Publishing Your Research

20 tips from a medical publishing professional on improving your chances of manuscript acceptance

Presented by Frank J. Rodino, MHS, PA
School of Health Technology and Management
Stony Brook University
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## Biosketch

### Clinical Experience
- Stony Brook graduate; PA 1977, MHS 1982
- Primary care practice 1977
- Nassau-Suffolk, and NYC Health Systems Agencies 1979, 1984
- Full-time faculty SHTM 1983
- President NYSSPA 1983
- Distinguished Alumnus 1989

### Publishing Experience
- SCP Communications 1984
  - Precursor to Medscape
- PW Communications 1986
  - *Hospital Physician, Physician Assistant*
- Churchill Communications/Outcomes Research 1989-Pres.
  - Formerly part of the Pearson family of publications including Churchill Livingstone
From a small, relatively unknown teaching institution to a world-class research university

1975: What University Hospital?

2017 and Beyond!

- Research drives publications
- Publications generate prestige and funding
- Prestige and funding helps Stony Brook to grow
- And the cycle continues…
- So, let’s unseat Michigan as the nation’s top public university!
You can lead a horse to water…

- This lecture represents 30+ years of publication management experience as well as input from many medical journal editors
- The tips suggested herein are no guarantee of publication
- As an author, it is entirely up to you to put the necessary time and effort into planning and writing to assure a successful manuscript submission
- No amount of effort can turn a poorly designed study into a great publication, so start your manuscript planning early!
Publishing Should Not Cause You to Perish!

Close to Home by John McPherson

NEW STUDY REVEALS THAT READING STUDIES MAY CAUSE HEART DISEASE

4-19
Learning Objectives

Upon completion, attendees should have a better understanding of…

- Successful publication planning
- How to think like a medical journal editor
- How techniques help improve your chances of getting published
- Defending your target journal decisions
- Ethical considerations for medical publications
Today’s Resources

- Medical journal editor opinion survey
  - 19 medical editors surveyed during October using SurveyMonkey
  - Publishing houses included Elsevier, Springer, and Taylor & Francis

- PubMed and PubsHub
  - For audience and journal identification

- Ethical publishing considerations
  - ICMJE, CONSORT, GPP3
  - Also clinicaltrials.gov

- *Getting Research Published; an A to Z of publication strategy*
  - Elizabeth Wager, 3rd edition, Taylor & Francis
### Case History: Von Willebrand Disease (VWD)

**You are a hematologist and principal investigator for a research project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Von Willebrand Disease</th>
<th>The Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Common hereditary blood-clotting disorder</td>
<td>- Randomized controlled trial to assess efficacy and safety of Deximab, a new therapy for VWD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Deficiency in the quality or quantity of Von Willebrand factor (VWF), required for platelet adhesion</td>
<td>- New formulation has higher concentration of VWD factor and lower risk of thrombosis vs. other therapies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Prevalence of clinically significant cases is one per 10,000</td>
<td>- 20 subjects, ≥18 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Treated with Factor VIII concentrates containing Von Willebrand factors</td>
<td>- Protocol and IRB documentation currently under development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Goal Without a Plan is Just a Wish…

…Or just a gamble

Tip #1: Publication Planning Should Coincide with Protocol Development

As you plan your study, visualize the outcome

- IRBs want a communications plan anyway!
  - Helps to assure that patient information will be properly reported

- Draft a pro-forma 250-word abstract help to visualize your outcomes
  - How would you visualize your graphs/tables/charts?
  - Pass your vision along to a less visionary co-investigator to get them on board
  - Helps to minimize post-hoc analyses and suspicions of data-dredging

- 4 T’s
  - Topic: What do you want to say?
  - Tone: How do you want to say it?
  - Target: To whom will you say it?
  - Timing: When should you say it?
Tip #2: Decide Upon Roles and Responsibilities Early

Avoid an academic food fight!

- Gain consensus as early in the process as possible on individual roles and responsibilities of each
  - Author(s) (first and last)
  - Contributor
  - Guarantor/referee/corresponding author
  - Acknowledgements

- Definitions are clearly stated in ICMJE

- For multicenter trials
  - Establish a publication steering committee
  - Establish clear roles and responsibilities
  - Keep writing groups small and manageable
"...But our most useful publication is the 'Journal of Don't-Do-It: It's already been done'. "
Tip #3: Prepare a Needs Assessment

Why should anyone care about your study?

- Be prepared to answer the BIG question; “So what?”
  - What is the need for this information?
  - Where are the gaps in our clinical knowledge?
  - Is this information novel or newsworthy?
  - How will this information benefit my patients?

