

2007

How to get an article published

Amy M. Amlani
University of North Texas

Michael Valente
Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis

Therese C. Walden
Walter Reed Army Medical Center

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Recommended Citation

Amlani, Amy M.; Valente, Michael; and Walden, Therese C., "How to get an article published" (2007). *Staff Publications*. Paper 1.
http://digitalcommons.wustl.edu/audio_fapubs/1

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HOW TO GET AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED

AMYN M. AMLANI, PHD; MICHAEL VALENTE, PHD; AND THERESE C. WALDEN, AUD

This article is a summary from a Discussion Group session held during AudiologyNOW! 2007 in Denver, CO. The Discussion Group leaders focused on the manuscript submission processes and provided insight on how practitioners and students interested in research could cultivate such a mindset. With the shortage of research personnel in the field, hearing health care faces an arduous challenge in its ability to remain at the forefront of advances in technology and patient care. In response to this shortage, academia and professional organizations are encouraging contributions of scholarly work by experienced and inexperienced researchers, practitioners and students alike. We present general guidelines that promising authors will want to consider as they prepare their original work for the publication process.

THE PUBLISHING PROCESS

We start with some important points about the publishing process. First, the publishing process takes time. It is not uncommon for several months or even a year to pass between submission of the manuscript and final publication of the paper. Second, depending on the journal, two to three "experts" typically do a critical review of each manuscript. These experts have a working knowledge of the topic area, and it is rare that each one arrives independently at the same recommendation. Third, the submitted work is returned from the review process with recommendations to "accept as is," "accept with modifications" (and then possibly rereview) or "reject," perhaps as "not suitable for publication in this journal." For most peer-reviewed journals, the rate of rejection is greater than the rate of acceptance. Therefore, if the submitted manuscript is rejected, this should not dissuade the budding researcher/clinician from submitting again to a different or more appropriate journal. In fact, it is likely that all who have submitted manuscripts have had their papers rejected at one time or another.

There are several issues the author should consider that might help improve the likelihood that their first submission for publication will be accepted. The author should determine whether the topic for submission is timely. That is, does the content of the submitted manuscript address a topic that is "hot" or of clinical or research interest? This type of work has a higher chance of acceptance than a submission that is merely restating facts previously published. Additionally, the author must carefully read and closely follow the instructions to authors published by the peer-reviewed journal to which they are submitting. For instance, the Academy's "Instructions to Authors" for the *Journal of the American Academy of Audiology (JAAA)* appear on the

inside cover of the journal, as well as on the Academy's Web site at www.audiology.org/publications/jaaa/. All journals contain explicit instructions one must follow, or it is likely the manuscript will be returned with instructions to put it into proper format for submission. Finally, be sure to have someone unfamiliar with the research, project or work proofread the manuscript. Proofreading focuses on writing mechanics (e.g., sentence structure, spelling, grammar, format), which is preferable to simply spell checking with a word-processing program.

WRITING THE MANUSCRIPT

Prior to writing a manuscript there are several considerations the author must review. One consideration is the type of research undertaken. For instance, a manuscript written for data collected on humans or animals will differ in content from a manuscript written either for a case report or for a review paper. Authors will also want to consider the types of research typically published by a specific journal, the target audience, and the importance and significance of the findings. This will help you decide which journal is most appropriate for the manuscript.

Manuscripts submitted to peer-reviewed journals typically consist of a title page, an abstract, the body of the paper, reference section, and acknowledgments. Presented below are some general considerations on writing each component.

TITLE PAGE

The title page of a manuscript usually contains three components: the title, a running title, and the names of authors. The title should describe the contents of the undertaking in the fewest words possible. A running title, or header, is an abbreviated version of the title and serves as a navigation tool for readers as they peruse an issue of a journal.

ABSTRACT

The abstract is an important section of the manuscript. It is the part of the paper that, after publication, is included in electronic databases such as PubMed. It is frequently the first section read by the reader and helps the reader to determine whether he or she will continue with the remainder of the paper. The abstract is an abbreviated version of the study and reveals the purpose of the project, the basic procedures used, the main findings, and the principal conclusions. Some journals also require a list of

key words and a list of abbreviations. Electronic databases use key words to cross-index searches. Because of its importance, the abstract should be the last section composed, and care should be exercised not to exceed the maximum number of allowable words.

