Intensive Course in Research Writing

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Note

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Intensive Course in Research Writing:
Session 1 (27 June 2016)

Welcome!

Today

- The participants and the course
- Deciding when and where to submit a paper
- Defining a paper's focus and contribution
- Journals' instructions to authors
- Overview: the structure of papers
- Introduction: drafting an abstract
- Brief tour of building (optional)

Introductions

- The class members
  - Completion of form
  - Oral introductions
- The course staff
- The course
  - Syllabus
  - Textbook
  - Questions

The Course Staff

- *Instructor:* Barbara Gastel, MD, MPH
- *Instructional Associate:* Roberto Tuda, PhD
- *Editorial Associate:* Colin Young, PhD
- *Postgraduate Associates:* Gina Wadas, MS; Bryan Demapan, MS

AuthorAID website (www.authoraid.info)
Contains resources on aspects of research communication

Preparing to Write a Paper

- Deciding when to publish
- Choosing a target journal
- Exercise: defining the focus and contribution of your paper
- Using journals' instructions to authors

Deciding What (or When) to Publish

- Some factors to consider: quality of the work, extent of the work, interest to others
- Suggestions:
  – Seek guidance in this regard from others in your field who are more experienced in publishing journal articles.
  – Present your work orally first. Doing so can help in deciding whether the work is publishable and in shaping the paper.

Identifying a Target Journal: Some Basics

- If possible, decide early (before drafting the paper). It's better not to write the paper and then look for a journal. (Why?)
- Look for journals that have published work similar to yours.
- Consider journals that have published work you will cite.
- Consult the journal's website and instructions to authors.

Some Factors to Consider

- Aims and scope of journal
- Audience
- Prestige
- Impact [to be discussed more later]
- Access (open access; general accessibility)
- Speed of acceptance and publication; availability of article-based (continuous) publication
- ?Quality of reproduction of figures?
- Publication costs, if any
- Likelihood of acceptance

To Be Avoided: Predatory Journals

- "Journals" that obtain publication fees but are not valid peer-reviewed scholarly publications
- Some clues that a journal *might* be predatory (especially if several such items are present):
  - Unrealistically broad scope
  - Unrealistically short stated turnaround times
  - Flashy but poorly crafted, ungrammatical websites
  - Fake metrics
  - Incomplete contact information
  - Inclusion in Beall's List

Some Research

- Frank E. Authors' criteria for selecting journals. JAMA 1994;272:163-164.
- Presents findings from one medical school
- Interesting: criteria differed for first and later submissions of paper
  - Top factors for first submission: prestige, readership, usual content of journal
  - Top factors for later submissions: likelihood of acceptance, usual content of journal

Impact

- Impact Factor (from Science Citation Index—Journal Citation Reports)
  - Indicates how much articles in the journal tend to be cited
  - Does not say how much a given article will be cited
  - Not valid for comparison from field to field
  - Changes over time
- Other impact—for example, on practice, policy, teaching, and media coverage

Moving Beyond Impact Factor: Some Resources

- Article-Level Metrics: A SPARC Primer
  - From SPARC (the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition)
  - Discusses indicators of the impact of individual articles (for example, views, downloads, citations, social-media mentions, news coverage)
- San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment ("DORA")

Exercise: Defining Your Paper's Contribution and Focus

- Background: To identify a suitable target journal and to write an effective paper, you must define the focus and contribution of your work (the "take-home message").
- Please tell others in your group what main question your research addresses and why that question is important. (Put another way: What important gap in knowledge is your research intended to fill?) Answer questions from other group members.
- Be ready to tell the full group, in 1 minute or less, this question and why it is important.

Journals' Instructions to Authors

- Usual locations: on the journal's website and in the journal
- A large collection of instructions to authors in the health sciences: http://mulford.utoledo.edu/instr/
- General advice: Select your first-choice journal early, and obtain its instructions immediately.

Using the Journal's Instructions

- Read the instructions to authors before starting to prepare your paper.
- Consult the instructions while preparing your paper.
- Check the instructions again before submitting your paper.

Some Questions the Instructions May Answer

- What categories of article does the journal publish?
- What is the maximum length of articles?
- What is the maximum length of abstracts?
- What sections should the article include? What are the guidelines for each?
- Does the journal have a template for articles? If so, how can it be accessed?

Some Questions (cont)

- What guidelines should be followed regarding writing style?
- How many figures and tables are allowed? What are the requirements for them?
- In what format should references appear?
- Does the journal post supplementary material online? If so, how should it be provided?

Some Questions (cont)

- In what electronic format should the paper be prepared?
- How should the paper be submitted?

A Look at Some Journals' Instructions to Authors

- Example of short instructions: *Science Communication*
- Example of long instructions: *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*
- Another example of long instructions: *Journal of Bacteriology*

Beyond the Instructions

- Be sure to look at some recent issues of the journal (and some recent papers in those issues).
- Doing so can help you gear your paper to the journal.

An Assignment for Tomorrow

Please bring instructions to authors from 2 or 3 journals in your field. At least 1 set of instructions should be from a journal to which you might want to submit a paper about your research.

(You may bring hard copies, electronic copies, or links.)

Formats for Journal Articles Reporting Research

- One common format: IMRAD
  - **I**ntroduction: What was the question?
  - **M**ethods: How did you try to answer it?
  - **R**esults: What did you find?
  - (**A**nd)
  - **D**iscussion: What does it mean?

Article Formats (cont)

- Formats can differ among academic fields.
- Non-IMRAD formats in some journals:
  - IRDaM
  - IMRDRD . . .
  - Essay format, with headings chosen by author
  - Other
- Question: In your field, what is the usual structure for papers reporting research?

Note

People read sections in various orders. Papers should be written accordingly.

Drafting an Abstract

- An abstract generally should be organized like a journal article (for example, in sort of a mini-IMRAD format).
- In some fields, there are structured abstracts (with standardized headings).

Sample Abstract

From: Pitkin RM, Burmeister LF. Prodding tardy reviewers: a randomized comparison of telephone, fax, and e-mail. JAMA 2002;287:2794-2795.

Abstract

Context To compare telephone, fax, and e-mail methods of prodding tardy reviewers.

Methods Randomized trial conducted January 1998 through June 1999 at the main editorial office of *Obstetrics & Gynecology*. Reviewers who had failed to file reviews by 28 days after being sent manuscripts (7 days after deadline) were sent identical messages in oral (telephone) or written (fax and e-mail) form inquiring as to the status of review, asking for its completion as soon as possible, and requesting it be sent by fax or e-mail.

Results Of 378 reviewers, proportions returning reviews within 7 days were essentially identical: telephone, 85 (68%) of 125; fax, 86 (67%) of 129; and e-mail, 84 (67%) of 124 (P=.59). In the two thirds who responded, the mean time to return reviews did not differ among the 3 groups.

Conclusion Contacting tardy reviewers resulted in a review being received within 7 days in about two thirds of cases, and it made no difference if the contact was made by telephone, fax, or e-mail.

The Abstract: A Closer Look

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The Abstract: A Closer Look (cont)

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An Assignment for Tomorrow

Please draft an informal abstract on the research about which you will write a paper. The abstract should run about 250 words (1 double-spaced page). If appropriate, use the following headings: Background, Methods, Results, and Conclusions.

Any Questions?

Again, welcome!