

## **Publishing in Medical Journals**

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Medical researchers work hard to perform high-quality research to generate and share knowledge for the betterment of humanity and advancement of science. For any credible research, it is essential that the research must be based upon the innovative hypothesis, robust methodology and appropriate statistical methods. The researcher then compiles the data and discusses its practical and theoretical implications in the manuscript, which is then shaped according to certain peer-reviewed medical journal's guidelines and submitted for publication. However, for many medical researchers manuscript preparation and submission are the most difficult parts of the research.

Several deficiencies have been increasingly observed by the medical journal editors in the preparation of the manuscripts submitted by the researchers. The poor quality of the research manuscript not only leads to its rejection by the journals but also makes editor's job extremely difficult. An innovative study with a good research question, robust methodology employing appropriate statistical methods might not be considered by the journal for publication due to its poor formatting and improper writing style. In this context, several good quality resources are available online which if utilized properly would not only help to improve the quality of the manuscript but also increase the likelihood of acceptance of the research work by the journal. This editorial is dedicated to share some useful tips and links to important resources for the young researchers to facilitate them in the preparation of research manuscripts.

As a general guiding document, "Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals" distributed by International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (<https://www.ICMJE.org>) is an excellent resource for journal editors as well as for the prospective authors. The recommendations highlight important ethical issues in the conduct

and reporting of the medical research. The site provides important guidelines for reporting of research results and drafting the manuscripts.

Disputes about authorship are the most common types of conflicts among research groups because of its significant impact (promotion, employment, grant-winning, etc.) on the researchers. Regarding this important issue, ICMJE formulated rules to minimize such conflicts, which recommend that the authorship should be based on the following four criteria:

- 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.

Therefore, all the researchers meeting above-mentioned four criteria should be designated as authors while those who do not meet all four criteria should be acknowledged. Furthermore, acquisition of funding, data analysis, general supervision, data collection, alone, does not justify the authorship.

The aims and objectives of the research involving human subjects are to share knowledge for the benefit of scientific community and humanity. Therefore, various ethical guidelines have been formulated which emphasize upon safeguarding the well-being, dignity, rights and safety of the research participants. Two important research ethics documents include:

- World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki - Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (available at <https://www.wma.net/>)

- International Ethical Guidelines for Health-Related Research Involving Humans (available at <https://cioms.ch/>)

Manuscript preparation is a demanding job but the most time-consuming portion of it is in-text citations and preparing bibliography/reference section, which does not usually error free. Although most of the medical journals follow single referencing style (like Vancouver referencing style) almost all of them have different in-text referencing styles including other minor variations. Additionally, most of the journals have different referencing styles making it highly inconvenient and time-consuming for the researchers to change the referencing style manually according to different journals requirement. However, researchers could make their life easy by using different software known as citation managers. One of the most famous citation managers includes EndNote<sup>®</sup> distributed by Thomson Reuters. EndNote<sup>®</sup> desktop interface allows researchers to search online bibliographic resources (PubMed (NLM) etc.) and build an offline reference library. Furthermore, Cite While You Write<sup>™</sup> Microsoft<sup>®</sup> Word add-in allows researchers to quote in-text citations and simultaneously creating bibliography/reference section automatically. Most importantly, the reference styles can be changed instantly throughout the document using EndNote<sup>®</sup> with a single click. Therefore, EndNote<sup>®</sup> and software like it are indispensable research tools in the current era.

Regardless of much effort for the preparation of the manuscript by the researchers, the submission to the medical journal is not a straightforward process. Each journal has its own sets of guidelines (author guidelines or instructions to authors, etc.), which should be followed for successful submission of the manuscript for consideration. These guidelines not only tell the prospective authors about the scope of the journal but also guide them about the formatting and submission requirements of the journal. Journal editors usually spend many quality hours to jot down these guidelines to facilitate the authors, therefore authors are advised to must read them and prepare manuscripts accordingly before submission. A good written, well-

formatted manuscript prepared according to the author guidelines not only save the time of the editors but also reflect the personality and interest of the author(s).

Once the manuscript is ready for publication after careful consideration, the next step is to search for a suitable journal for publication. Choice of an appropriate journal would dramatically improve the chances of acceptance and minimize chances of rejection. The decision is often based upon several factors, including aims and scope of the journal, quality of the manuscript vs. prestige and visibility of the journal, review speed, acceptance rate and article processing charges, etc. Some of the publishers have also developed online search tools to facilitate the researchers. In this direction, Elsevier<sup>®</sup> developed an online search engine *Journal Finder* (available at <https://www.journalfinder.elsevier.com>). However, one of the major limitations of such type of search engines is that they are publisher specific and search for few journals available in their databases only.

Even though each section of the manuscript has its own significance, special care must be taken in the preparation of following sections: abstract; discussion; figures and tables. Most of the editors decide the fate of the manuscript by just reading the abstract and looking at the pictures and tables. They might consider the manuscript for detailed editorial/peer review if they find something interesting in these sections. Discussion portion is another very important section in the manuscripts, which is often ignored and written carelessly by many researchers. Essentially, the discussion section differentiates between a good and a bad study; therefore, it requires special consideration by the authors. This section should briefly summarize the main findings and discuss their significance while giving possible explanations for these findings.

The most important tip for the prospective authors remains that the authors must read authors guidelines, available online as well as in the printed copies of the journal in which they intend to submit their manuscripts. The Author Guidelines for Journal of Fatima Jinnah Medical College (JFJMC) could be accessed from <https://www.jfjmu.com>.