- Use **verbs** and an **active voice** in your title;
  - “Report of the results of a double-blind study of Deximab for Von Willebrand Disease”
    - Yawn!
  - “Deximab reduces bleeding episodes and improves quality of life in patients with Von Willebrand Disease”
    - Now you have my attention
Q18: Lack of innovation/novelty, topic has already been well covered by the journal, will not interest the readers
Tip #4: Find Your Audience, Prepare a Publication Landscape

Who do you want to reach with your message/data?

- Start with a keyword PubMed search:
  - Von Willebrand
  - Human
  - Clinical trials
  - 5 years
  - Then sort by journal name

- Why would a journal publish papers on Von Willebrand?
  - To paraphrase the bank robber Willie Sutton; “’Cause that’s where the audience is!”

Q19: Topic is outside of the journal’s scope

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- N/A
**Publication Landscape:**
Only 2 Journals Published More Than One VWD Mss

Which would be your first and second choice and why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VWD Citations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection Rate</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact Factor</td>
<td>72.406</td>
<td>13.164</td>
<td>5.627</td>
<td>5.287</td>
<td>5.275</td>
<td>3.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit to Accept</td>
<td>25 wks</td>
<td>2-19 wks</td>
<td>3-6 wks</td>
<td>3 wks</td>
<td>8-17 wks</td>
<td>4-17 wks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept to Online Pub</td>
<td>38 wks</td>
<td>1-1 wks</td>
<td>1-4 wks</td>
<td>1 wks</td>
<td>17-21 wks</td>
<td>12-17 wks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept to Print Pub</td>
<td>38 wks</td>
<td>12 wks</td>
<td>12-21 wks</td>
<td>9 wks</td>
<td>17-21 wks</td>
<td>12-17 wks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print Circ</td>
<td>600,000</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>2,885</td>
<td>2,274</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Circ</td>
<td>400,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>77,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freq/Issues</td>
<td>52/yr</td>
<td>52/yr</td>
<td>12/yr</td>
<td>12/yr</td>
<td>12/yr</td>
<td>6/yr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: All accept research manuscripts, all are clinically oriented*
The Rapidly Changing Role of Bibliometrics

PLEASE WELCOME THE NEWEST MEMBER OF OUR EDITORIAL BOARD, WHO BRINGS TO THE TABLE A WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE IN TWEETING.
## Tip #5: Bibliometrics: “One Size Does NOT Fit All”

### Three examples of bibliometrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Factor</th>
<th>Altmetrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps to choose between journals</td>
<td>Readership oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\text{IF}'14 = \frac{\text{cites}'12 +'13}{\text{pubs}'12 +'13}$</td>
<td>“What’s being talked about”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t measure downloads, etc.</td>
<td>Tracks social sharing not reflected in Impact Factor and H-Index scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not great for open access</td>
<td>- Article downloads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Twitter and Facebook mentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- News feeds, blog posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informs publishers about readership needs and wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helps authors measure the real-world impact of their work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **H-Index**
  - Academic author focused
  - Reflects both the number of pubs and the number of cites per pub
  - Compares researchers in similar fields and career lengths
Study Closed, Analyses Complete, Time to Write!

“T’ve been reading the trashiest scientific abstract.”
Tip #6: Choose Your Publication Type

The publication type will dictate your choice of outlet(s)

- Scientific abstract/poster
- Original research manuscript
- Subset analysis
- Review manuscript
- Case study/series
- Health economics/outcomes research manuscript
Tip #7: Structure Your Manuscript

IMRaD is the most commonly used manuscript structure

- Introduction: What is your hypothesis, who are you studying, and why are you doing it?
- Methods: How did you do it?
- Results: What did you find?
- Discussion: So what?

and
Q8: Study methodology flaws

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- N/A
Q9: Missing, incomplete, or incorrect study results
Q10: Incomplete, confusing, or contradictory discussion

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- N/A
What the Editors Said:
Text Comments From Editors Regarding Rejection

- ...fundamental flaws in the methodology or results or a perceived misunderstanding of the topic at hand
- ...being out of scope or already extensively covered in the journal/literature
- Frequently – not doing what asked to do by the editor the first time
- Sometimes – not responding adequately to reviewer comments
- Frequently returned to address peer review comments
- Lack of ethical conformity
- Missing prospective clinical trial registration details
- Incorrect manuscript type tag in Editorial Manager (e.g., “Original Research Article” instead of “Short Communication.”)
- Plagiarism
- Sometimes – methodology not necessarily flawed, but poorly explained to the extent that they would not be reproducible
- Rarely – poor quality graphics
- Sometimes – sample too small
Editor Survey: Other, Less-Common Reasons for Manuscript Rejection

