

Facilitator Notes

# Using Journals’ Instructions to Authors

These notes accompany the PowerPoint presentation of the same title by Barbara Gastel.

For a longer module, this one can be combined with one or both of the following: “Deciding When and Where to Submit a Paper” and “Defining the Focus and Contribution of Your Paper”.

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| Module Title | Using Journals’ Instructions to Authors |
| Course title (or analogous information) | This module normally would be presented as part of more general instruction on writing and publishing journal articles. It may be part of either a workshop or a course. |
| Unit Title | Not applicable |
| No. of Unit | Not applicable |
| Session Day/Time | Not applicable |
| Length of Session | This module typically would run about 30 to 45 minutes, depending in part on the amount of detail that the facilitator decides to provide and how much time is devoted to the exercise. |
| Aim | This module is intended mainly to (1) increase participants’ awareness of what journals’ instructions to authors can offer and (2) help prepare and motivate participants to use journals’ instructions well. |
| Learning Outcomes | By the end of this module, participants will be able to (1) locate journals’ instructions online, (2) consult journals’ instructions at appropriate times, (3) derive needed information from journals’ instructions, and (4) obtain related useful information that might not appear in the instructions. |
| Facilitator Profile | Ideally, this workshop would be facilitated by someone who has experience with research writing (for example, as an author of journal articles or as an editor), because such an individual can enrich the content with examples from his or her experience. However, the slides are designed to be relatively self-explanatory, and so a less experienced facilitator also can present the module. Also, the module can be presented jointly by a facilitator and a co-facilitator who provides additional commentary. |
| Participant Profile | This module is primarily for early-career researchers who are starting to publish their work. It also may be useful to mid-career researchers who wish to improve their approach to writing or increase their ability to mentor others in research writing. In addition, it may be helpful to some editors and writing instructors. |
| Pre-workshop Activities | Ideally, each participant should bring the instructions to authors from a journal in which he or she may wish to publish a paper. Alternatively, the facilitator may bring some copies of instructions to authors or some links to such instructions. |
| Room Layout | Ideally, this module will be presented in a room layout facilitating interaction—for example, with several small tables, with tables in a U configuration, or with a conference table. However, this module also can be presented in a traditional classroom or a lecture hall. |
| Number of Participants | For optimum discussion, the number of participants should be limited to about 10–15. However, the module also can reasonably delivered to about 25 participants.  |
| Files and Materials | PowerPoint file: 06\_Journals’ Instructions to Authors |
| Visual Aids and Resources | Computer with PowerPoint; projector for PowerPoint presentation; Internet connection if possible; hard copies or electronic copies (depending on the setup) of some journals’ instructions to authors |
| Potential Embellishments of the PowerPoint | To keep the file small, the presentation consists almost solely of text. Images can be added to make it more visually appealing. For example, images of some journals’ covers or screen shots of some journals’ instructions may be added to increase visual interest. |
| Learning methods and activities | The following notes may help facilitators to (1) elaborate on the content of some slides and (2) elicit group participation at suitable times. In the PowerPoint presentation, similar notes appear in the notes sections below the respective slides.* (Slide 1 is a title slide.)
* Slide 2 (“Overview”)
	+ Note the topics that the module will address.
	+ Note the module’s overall purpose, which is indicated earlier in this facilitator guide. (Feel free, of course, to frame the purpose in the way that the group is likely to find most relevant.)
* Slide 3 (“Journals’ Instructions to Authors”)
	+ Note to look for the journal’s instructions on its website. Mention that instructions to authors sometimes go under other names, such as information for authors, author guidelines, or submission instructions.
	+ Mention that lack of instructions on a journal’s website (or inclusion of poorly written instructions on the website) is sometimes a clue that a journal is not of high quality.
	+ If none of the participants do health-related research, perhaps delete the second bulleted item from this slide.
	+ Emphasize that obtaining the journal’s instructions early, and following them from the beginning, can save work later.
* Slide 4 (“Using the Journal’s Instructions”)
	+ Re-emphasize the value of repeatedly consulting the instructions.
