A glimpse behind the curtain: Tips for publishing in health professional education journals

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Why publish?

• To create a sense of completion
• So others may benefit from your work
• To get feedback
• To engage in discussion with others
• To advance your career
“Publish or perish”

- Survival in academia and advancement in training are heavily influenced by publication success

- Size matters!
  - Impact factor; citations; h-index

- Many in our field strive to publish without ever having been trained in research or publication strategies
The many forms of Oz

A giant head
A beautiful fairy
A ball of fire
A monster
A disembodied voice

“Just an ordinary man from Omaha, Nebraska”
How often have you submitted to a peer reviewed journal?

- a) Never
- b) Once
- c) Twice
- d) Three x or more

How often have you been published in a peer reviewed health professional education journal?

- a) Never
- b) Once
- c) Twice
- d) Three x or more
Do you consider writing for publication to be a painful process?

- a) I’d rather a fork in the eye
- b) It’s delightfully unpleasant
- c) It’s not so bad
- d) Most. Fun. Ever!

What challenges do you anticipate?

Please discuss
The Magical World of Publishing

• Why?
• What?
• Where?
• How?

Caveats

• Risk of symptomatic treatment
• Lack of magic bullets
• Differences of opinion/style
Do you hereby solemnly swear to keep these caveats in mind?

| a) Yes |
| b) I’ll try |
| c) Get on with it |
| d) I hope you’re not getting paid for this! |

The Magical World of Publishing

- Why?
- What?
- Where?
- How?
What would you like to publish?

- Research article?
  - A conceptually framed effort to better understand educational practice
    - “Are tests useful as pedagogical interventions?”
    - “How does professional identity form during interprofessional interactions?”

- Program evaluation?
  - A quality assurance effort often primarily of local relevance
    - “Was our OSCE reliable?”
    - “Was our course effective?”
What is most likely to get a paper rejected?

- a) Title/Abstract
- b) Introduction
- c) Methods
- d) Results
- e) Discussion
- f) References
- g) Illustrations

Of all rejections in 2008...

- 42% didn’t add meaningfully to the existing literature (i.e., didn’t advance understanding in the field)

  - E.g.: Students liked my course
  - E.g.: Conclusion = learners learn

  - Writing trick: Do not mention the local context until the methods section
Of all rejections in 2008…

• In contrast, only 23% were rejected primarily because of a fatal methodological flaw

• E.g.: Weak outcome measures
  • Self-assessments, satisfaction ratings
• E.g.: Unremediably confounded
  • Time on task variability across intervention

• Writing trick: Use peers to consider variety of explanations for possible data patterns before collecting any data

What makes for a good paper?

Please discuss
## Journal criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevance</th>
<th>Rigour</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Originality</td>
<td>Importance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>Ethical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>Interest</td>
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## Where do you want to publish?

- Decide on your target audience:
  - Researchers? Teachers? Administrators?
  - Specialty? Generic?
  - Local? National? International?
Where do you want to publish?

- Factors:
  - Precedent
  - Impact Factor
  - Acceptance & turnaround rates
  - Type of article you want to write
The Magical World of Publishing

• Why?
• What?
• Where?
• How?

How does one publish?

• Before submitting…
  • Read other articles in your target journal
  • Talk with colleagues
  • Share your article
  • Write, revise, and revise again
  • Keep the audience in mind the entire time
Style matters!

"I didn't have time to write a short paper, so I wrote a long one"

(Pascal, Twain)

"True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance."

(Alexander Pope)
Which section of a paper is most important?

- a) Title/Abstract
- b) Introduction
- c) Methods
- d) Results
- e) Discussion
- f) References
- g) Illustrations

Titles and Abstracts

- Usually the first section read
  - After publication it might be the only section!
  - Treat it as your best marketing tool
  - What is your core message?

- Questions
  - Does the journal require a certain structure?
  - Word length?
  - Does it capture attention clearly, accurately, and informatively????
How does one publish?

• The review process…
  • Initial skim read by the Editor
  • Assignment to Deputy Editor
  • Recruitment of Peer Reviewers
  • Recommendation from Deputy Editor
  • Full review and decision by Editor

Critical appraisal

• Who was this written for?
• What is the author trying to achieve?
• What did they do and why?
• Are the findings trustworthy?
• So what?
The most important orienting question we would like you to ask yourself when reading this manuscript is “Did I learn anything?”
### Decisions on submissions to *Medical Education* in 2013

- Total number $\approx 1,500$
- Reject without review $\approx 65\%$
- Reject after review $\approx 25\%$
- Accept after review $\approx 10\%$
- Majority of acceptances offered only after revisions are made

### What to do if your paper is rejected

- Pout, curse, commiserate with co-authors
- Take some time away
- Appeals are possible, but pay particular attention to the editors’ commentary
- Use the feedback to revise for submission elsewhere and/or adjust your next study
What to do if you are offered the opportunity to revise

• Celebrate (but not too much)
• Take some time away
• Carefully attend to each point in the review, but pay particular attention to the editors’ commentary
• Submit a clearly marked revision along with a descriptive cover letter

The Homestretch
To write well, you need to read (specifically and broadly)

Your colleagues are your greatest asset
Keep in mind ...

A journal's main responsibilities are towards its readers, not the authors

When in doubt, ask...

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The Magical World of Publishing

• Why?
• What?
• Where?
• How?
• Who?

Who should be involved?

• Authorship deserved only for substantial contributions to:
  • Conception & design, or analysis and interpretation
  • Drafting or revising article critically for important intellectual content
  • Final approval of the version to be published

(International Consortium of Medical Journal Editors;
Committee on Publication Ethics)
Who should be involved?

• Not sufficient:

• Gift, ghost or guest authorship
  • Participation solely in acquisition of funding or data collection; general supervision; being head of department; etc.

• Many journals now ask for a statement about relative contributions