- Failure to follow Guidelines for Authors
- Grammar
- Incomplete citations
- Failure to submit protocol/IRB documentation
- Incomplete author disclosures
- Failure to acknowledge writing assistance
THE UNSUCCESSFUL SELF-TREATMENT OF
A CASE OF "WRITER'S BLOCK"*1

DENNIS UPER
VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL, BROXTON, MASSACHUSETTS

REFERENCES

1Portions of this paper were not presented at the
81st Annual American Psychological Association
Convention, Montreal, Canada, August 50, 1973. Re-
prints may be obtained from Dennis Upper, Behavior
Therapy Unit, Veterans Administration Hospital,
Brookton, Massachusetts 02401.

Received 25 October 1973.
(Received without revision.)

COMMENTS BY REVIEWER A
I have studied this manuscript very carefully with
lenses and X-rays and have not detected a single
flaw in either design or writing style. I suggest it be
published without revision. Clearly it is the most
concise manuscript I have ever seen—yet it contains
sufficient detail to allow other investigators to repli-
cate Dr. Upper's findings. In comparison with the
other manuscripts I get from you containing all that
complicated detail, this one was a pleasure to examine.
Surely we can find a place for this paper in the
Journal—perhaps on the edge of a blank page.

497
Tip #8: Outlines and Structure Save Time and Help to Overcome Writer’s Block

Which would you rather rewrite? An outline or a full manuscript draft?

- Organize your thoughts using IMRaD
- Include
  - A draft 250-word abstract (for manuscripts)
  - Study tables/charts/graphs that you plan to use
  - Selected citations that will be referred to in your text
  - Outstanding questions and analyses
- Circulate to all authors for review and comment, and obtain approvals before commencing a draft
Tip #9: If You Want Future Citations, Make Your Study Easy to Find

Steer clear of the “Clinical Study Witness Protection Program”

- Adopt a strategy to facilitate future searches
- Terminology should align with current literature
- Prepare “key word” list to accompany your submission
- In the case of terminology for a new treatment
  - Evaluate for potential copyright restrictions
  - Avoid confusing or conflicting acronyms
    - IMPACT may be the most frequently used study acronym
  - Test new terminology in different languages
    - NOVA sounds scientific but means “Not going” in Spanish
Tip #10: Enlist Help To Informally Review Your Manuscript Prior To Submission

- Statistician
- Writer
- Fellow clinician
- Preceptor
- Department head
- Pharmacist
- But not Mom or Dad (unless Mom and Dad are journal editors)
Time to Submit Your Masterpiece!

“You should spend the next week typing down names of all co-authors on your paper.”
Tip #11: Think Like An Editor!

Ask yourself. Is this manuscript a hot mess, or is it ready for peer review?

- Does this manuscript fit with our journal’s editorial mission/scope?
- Is this study appropriate for my audience?
- Has the study methodology been clearly explained?
- Have the results been correctly interpreted?
- Does the discussion have clinical relevance?
- Do I have to work nights, weekends, and holidays to get this manuscript into shape?
Tip #12: Pre-submission Inquiries Save Time…

…And time is money!

- Abstract with a cover note to the journal’s editor
- Response usually within 72 hours
- A positive response is no guarantee, but helps to provide focus
- A negative response saves 6-12 weeks of waiting, then 6-12 weeks revising, circulating for approval, and submitting to another journal
- Treat it like a full submission. Send only one at a time!
Q6: In your opinion, do pre-submission inquiries help to reduce the number of manuscripts submitted to your journal that may not fit with your editorial plan?
Tip #13: Read the Instructions to Authors!

Carefully review the journal’s instructions to authors

- Review their manuscript formatting specifics
  - Editorial style (AMA, APA, other)
  - Artwork in the proper format (jpeg, tiff, etc.)
  - Citation formats (End Note, other)
  - Make the corresponding author clear to the editor

- Secure all requested documentation
  - IRB documentation
  - Protocol and stat plans
  - Disclosures and conflict of interest forms
  - Copyright releases
Q7: Failure to follow the journal’s author guidelines/editorial style

- Frequently: 10%
- Sometimes: 40%
- Rarely: 30%
- Never: 20%
- N/A: 0%
Tip #14: Get a Copy of Your Target Journal(s)

There’s a whole bunch of them upstairs in the library!

