

Hints and tricks in the scientific publication

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Authorship

- All authors should have contributed to:
 - Hypothesis
 - Design
 - Data collection
 - Interpretation and manuscript revision
- Engage your co-authors actively from the start
- **First author is the boss**
- Senior author
- First 6 authors, et al. >6 authors
- Authorship agreed upon prior to data collection
- Co-authors can present the paper
- Acknowledgements may help limit authorship
- Corresponding author

Congress abstracts

- **a rapid communication** for an oral or visual public presentation
- not a summary of a paper
- **a single message**
- can be interpreted on its own
- **select topic/category very carefully**
- 1 study may support several abstracts
- key words are unimportant
- follow instructions exactly
- **title is most important, should be written first and revised last**
- remember the theme of a chosen topic
- use recommended subheadings
- design tables simply
- avoid busy figures
- use all space provided
- **an abstract should always lead to a full manuscript**

Poster

- **more relaxed than an oral presentation and more fun**
- it is the publication and reference that counts on your CV
- be available to elaborate and argue
- use the opportunity to network
- stay modest, visitors usually know more than you do
- view criticism as free peer review for your paper
- talk to your neighbours

- look at it from 2 meters away while walking
- **title must summarise results and is the only part read by 99%**
- as little text as possible, telegraph style is best
- indicate participating centres clearly
- illustrations must be simple and very large with clear titles
- people like colours and big fonts
- not too fancy, it is science not show business
- blow-up conclusions
- attach the accepted abstract

Submission

- try a high impact journal if you have time and the paper is strong
- know the journal's special interests, style and readership
- read some papers
- do not divide findings from 1 study into several papers
- **one strong paper is better than two weak papers**
- read "instructions to authors" several times

Abstract as a summary for a manuscript

- very different from a congress abstract
- important exercise and should be written before the paper
- briefly summarise the aims and major findings
- **invitation to read the paper**
- less data necessary
- detailed information is contained in the paper
- may be very short, no tables
- use a lot of time on the impact and conclusion
- make the English perfect, reviewers' first impression

Title Page

- Presentation is important and demonstrates clarity and organisational skills
- Corresponding author should be first author
- Indicate financial support

Manuscripts

Title

- **Most important part of the paper, write it first, make it concise and provocative**
- Make a statement that will wake up the reader
- Show it to your colleagues

Introduction

- short (1-3 paragraphs max)
- background and hypothesis
- why the study needs to be done

Methodology

- adequate information, too much detail is better than too little

- describe study design and patient population thoroughly
- get the statistics section right, show it to a statistician

Results

- **make it readable and easily digested**
- concise short text, repeat same format for reporting
- well-designed illustrations
- refer to tables and only repeat essential data in text
- place references to figures and tables appropriately

Discussion

- use logical headings
- brief review of your results with few numbers
- review current literature and **compare or contrast your findings**
- interpret results
- speculate on mechanisms
- include limitations section
- separate implications from conclusions
- **"appropriate conservatism"**

References

- should be current and accurate, they reveal your efforts to the reviewer
- do not use too many of your own references
- do not use reviews, rather the original paper
- editors choose reviewers from senior authors in the reference list

Final touches

- double space
- **spell check, show to an Englishman**
- **if you do not know an Englishman, send it to a Scot or an American**
- make the paper and illustrations look good
- presentation counts
- **a clean appearance implies organized work**
- prepare and mail by express in a clean package to the journal
- follow electronic submission rules exactly
- revise carefully according to co-authors' comments
- highlight changes, do not touch "accept all changes" button
- resist time pressure
- **put it on the shelf for 3 weeks, "cold eye"**
- then read it like you have never seen it before

Cover letter

- invest time in the letter
- by the first author on hospital paper
- get the Editor's name and address right
- well-written, immediately displays your language skills to the editor

- the King's English, no typos
- short and concise
- explain what is *novel* about the paper
- potential *impact on clinicians and researchers*
- **include the reference if an abstract was published**
- include title in first sentence
- summarise results in 2 sentences
- why you chose this journal
- **always include the words "novel" and "impact"**
- always suggest potential reviewers if permitted report important potential conflicts of interest
- end with: "We look forward to the results of the review process"
- ***a negative result is important if the hypothesis is strong***

Revision letter

- do a very thorough job, revision is time-consuming, do not respond too quickly
- detailed and organised revision letter
- "all authors have approved revisions"
- Do not argue unless you can defend well
- paste response into document after reviewer comments
- **long is good**
- revise *exactly* according to recommendations
- **deal with each criticism separately**
- **specify modifications; page and paragraph in revised paper**
- thank the editor and reviewers for their time
- state that the revised paper was "much improved by the criticism"
- de novo review is increasingly popular

Rejection

- **do not get depressed, you have learned something**
- discuss a plan of action with co-authors
- if the paper was rejected by a good journal:
- consider sending *the editor's and reviewers' comments and a detailed revision* elsewhere
- ***or revise the paper according to the reviewers' comments and re-submit to another journal***
- **do not resubmit elsewhere without improving the paper**
- new reviewers will usually have similar criticism
- ***never give up, rejection is part of the game***

The review is based on the lecture presented during the workshop titled: "Clinical research methodology in heart failure" on the Heart Failure Congress in Lisbon, Portugal, 11-14 June 2005.