Editorial
Journal of Pierre Fauchard Academy (India Section), *Vol 37(3-4), DOI: 10.18311/jpfa/2023/35691, July-December 2023 p. i-iii*
ISSN (Print) : 0970-2199
ISSN (Online) : 2405-772X

Editorial Commentary

Suggestions for Improving the Quality of the Manuscript

Acceptance of the manuscript in a reputed scientific journal is one of the substantial moments of our academic career. Articles published in reputed journals increase our stature in academic or research communities. With a sharp increase in the number of manuscripts being submitted to scientific journals in the past few decades, it's becoming difficult to publish our research work in a good-quality journal. Therefore, to improve your chances of getting your research published in such journals you must learn the science of scientific writing along with robust study design and novelty in research. A manuscript that is crisp, appealing to the eyes, free of grammatical errors, and conveys a new message to the scientific community has a higher chance of publication.

In this editorial, we have compiled a few suggestions for young researchers to help them in improving their manuscripts' quality. We are going to discuss three important areas of manuscript writing i.e. things to do before you start writing, tips for writing different sections of a manuscript, and certain general suggestions before submission to a journal.

Before you Start Writing

Decide on Authorship

Before you start writing your article decide on the number and order of authors to avoid conflict of interest later. There are guidelines available to decide who can or cannot be an author. To qualify as an author you should have made substantial intellectual contributions to different aspects of the manuscript such as writing, data analysis, and data interpretation (more details are available at www.icmje.org). Certain journals provide a points-based system to decide the order of authorship in an article. They are based on work done and responsibilities bestowed to each author/s. Remember, a person who has only done data analysis or collection doesn't automatically qualify to be an author.

At all costs avoid authorship by coercion, mutual support, or admiration. Also, avoid duplicate publication (publishing a second article with results like the previously published one). Every author must decide their role and responsibility before initiating the writing process. Usually, the first author is responsible for majority of tasks performed while writing a manuscript such as supervising or conducting data analysis and its interpretation, writing first draft, correspondence with co-authors and the journal, and finalising and saving the final draft.

Finding an Appropriate Journal

There are different kinds of scientific journals- some are subject-specific; others accept manuscripts on any relevant topic (general); some focus on specific topics or diseases; journals can also be clinical or basic science; and new or well-established. It's a good practice to decide beforehand which journal you are planning to submit your article. The advantages of this practice are: you will come to know whether your manuscript is suitable for the journal; is the journal peer-reviewed? is it open access? Do they charge any publication fee, if yes, how much? What are their requirements regarding word limits, and formatting? Also, you can find information regarding the journal's current indexing status, citation index, impact factor, and time taken to review.

Be realistic while selecting the journal. You can shortlist 3-4 journals that you feel are suitable for your article and discuss with co-authors to select the most suitable one. You can search scientific databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science to know the current indexing status of the journal. An important tool in Google is "*Journal Finder*". Typing these two words in Google will provide you links to searching journals published by prominent publishing houses. You can copy your abstract in their search bar to find a suitable journal for your article.

Read Standard Guidelines and Instructions

Based on the type of manuscript, your article could be a case report or case series, narrative review, systematic review, meta-analysis, or original research (experimental or observational study). There are certain standard guidelines available with corresponding checklists that can help you in writing your article according to the type of manuscript, for example, STROBE, PRISMA, MOOSE, QUOROM, STARD, CONSORT (List of these guidelines can be found at www.equator-network.org). There are guidelines prepared by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) called Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals (available at icmje.org). These guidelines provide a broader framework on what mandatorily needs to be included in your manuscript. Some journals do ask to attach these checklists along with the submitted manuscript to evaluate whether the author/s had followed the prescribed guidelines.

Secondly, you must read instructions to authors published by journals. These instructions provide valuable information on what a particular journal is expecting from authors in their manuscripts. These include the mandatory headings, subheadings, word limits of each section or type of manuscript, and style of referencing.

Role of Statistician

Take the help of a statistician before starting your study. They can help you to calculate the appropriate sample size to avoid Type-1 and Type-2 errors. They can provide information on what are the independent and dependent (outcome) variables and appropriate tests for your study.

Writing Different Sections of the Manuscript

Follow the IMRaD format i.e., Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion. Other important parts of the manuscript are the title, abstract, conclusions, acknowledgments, and references.

Start with writing methods and results sections as they are easiest to write. Then write an introduction and discussion, finally summarize your article in abstract and decide on the title at the end.

Title

- Title should be short, arresting, and eye-catching.
- Avoid lengthy titles as most readers don't have the patience to read them.

Abstract

- Follow the word limit, usually it's 250-300 words.
- Abstract can be structured (which has subheadings) or unstructured (single paragraph).
- Writing a structured abstract is easier and it helps you to remain within word limits.

Keywords

- Maximum 3-5.
- Preferably from MeSH headings of PubMed.

Introduction

- It should not be very lengthy like a textbook chapter.
- Keep it of maximum three paragraphs, focus on summarizing why you have planned this study or writing this review.
- Cite scientifically strong and recently published articles.
- Avoid mentioning the author's name while citing their work (best kept for reference section) and mention what was found not how it was found (quote findings, not research method).

Methods

- Should be in sufficient detail so that other people can replicate your work.
- Don't use the word "subjects" for study participants.
- Divide into sections as mentioned in the journal's instructions or uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals.

Results

- Easiest section to write.
- Make use of tables and diagrams to explain your findings.
- The table should have a minimum number of grid lines and plenty of white spaces.
- Don't use the word "demographics" to describe baseline characteristics of the participants.
- Don't repeat numbers mentioned in tables and diagrams in the text.

- Be consistent in the use of units and decimal spaces.

Discussion

- Most difficult section to write.
- Thorough reading of important articles related to your research and making important notes is beneficiary while writing this section.
- You must mention the strength and weaknesses of your scientific work here.
- Don't claim on things you have not found.

References

- Follow referencing style of the journal you are planning to submit your article.
- You can use reference managing software such as Endnote, Mendeley, and Zotero. The advantages of this software are: They are easy to use; adding any citation after revision by co-authors or journal becomes easy. If your manuscript gets rejected by one journal and next shortlisted journal prescribes a different reference style it's easy for you to switch using these softwares.
- Avoid self-citation unless justifiable and absolutely necessary

General Suggestions

- Check plagiarism and grammar using appropriate software before submitting the manuscript
- Remember to share all necessary documents along with the manuscript such as declaration form, letter of ethical approval, cover letter, and copyright form with the editor of the journal to avoid unnecessary delays in the review
- Apply for reviewer for high-impact factor journals related to your subject of interest The advantages of this practice are that you get access to the latest research happening in your subject and reading and Reviewing manuscripts will improve your own writing ability and reduces errors.

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