- Visualize your manuscript, this time in printed form
- Is your manuscript a good fit for your target journal? Why?
- Are your tables/charts/graphs consistent with those in your target journal?
- What were the submission, acceptance, and publication dates of articles like yours?
- How do they address authors, contributors, acknowledgments?
- What can you learn from the citation listings?
- Is there something about the journal that you can include in your submission cover letter?
Tip #15: Manage Your Timetable

Plan carefully to overcome inevitable inertia

- Prepare a publication calendar with key milestones
  - Research, outline development and approval, draft development, revision, and approval, submission
  - Work backwards from anticipated submission date

- Choose a version control method and stick to it!
  - Don’t let poor version control hamper your schedule

- Keep track of your task list and timetable
  - Set Outlook reminders as early in the process as possible

- It always takes longer than you think
  - Life happens, so build some wiggle room into your schedule
Tip #16: Manage Your Co-authors

Don’t let them mess with your schedule for success!

- Remind them of your publication plan. Then remind them again.
  - Roles, responsibilities, authorship, messaging, targets, timetables, etc.

- Give them clear dates to return comments to drafts
  - Typically 10 business days. Memories fade after that.
  - Send Outlook meeting/milestone reminders to each reviewer

- Insist on the use of “track changes” and version control

- Use Google Docs for sharing drafts and comments

- Schedule t-cons for outline and final manuscript approvals
  - Take and circulate meeting minutes
Tip #17: Recommend Some Disinterested Expert Reviewers

Especially in rare diseases like VWD

- Editors often welcome, and sometimes require suggestions for 3 or 4 disinterested (non-investigator, non-coauthor) expert reviewers
  - Provide contact info and academic affiliations upon submission
- Using them remains the editor’s prerogative
- Don’t put your efforts at risk with an unqualified reviewer
Tip #18: Follow-up

Hurry up and wait!

- Obtain receipt of submission
- Address every reviewer comment completely and within the time frame you are given
- Check proofs carefully
- Follow-up every 4-6 weeks to determine status
- If offered an alternate journal, give it careful consideration.
- Have a back-up plan!
Q33: How often do you suggest transferring a manuscript submission to another journal within your publishing company?
Tip #19: Evaluate Alternate Journal Recommendations Before Agreeing

Does this represent a conditional acceptance?

- Who is the alternate journal audience?
- Is it indexed?
- What would be the timing of publication?
- Are there costs associated with the alternate journal?
- Prepare recommendations for co-author consideration before deciding
Tip #20: Beware of Predatory Journals

Some important questions to ask

1. Do you know anyone who has read, reviewed, or published in that journal?
2. Where is the journal indexed?
3. Is it owned by a professional publisher or associated with a scholarly society?
4. Are any reliable bibliometrics associated with the journal?
5. Who is the editor? Who is on the editorial board? What can you find about them on Google?
6. Are there typos or falsehoods in their correspondence or marketing materials?
7. Under what conditions are they asking for money?
8. Are they on Cabell’s Predatory Journal Blacklist?
Ethical Guidelines of Note

ICMJE: International Committee of Medical Journal Editors

The gold standard

- Recommendations for best practice and ethical standards in the conduct and reporting of research and other material published in medical journals, and to help authors, editors, and others involved in peer review and biomedical publishing create and distribute accurate, clear, reproducible, unbiased medical journal articles

- Three major sections:
  - Roles and Responsibilities of Authors, Contributors, Reviewers, Editors, Publishers, and Owners
  - Publishing and Editorial Issues Related to Publication in Medical Journals
  - Manuscript Preparation and Submission
Standard way for authors to prepare reports of randomized, controlled trial findings, facilitating their complete and transparent reporting, and aiding their critical appraisal and interpretation

25-item checklist focusing on reporting how the trial was designed, analyzed, and interpreted

Flow diagram displays the progress of all participants through the trial
GPP3: Good Publication Practices Version 3

- Recommendations for individuals and organizations that contribute to the publication of research results sponsored or supported by pharmaceutical, medical device, diagnostics, and biotechnology companies
- Designed to help individuals and organizations maintain ethical and transparent publication practices and comply with legal and regulatory requirements
- Covers publications in peer-reviewed journals and presentations (oral or poster) at scientific congresses
ClinicalTrials.gov is a database of privately and publicly funded clinical studies conducted around the world.

Provided by the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

All human, randomized clinical trials should be posted and information about the trial made accessible to the public.
Summary: Plan Early, Choose Wisely, Communicate Clearly, Stay Focused, and Follow-up

It’s not rocket science
Questions?
Thanks!

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