Strategies for success
Research writing and publication

Karen Shashok
AuthorAID in the Eastern Mediterranean
kshashok@authoraidem.org
Part 1
Publication strategy in a competitive global environment

Two main economic models: Commercial vs. not-for-profit publisher

Both produce good journals and attract good manuscripts.

“Official” publications of a national scientific society may not be open to manuscripts for other countries.
Two access models:
- Payment required by reader (subscription or pay-per-view)
- Open access (payment required by author)
Both use peer review.
Both produce good and bad journals.
Open access does not always require the author to pay.
Insight into journal policies can help authors select target journals with better chances of success:

- more favorable reception
- faster review and publication
- communicating with readers who will use your results
Anglocentrism and globalization

Wikimedia Commons
- Peer reviewer and editing improve the article but do not make it perfect.
- Even if research is not perfect, the report of the research should be as accurate and helpful to readers as possible.
- Most of the quality (both scientific and language/reporting/writing) should be provided by authors.
To reach the right **readers**, researchers need:

1. good research skills
2. good information-seeking skills
3. good writing skills
4. a publication strategy
To reach the **right readers**

An optimal match between your work and the journal’s mission

(Guyatt and Haynes, 2006)

Where will the article be seen by the greatest number of most interested readers?
Writing strategies

Buchachon
Petthanya
Ready to write?

When you write the manuscript, ask yourself **who needs to know** what you found.

Before you finish the manuscript, **identify the journals most likely to accept it**.
Goal: a text that is clear and accurate, not a work of art
1. A simple and boring text is better than a complex, “interesting” text that is hard to understand.
How do I start writing?
- Use whatever strategy works for you.
- Be prepared to think hard about who your readers will be and what they need to know.
- Be prepared to make many changes.
Writing strategies

- Make notes or draft parts of the text any time you have an idea.
- Make an outline.
- Make a list of references that should be cited.
- Write the easy parts first and the hard parts last.
To make a good first impression
- Invest time to compare journals.
- Write specifically for the journal.
- Follow the Instructions for Authors or Guidelines for Manuscript Preparation carefully. Details are as important as content.
- Title page, abstract, references, tables, figures
Revise, correct and rewrite patiently.
It is normal for a good article to be rewritten many times before it is clear enough for readers to understand easily.
Part 2
Title and Abstract: Accuracy, clarity and impact

Open Lounge
A title that reflects the contents
What subjects? What population?
What conditions? Where?
What setting (local, national, regional, international)?
Experimental or observational?
When?
Title

Emphasis on the hypothesis, the method, or the results?
Should the title state the conclusion?
Consult examples in your target journal.
An Abstract that reflects the contents

- Re-revise the abstract after the main manuscript is completely finished.
- No discrepancies in the information in the abstract, main text, and tables or figures for: terminology, sample size, population size, numerical data
Part 3
Introduction section: Asking an important question, choosing the best method

Ellie Davies
An *Introduction* that attracts attention and identifies the target population of readers
- Interesting first sentence
- Identify the problem or gap in knowledge.
- State your proposed solution.
- Say how you tested your solution.
Ask a specific question. Provide a specific answer.

Your **statement of purpose** (at the end of the Introduction) is the anchor for the whole article.
EXERCISE

Please write a title for the abstracts.

What specialty do you think the articles are from?

What specialists need to read this article to improve their research or clinical care?
1. Exploring Middle-Eastern mothers' perceptions and experiences of breastfeeding in Canada: an ethnographic study.  
   *Maternal & Child Nutrition*

2. Performance of iron spot test with Arabic bread made from fortified white wheat flour.  
   *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*

3. A historical review of progress in the assessment of dietary zinc intake as an indicator of population zinc status.  
   *Advances in Nutrition*
Part 4
Quoting, citing and referencing

Blog of
Unnecessary
Quotation
Marks
6. Don’t copy and paste from other articles. The English may not be very good.

Many articles in an unreadable writing style are published even in top journals.

Vasconcelos SMR. Writing up research in English: Choice or necessity? Rev Col Bras Cir 2007; 34:1-2
How to improve citation accuracy and avoid plagiarism

1. Avoid copy-and-paste.
2. Write or revise all the text yourself.
3. Insert provisional references (author-year) in the first draft.
4. Paraphrase for only 1 or 2 lines and provide the reference.
5. Use “verbatim quotations” for only 1 or 2 lines and provide the reference.
Plagiarism detection
Part 5
Patients and methods section: Methodologies and reporting guidelines

Rasmussen et al. 2010
Emphasis on research methodology and reporting

- Follow the EQUATOR reporting checklists for different study designs

Methods

- Setting, population, sample
- Reproducibility
- Exact name, manufacturer, city and country of materials (apparatus, reagents, cell lines, antibodies, etc.)
- Compliance with ethics guidelines
Methods that don’t keep secrets.

