Some rules for writing medical articles for peer-reviewed journals

JYOTI SHAH

Commissioning Editor, the *Annals***CORRESPONDENCE TO**

Jyoti Shah, E: jyoti.shah@burtonft.nhs.uk

As an appendix to Elisabeth's introduction on style and format for medical publishing, this article offers readers a guide to fine-tune a paper for publication and increase acceptance rates. A good paper is often highly praised by colleagues but a good writer must scrutinise every aspect of the text to ensure that it conforms with the requirements of a scientific article and that of the journal to which it will be submitted.

Checklist

1. Check the instructions to authors in the journal of your choice. There will be instructions on word length, size of tables and the requirements for the presentation of figures.
2. Always do a thorough literature search and ensure that articles are properly referenced.
3. If there are aspects of your work that are suboptimal, include a section called limitations.

Table 1 Some simple rules for writing

Title	<p>Keep it simple; approximately 12 words</p> <p>Use the title to describe the contents of your article accurately</p> <p>Avoid abbreviations, jargon, formulas</p> <p>Avoid words with little impact ('Observations on...', 'Investigation into...', 'Study of...')</p> <p>Report the subject of the paper and not the results</p>
Authors	<p>Usually listed in logical order of level of contribution</p> <p>Specify the corresponding author</p>
Keywords	<p>Important to increase the visibility of the paper in abstracting services</p> <p>Avoid using the same words as in the title</p>
Abstract	<p>Should be definitive and not descriptive</p> <p>Use this as a standalone version of the paper</p> <p>Use this to present facts</p> <p>Stick to the word limit of the journal (usually 150–250 words)</p> <p>Avoid wasted words (abbreviations, acronyms, references to tables or figures, general statements)</p>
Introduction	<p>Does not need to be long</p> <p>Should tell the reader why the paper is of interest</p> <p>Usually 500 words</p> <p>Avoid repetition</p>
Methods	<p>Explain your steps clearly (usually in the past tense)</p> <p>List inclusion and exclusion criteria</p> <p>Discuss consent and ethics clearance</p>
Results	<p>Core of the paper as presenting new knowledge</p> <p>Only report representative data</p> <p>Include negative data to allow adequate interpretation of the results</p> <p>Use SI system (Système International d'Unités) for reporting measurements</p> <p>Do not present the same data in tables and graphs</p>
Discussion	<p>Explain the meaning/implications of the results</p> <p>Do not repeat what has already been reported</p> <p>Show how the results agree or do not agree with what is already known about the subject</p>
Conclusions	<p>State the outcome of the study</p> <p>State the possible implications of the findings</p> <p>Do not state: 'More research is needed...'</p>
Acknowledgements	<p>Thank individuals who helped significantly with the paper</p> <p>Can be included as a footnote at the end of the paper if no separate section</p>
Conflict of interest	<p>Always declare any conflict of interest – real or perceived</p>

Table 2 Guidelines for references

Books	Author's surname, Initials. Title. Edition. Place: Publisher, Date. Number of volumes (if >1) eg: Smith, JE. Biotechnology. 2nd edn. London: Edward Arnold, 1988
Edited books	Use the abbreviation 'ed' for the editor eg: Gardner, P, ed. EM Forster: the critical heritage. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973
E-books	Author's surname, Initials. Title [online]. Edition. Place of publication: Publisher, Date eg: Roush, C. Inside Home Depot: how one company revolutionized an industry through the relentless pursuit of growth [online]. New York: McGraw, 1999
Anonymous work	Use 'Anon' eg: Anon. Primary colours: a novel of politics. London: Chatto & Windus, 1996
Conferences	Author's surname, Initials or Organisation. Title of contribution. Then In: Surname, Initials, editor of proceedings. Conference name, Date of conference, Location of conference. Place of publication: Publisher, Date eg: Granger, S. The hacker ethic. In: Kizza, JM, ed. Ethics in the Computer Age, 11–13 November 1994, Tennessee. New York: ACM Press, 1994
Theses	Author's surname, Initials. Title of thesis. Type of degree. Awarding body, Date eg: Young, VE. Special collections in the year 2015: a Delphi study. Thesis (PhD). University of Alabama, 1997
Reports	Author's surname, Initials. Title of report. Place of publication: Publisher, Date. Report number eg: Kinnersly, R. A generic guide for small islands on the implications of signing up to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Peterborough: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, 2013. Report 4892013
Patents	Applicant, Inventor. Title. Patent application number, Publication date eg: Mavin, G and Stevenson, T (Portola Packaging Limited). Container closure in combination with a ring pull insert. UK patent application 2428669 A, 7 February 2007
Internet sources	Title. Publisher or organisation. Available from: <URL>. [Date accessed] eg: BBC News Dorset, 2011. Boscombe surf reef attracts '100 species' [online]. BBC News. Available from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-dorset-15410048 . [Accessed 19 August 2013.]
NICE guidelines	Best practice to use the full guidelines National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Year). Title. NICE clinical guideline number. Available at: <URL> [NICE guidelines] eg: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2009). Depression: the treatment and management of depression in adults (update). NICE clinical guideline 90. Available at: http://www.nice.org.uk/cg90/ . [Accessed 4 March 2015.]
Appendix	Supply any information that is relevant to the paper in an appendix