BODY OF THE PAPER

Introduction. The introduction serves as a review of the pertinent literature and findings from previous studies, and their relationship to the current study. The introduction section also presents the reader with the hypothesis or question the study aims to answer. A well-written introduction section should heighten the interest of the reader.

Methods. The methods section provides a detailed account of the research design of the study so that others can replicate the methods used. The amount of detail provided will vary with the type of method employed. For instance, a conventional method, such as pure-tone testing, requires only a reference. Less conventional methods should provide the reader with a reference and a brief description. It is also important to include a power analysis to demonstrate that the number of subjects included in the study was appropriate for the reported effect size, the type of experimental design, and the level of evidence.

Results. The objective of the results section is to report findings related to the purpose of the study. This is probably the most difficult part because many authors (experienced and inexperienced) incorrectly place the “meaning” or interpretation of the data in this section. The results section is frequently the shortest section of the manuscript because most often only significant findings are reported. Tables and figures serve as support of an argument and should be constructed so that they are readily understood by the reader, without the need to reference the text.

Discussion and Conclusions. According to Docherty and Smith (1999), a well-written discussion section will include: (1) a targeted discussion that should begin by answering the research question or restating the principal findings, while including any new information; (2) the strengths and weaknesses of the study; (3) a critical evaluation of the methodology, findings, and conclusions; (4) an interpretation of what the results mean and also what they do not mean; (5) suggestions for new research to answer questions that remain unanswered; and (6) strong, clear conclusions that are linked with the goals of the study.

REFERENCES

The references section includes a list of all cited work. Authors should limit the number of citations to those that have a direct bearing on the work described. In addition, the author should pay close attention to the guidelines for correct formatting of citations within the text (single versus multiple authors) and of references. Also, be sure that all references listed in the reference section are included in the text. It is recommended that the accuracy of the references listed be carefully reviewed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The acknowledgments section of the manuscript recognizes individuals or institutions for their contribution to the study. For instance, one might acknowledge a colleague who read an earlier version of the unpublished manuscript, or a lab assistant who provided technical assistance on the project, or an institution or company for financial and material support. When acknowledging a colleague, authors should obtain the permission from that individual.

THE CLINICIAN-RESEARCHER

The path to publishing may seem overwhelming for a clinician. Unlike researchers, who have intensive research training, the clinician-researcher must gain insight on how to conduct research. One way to learn is to collaborate with other, more seasoned researchers, one of whom who might be viewed as a mentor. If there is no outright researcher in the work facility, investigate opportunities to observe or participate in projects at the local university or hospital. It may also be beneficial to attend a seminar, meeting, or exposition at local institutions and see how others present their research. Further, it may be possible to become more familiar with research methodologies by volunteering in a local laboratory or research center, and by taking an online course about human subject research and the purpose of an institutional review board. Courses are also available online (or at the local university) for those who want to learn about statistics and research methodology.

To develop a familiarity with other researchers and clinicians within the field, volunteer to work on an Academy committee or task force or working group. Often times, these

groups are required to prepare a document that may be published. This kind of work often leads to a review of the available research or best practices, which provides an opportunity to look at issues in a systematic manner.

- For more suggestions on getting an article published visit: www.audiology.org/academia/research/research/tools (for “FAQs Publishing your Research”)



Other opportunities that provide a systematic review of the literature include teaching online courses, presenting at local and national meetings, and reading peer-reviewed journals and discussing them with colleagues.

Expanding the knowledge base in audiology is everyone’s responsibility. Experienced and inexperienced researchers, practitioners, and students should work collaboratively to investigate issues of importance in the clinic and the laboratory, and then get that work published. 📧

REFERENCE

Docherty M, Smith R. (1999) The case for structuring the discussion of scientific papers [Editorial]. *Br Med J* 318:1224–1225.