No secret ingredients or secret techniques please!
Part 6

Results section: Clarity in data reporting, tables and figures
Results that focus on the question asked in the Introduction

- Figures and tables that focus on the question asked, and the data that help readers answer it for themselves

- No repetition of data among text, tables and figures

- Follow the order of subsections in the Methods section
Results that focus on the question asked in the Introduction

- If you present data clearly, the readers will be able to foresee your conclusions.
- Your article will be more convincing.
Part 7
Discussion section: Organization and convincing conclusions

The Plainspoken Scientist
A **Discussion** that explains what your findings mean

- Do not discuss data that are not included in the Results section.
- Answer the **question** you asked in the **Introduction**.
A Discussion that is critical of your own study

- Explain to what extent the conclusions can be generalized.
- Identify the limitations.
- Suggest new studies that could help answer questions that require more data.
Refer to your **statement of purpose** often while writing and revising, to stay focussed on the **aim of the study** and the **new, original key results**.
Eliminate discussion and references that are not related to the research question at the end of the Introduction.

Wikimedia Commons
Relate the conclusions explicitly to the aim of the study.

Wikimedia Commons
EXERCISE 2  Clear writing

Please look at the examples in your handout.

1. Never use –ing, especially “using”.
2. Never use “respectively” especially with lists of numerical data.
3. Never use an abbreviation without defining it.
4. Never mix up USA spelling (e.g. center) and UK spelling (e.g. centre).
5. Never have differences in the aims, conclusions or data (including statistical results) between the abstract, main text and tables or figures.
Part 8

Peer review: Responding effectively

Accept good advice but resist bad advice.
“Researchers overwhelmingly (90%) said the main area of effectiveness of peer review was in improving the quality of the published paper, and a similar percentage said it had improved their own last published paper, including identifying scientific errors and missed and inaccurate references.”

(Ware 2008)
“Our experience is that substantial improvements on the basis of reviewers’ comments are unusual, but do happen on occasion.”

(Guyatt and Haynes 2006)
For most researchers, and therefore most reviewers, English is not their first language.
Expressions of respect, courtesy and politeness are different.

Most Honorable Prof. Klein,
Though I am not worthy of your attention it is with utmost respect and humble humility that I write to inquire regarding...

DELETE:
Even manuscripts written by native speakers of English are frequently criticized for poor English.

It has frequently been said that despite the fact of having English as their first language, authors who fulfil this criterion may nonetheless receive frequent negative feedback due to the unfeasibility of discerning the meaning in their written communications.
“Far from this being an occasional occurrence, it seems that the **excuse of poor English** is used as a way of rejecting manuscripts, a handy tool to have in these days of heavy submission loads and the need to ‘cull’ manuscripts before peer review.”

(Cooter 2008)
“If I believe a *referee is mistaken* in his/her concern, and I know a way to defuse that mistaken concern without telling the referee that he/she is mistaken, then I will use that way because the probability of surviving the review process decreases when referee concerns are challenged rather than accepted.”

(Wright and Armstrong 2008, quoting an anonymous researcher)
Even though reviewers and editors are good researchers and subject experts, they may not be skilled in language or writing.

Editors depend on reviewers, and reviewers are not always right.
Authors’ editors:

1. Help researchers improve their manuscripts to satisfy readers’ expectations for language, content and organization

2. Do not write the first draft or rewrite text for the authors

3. Are contributors named in the Acknowledgements, but not authors named in the byline
Authors’ editors:

4. Are often but not always native speakers of English

5. Can be specialists in science, in writing, or both

6. Want researchers to publish successfully and learn good writing skills
Conclusions

[Diagram of pen-making and calligraphy tools from Wikimedia Commons]
The reader needs to be convinced that your findings are logical, valid, and supported by solid evidence, not impressed by your writing style.
Every journal is different, every editor is different, but good writing is the same: **clear, rigorous and convincing.**

Impartial Judgment by the “Gatekeepers” of Science: Fallibility and Accountability in the Peer Review Process

**Methods**

Participants and procedures
To measure mortality we did a national cross-sectional cohort study of deaths from January, 2002, through July, 2006. Household information was gathered about deaths that occurred between January of March 18, 2003, in all households compared with deaths that occurred invasion through to the date of 12,000 was calculated to doubling of an estimated pr

**RESULTS**

Methodological and Statistical Content Study

Less than half of the 166 journals provided information on statistical methods (Table 1). Eighty-seven percent (13/15) of general journals and 36% (54/151) of specialty journals made reference to ICMJE uniform requirements. Fifty-three percent
Clear:

The reader doesn’t need to read the same sentence or paragraph more than once, and can navigate all parts of the article easily.
Rigorous:

- The results (including tables and figures) follow from the methods.
- The discussion follows from the introduction.
- The data are reported in a consistent manner.
- Limitations and possible additional studies are noted.
Convincing:
- Focus on answering the question asked in the introduction.
- Don’t overstate or exaggerate your conclusions.
- Search for and correct technical errors.
Convincing:

Be confident in the interest and usefulness of your findings.

Thank-you very much

AuthorAID in the Eastern Mediterranean

kshashok@authoraidem.org