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Guide to writing and publishing a scientific manuscript: part 2—the process

Ian G. Stiell
Ottawa Hospital Research Institute

Paul Atkinson

Peter Cameron

Alix Carter

Warren Cheung

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Ian G. Stiell, Paul Atkinson, Peter Cameron, Alix Carter, Warren Cheung, Ryan Chuang, Kerstin Wit, Quynh Doan, Ian Drennan, Debra Eagles, Andrew Hall, Ariel Hendin, Grant Innes, Eddy Lang, Patrick McLane, Andrew McRae, Catherine Patocka, Jeffrey J. Perry, Naveen Poonai, Venkatesh Thiruganasambandamoorthy, Daniel Ting, Christian Vaillancourt, Robert Woods, Krishan Yadav, and Peter Zed



Guide to writing and publishing a scientific manuscript: part 2—the process

Ian G. Stiell^{1,2} on behalf of Canadian E. M. Writing Group

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Introduction

This is Part 2 of a two-part series on how to successfully write and publish a medical scientific manuscript. While **Part 1** addressed the structure of a manuscript, **Part 2** addresses the process of writing and dealing with journals.

General tips

Mentor

- **Newer authors** should always seek the help of a senior colleague with substantial authorship experience or expertise in a specific methodology.
 - *Mentors may come from a different discipline.*

Authorship

- The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (**ICMJE**) recommends that authorship be based upon **all four criteria**: [1]
 - substantial contributions to the **conception or design** of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of **data** for the work; AND

- **drafting** the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- **final approval** of the version to be published; AND
- agreement to be **accountable for all aspects** of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

- Those who do not meet all four criteria should instead be **acknowledged**.
- Authorship inclusion and **first and senior** authors should be determined **early in the project** and before writing begins.
 - Order of **remaining authors** is based upon contributions to the study and the manuscript.
- The **corresponding author** is the one who takes primary responsibility for communication with the journal during the manuscript submission, review, and publication process; this may be a senior author and not the first author.
- Some **formal research groups** have writing group guidelines that must be followed.

Target journal

- Choose initial journal **after careful discussion** with co-authors, once the results are complete and tabulated.
- **Consider** impact factor, whether your article is a good fit with typical publications, target audience, co-author experience with reviews and timeliness, open access, and publication fees.
 - *Aim high but be realistic to avoid multiple rejections (which is quite common).*
 - *Definitely consider non-EM journals, e.g. education, geriatrics, general medicine.*
- Review **submission guidelines** for word count, abstract layout, summary, and other instructions, e.g. <https://www.springer.com/journal/43678/submission-guidelines>

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✉ Ian G. Stiell
istiell@ohri.ca

¹ Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Ottawa, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, Ottawa, ON, Canada

² Clinical Epidemiology Unit, F657, The Ottawa Hospital, 1053 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Y 4E9, Canada

Writing tips

- Writing a manuscript is an opportunity for many authors to improve their skills.
- Tips:
 - Avoid use of the **passive tense** [2].
 - Write **short and clear** sentences.
 - Consider taking a **writing course**.
 - If your co-authors cannot help you, consider enlisting a **professional editor**.

Co-author review and submission

Review by co-authors

- When you have a **complete draft** (excluding references), solicit feedback from your co-authors.
 - Do not send **incomplete** or bullet form sections.
 - Alternately, junior authors may send chunks of **one or two sections** at a time to their mentor for early feedback.
- We recommend you ask them to **reply within 2 weeks** and give the explicit date.
 - *Send a reminder a few days ahead.*
- We suggest that you ask the co-authors to **insert comments** into the draft to give ideas for improvements or to identify confusing text.
- We ask our co-authors, other than identifying typos, to **refrain from using tracked changes** as that can lead to unreadable text when there are many authors.
 - Some authors prefer **tracked changes**, especially when only a few authors.
- We believe that the **first author** has the responsibility for language and grammar and should do the writing.
 - *Some authors prefer multiple authors working together on a shared document, e.g. Google Docs.*
- Co-authors often **add their initials** to the file name of their version with the next person adding further comments.
- A good resource is the recent CAEP Academic Symposium **publication on collaboration** [3].
- Send authors the **revised draft**, tracked changes and clean versions, for final approval.

Submission

- This should be done by an **experienced member** of the team, ideally a dedicated administrative staff.
- Double-check **journal instructions** for abstract, word count, summary, etc.

- The **cover letter** should be brief as editors are more often influenced by the abstract.
- Generally, it is not necessary to submit all the individual **author declarations** until the journal invites you to revise and resubmit.
- Ensure all authors are **notified of the submission** and are given the final version.
- Ensure all authors are aware of the **decision and comments**.
- If the paper is **rejected**, quickly obtain consensus on the next target journal.
- **Do not laboriously revise** according to comments from the rejecting journal, as the next journal will have completely different comments.
 - Revise obvious errors or unclear text.
- **Revise formatting** according to the new journal and submit quickly.

Response to reviews and next steps

Response to reviews

- It is important that you **respond fully** to each and every comment from the editors and reviewers.
- We believe it is easier to **cut and paste** the comments in their entirety into a new response document.
 - *Some authors prefer to use a table format*
- Respond with **bold text** or in a different colour; see **online appendix**.
- Overcome the common **temptation** to respond angrily or sarcastically to comments you do not like; in fact, be almost solicitous in your tone.
- Make changes to the manuscript with **tracked changes** as you go along and assist the editor by quoting the changes, in italics, in your response.
 - If you have added text, quote it explicitly and do not just say “done”.

Next steps

- If “revise and resubmit”, circulate **draft revisions and responses** for comment and approval within 7 days.
- After acceptance, **circulate proofs** to all authors so they can review their names and affiliations.
- Ensure all authors are aware of **publication date** and any press releases prepared by your institution or the journal.
- Provide the PDF of the **final published version** to all authors as well as the citation for their CVs.
- Consider **social media** to let others know about your new publication.

- Consider personal online profiles (e.g. GoogleScholar or ResearchGate) to increase visibility.

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