Navigating the Path the Publication

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Agenda

1. Identifying a target journal(s)
   - Why and how

2. Test driving your ideas
   - Before and during writing

3. Responding to reviews

- Submit to Annals of Internal Medicine
  - Rationale: “They publish QI”

- Submit to Journal of General Internal Medicine
  - Rationale: “More friendly to primary care”

- JGIM responds (after peer review) – no invitation to resubmit
  - Issues: analysis, # time points analyzed, possibility of secular trends influencing outcomes
  - Helpful: specific suggestions for more info on context, other features of “good QI reports”

- The Abyss
    - Resubmitted: Draft reviewed a scholarship-in-progress meeting. Follow up in individualized mentoring to make specific revision plan (major weakness was literature) and carefully select new journal. Multiple revisions.
    - Technical issues: formatting, merging drafts, references, computer issues

- Resubmit to Quality in Primary Care

- Provisional acceptance (minor comments)

- Accepted
How to find relevant journals

• Talk to your librarian (and mentor, colleagues).
• Examine reference lists in articles you’ve read.
• Consider publications of professional societies.
• Search NLM catalog or PubMed.

Short (2-minute) online tutorials:

• Your thoughts? What’s missing from this list?

How to choose a journal

• Some features to consider:
  – Scope and Audience - Match with your article’s message?
  – Impact factor
  – Acceptance rate
  – Circulation (no. of subscriptions)
  – Abstracting/indexing
  – Frequency of publication (quarterly, monthly, weekly)
• Read the journal, identify “model” article
• Make a list (3-5 targets)
• Top-tier will triage often, but usually rapidly
• If reviewed, but rejected – use comments to improve your article
Example: Ethnicity and Disease

- **Focus:** Causal relationships in the etiology of common illnesses through the study of ethnic patterns of disease
- **Multidisciplinary journal:** epidemiology, genetics, health services, social biology, anthropology
- **Subscribers:** physicians, medical researchers, other healthcare providers who treat patients and conduct research in the U.S. and abroad.

Take your draft (core ideas) for a “test drive”

- Dictate (or jot down) your idea, then listen to (or read) it a week later. Does it still enthuse you?
- Query a journal editor about your idea.
- Present at a suitable seminar or conference (poster, oral presentation).
- Circulate your main ideas in writing to trusted colleagues for feedback.
Why non-journal first?

- Get feedback on strengths/limitations of your project
- Practice explaining what you did
- Keep momentum while working on manuscript
- Identify collaborators for next work

Five tips for setting up a review with colleagues

1. **Give advance notice**
   "I expect to have my draft ready in about 2 weeks. Will you be available then to review this?"

2. **Negotiate a timeframe for feedback**
   "If I get this to you on Friday, will you have time to look at it by the following Tuesday?"

3. **Provide all relevant materials**
   In addition to your text, include tables, figures, name of target journal, and article category

4. **Decide on a format for feedback**
   "Can we meet next week to go over your comments?" Or, in later stages of review, "Can you e-mail or fax your comments to me by Monday?"

5. **Provide guidance on the type, depth of review**
   "I'm looking for serious criticism on the discussion section, so give that section your best shot. In the introduction, just assess for overall readability and flow."
Two surefire ways to annoy your colleagues

• Ask them to review a rapidly moving target.

• Ignore all of their suggestions on draft 1, then ask them to review draft 2.

The Manuscript Review Process

Example: JGIM article review form

  ORIGINALITY, NEW INFORMATION: High 1 2 3 4 5 Low
  STUDY DESIGN: __adequate __contains minor flaws __seriously flawed
  STATISTICAL ANALYSES: Appropriate 1 2 3 4 5 Inappropriate or absent
  Recommend review by Statistical Consultant: _Yes __No
  VALIDITY OF CONCLUSIONS: Valid 1 2 3 4 5 Invalid
  CLARITY OF WRITING: High 1 2 3 4 5 Low
  RECOMMENDATIONS:
    ___ACCEPT: ___REJECT ___RECONSIDER
    () as is () with major revisions
    () conditional () with minor revisions

*Professor Johnson's paper was zippy. It had just enough good stuff that I could dance to it. I would give it a 7.*
What Reviewers Provide

• Publishing recommendation
• Quality ranking
  superior, good, fair, poor
• Priority ranking
  high, intermediate, low
• Remarks to the editor
• Remarks to the author

Understanding the Verdict

• Rejection, no invitation to resubmit
  – No peer review (triaged)
  – Negative peer review
• Rejection “in its present form”
  – Revise, resubmit, re-review, reconsider
  – Major revisions, minor revisions
• Provisional “acceptance”
• Final acceptance (in press)

Reasons for Outright Rejection

• Mismatch with journal
  – No clinical implications
  – Results of narrow interest, too specialized
• Unimportant, unoriginal topic (“me too”)
• Poor study design and methods
• Findings misinterpreted, inflated
Surviving Rejection

Don’t
• Despair
• Malign the editor
• Let the manuscript collect dust
• Disregard the critique

Do
• Be persistent
• Use the critiques
• Identify a new target journal
• Resubmit a better manuscript

A salve for rejection

• Reviewers’ comments are meant to enhance the quality and impact of your work.

• Your work is almost always better – in numerous facets – after you revise in response to critiques:
  − Better argumentation of significance
  − Better analyses
  − Better discussion of findings
  − Better writing (clarity, concision)

• There many, many, many journals.
• Persistence pays off.

When the verdict is an invitation to revise and resubmit:

1. Carefully read, then re-read the comments. Compare your understanding of them with others.
2. Informally rank them by priority (severity). Cluster like comments together.
3. Make a revision plan!
4. Revise the manuscript.
5. Draft the response letter.
6. Revise the response letter.
7. Cross-check response letter with manuscript.
Dear Dr. Tenure, [The editor who sent you the reviews]

We are pleased to resubmit to you our manuscript entitled, "_____________," MS #____________.

We found the reviewers’ critique of our initial submission to be very helpful. In responding to their comments, we believe our manuscript is greatly strengthened. Our point-by-point responses to their concerns and revision suggestions are outlined below:

Reviewer 1
1. ["Quote the specific critique point."]
   Response: [Clear, concise, explanation of how you’ve revised the manuscript. Indicate sections and page numbers]

Use Responsive Language
1. “We revised paragraph 2 of the introduction to include additional literature on…”
2. “As suggested, we deleted Figure 1 and combined Tables 3 and 4.”
3. “As recommended, we reanalyzed our validity data using t-tests rather than ANOVA procedures.”

Use Explanatory Language
1. “Unfortunately, we did not collect data on variable X, so we are unable to assess its interaction effect. We acknowledge this as a limitation on page 22.”
2. “Our decision to use the EPDS rather than the CES-D as our depression screening tool was informed by several factors…We have added this rationale to our methods section on page 4.”
When necessary, defend your original text (without being defensive), respectfully disagree.

1. “We have added citations to support our position. We have also rewritten several sentences in the discussion to avoid overstatement.”

2. “Were we to build in many of the extra process measures suggested by the reviewer, …our clinics’ processes for initiating the [XXXX] system would have been very different. Our study was designed to evaluate PPRP in a real-world setting.”