	+ Suggest underlining or highlighting key points in the instructions.
	+ Perhaps include an anecdote about finding something to correct when checking the instructions a final time before submitting a paper.
	+ Note that serious deviations from a journal’s instructions (for example, submitting a longer paper than the journal allows) may result in the journal’s refusal to consider the paper unless it is modified.
	+ Note that more minor deviations from a journal’s instructions also may make the publication process more difficult for the author and journal and thus delay publication.
	+ Also to note: Perhaps surprisingly, many submitted papers have significant deviations from the instructions to authors (for example, references in the wrong format). Editors sometimes wonder whether some authors even know that the instructions exist. Submitting a paper that follows the instructions can make a good impression from the start.
* Slide 5 (“Some Questions the Instructions May Answer”)
	+ Walk through the questions on this slide and the next two slides.
	+ Regarding the first bulleted item: For example, the instructions to authors may note whether, in addition to scientific papers, a journal publishes review articles and case reports.
	+ Regarding the fourth bulleted item: For example, the instructions might say that scientific papers submitted to the journal should include the following sections: introduction, methods, results, and discussion.
	+ Regarding the last bulleted item: Perhaps ask the group what an article template is and whether anyone in the group has used one. Perhaps note that a template can consist of, for example, a Word document containing the proper headings and formatting for manuscripts submitted to the journal.
* Slide 6 (“Some Questions (cont)”)
	+ Walk through the questions on this slide.
	+ If desired, elaborate on one or more points or ask participants to do so. For example, people could note types of supplementary material, if any, that they have seen posted along with journal articles.
* Slide 7 (“Some Questions (cont)”)
	+ Walk through the questions on this slide.
	+ Perhaps note that many journals have authors submit papers through online portals.
* Slide 8 (“A Look at Some Journals’ Instructions to Authors”)
	+ Feel free either to show the 3 sets of instructions for which links are provided or to substitute other journals’ instructions (for example, if other journals would be more relevant to the participants).
	+ Scroll through the sets of instructions, pointing out types of content. Where doing so seems useful, tie what is said to material earlier in this module.
	+ If questions arise during the look at instructions, perhaps reflect some of them back to the group for discussion.
* Slide 9 (“Beyond the Instructions”)
	+ Mention the following: Although instructions to authors sometimes are very informative, they rarely say everything worth knowing about gearing a paper to the journal. Therefore it is helpful also to look at examples of papers in the journal. Ideally, the papers that are looked at should present research similar to one’s own.
	+ Perhaps ask the participants to note some useful items that one might notice about the papers in a journal but that might not be mentioned in the instructions to authors. Perhaps note some yourself. Some possible examples are typical number of figures and tables, inclusion (or not) of subheadings within sections, and usual lengths of sections.
* Slide 10 (“Exercise: Instructions to Authors”)
	+ Break the participants into groups of about 3 or 4 members. Have the group members look at the instructions to authors that they have brought or that you have brought or provided links to, and have them discuss with each other the questions listed on this slide. This small-group work generally should take about 10 minutes.
	+ Then reconvene the full group and discuss the questions.
* Slides 11-14 (“Which of the following questions do the instructions answer?”
	+ Walk through these slides, which contain the questions presented earlier in the module as “Some Questions the Instructions May Answer”; for each question, have group members say whether the instructions that they looked at answered it.
	+ Perhaps ask people to identify any questions not listed that the instructions answered.
* Slide 15 (“In Conclusion”)
	+ If time permits, include a question-and-answer session before ending.
	+ Perhaps do one or both of the following:
		- Have participants meet in small groups to discuss, in light of the workshop content, items in instructions to authors that they will pay particular attention to when they write papers. Then have some of the participants share some points with the full group.
		- Summarize the session.
* Slide 16 (“Do keep consulting instructions to authors!”)
	+ End by expressing the hope that the session will be helpful and by encouraging participants to take good advantage of instructions to authors.
	+ If this module is part of a workshop, course, or series, perhaps note what is upcoming.
	+ Perhaps encourage group members to share points from this session with others.
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