Getting your work published: what to do & what not to do

Histopathology

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Who is going to read your work?

• Other scientists . . .
• The readers are going to include editors and reviewers . . .
• They are all busy people and there’s a lot of competing material!!

So
• You need to grab and keep readers attention
A good paper is like a gripping novel

- Immediately captures your interest
- It tells a story
- The story is told with enthusiasm and excitement
- It doesn’t contain unnecessary information that detracts from the story line
- Each sentence reads easily and flows smoothly into the next
A good paper is easy to read, but is very difficult to write.

Writing Law one:

*The Law of Conservation of Effort*

- A fixed amount of effort is required to adequately write and review a paper. The less the author puts in, the more the reviewer has to put in.

Writing law two (a corollary of law one)

*Law of Diminishing Returns*

- “The harder I have to work at reviewing your paper, the less I will like it”
Style and language

• Measured.
• Not inflammatory.
• Over complicating wins no friends.
• English...must be comprehensible.
Writing with a reviewer’s perspective

• Write for them, not for you
• Be respectful of the reviewer’s time
• Keep it simple – your paper may be reviewed by someone not directly in your field
• If they have to work too hard to find the message, it will be missed nearly every time
• Use a writing style that makes it easy to understand and minimizes ambiguity
Editors don’t like…

– Poor fit with scope
– Unoriginal research
– Very long papers
– Incorrect or flawed research methods
– Unrepresentative samples
– Poor or misleading stats
– Non-randomised interventions
– Poor controls
– Poor images
– Poor presentation
MOLECULAR STRUCTURE OF NUCLEIC ACIDS

A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid

We wish to suggest a structure for the salt of deoxyribose nucleic acid (D.N.A.). This structure has novel features which are of considerable biological interest.

It has not escaped our notice that the specific pairing we have postulated immediately suggests a possible copying mechanism for the genetic material.

This figure is purely diagrammatic. The two ribbons symbolize the two phosphate—sugar chains, and the horizontal rods the pairs of bases holding the chains together. The vertical line marks the fibre axis.
General structure of journal articles

• Title
• Abstract
• Key words
• Body of text
• References
• Supplementary material and
• Other information, authors and affiliations, conflict of interest statement, sources of funding and acknowledgements
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- Should be clear and precise and concise
- Long titles rarely work well!
- Should be an accurate reflection of subject matter
Styles of Title

• Questioning or ‘look further’:  
  – Is X associated with Y?  
  – A study into X and Y.

• Statements:  
  – X is associated with Y  
  – X is a poor prognostic factor for Y  
  – X fatally induces Y
General structure of journal articles

• Title
• **Abstract**
• Key words
• Body of text
• References
• Supplementary material

• A concise outline of the setting of the work, what was done and what was found and what it means
• Beware! They can be very misleading

• Other information, authors and affiliations, conflict of interest statement, sources of funding and acknowledgements
Abstract

• Presumably write for poster first!
• Challenges
  – Not enough words!!
  – Precis
  – Try to hide nothing
  – Give significance values if possible
General structure of journal articles

• Title
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• What it says on the tin!!
• **Key...Words...**
  Which reflect what is in the paper
• Useful for searching for similar papers
General structure of journal articles

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- Abstract
- Key words
- **Body of text**
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- Supplementary material and
- Other information, authors and affiliations, conflict of interest statement, sources of funding and acknowledgements

- Introduction
- Material and methods
- Results
- Figures
- Tables
- Discussion
Austin Bradford Hill

• Introduction
  – Why did you start?
• Materials and Methods
  – What did you do?
• Results
  – What answer did you get?
• Discussion
  – What does it mean?
The Introduction

• Sets the scene
• *Concisely* gives the background to the problem
  – Should not be too long
  – Should be in proportion to the rest of the document
• Often useful to end it with a statement of the hypothesis to be tested
• Avoid rehashing all the results and discussion
How do I start writing?

AVOID....

Plagiarism

Fabrication/falsification

Use your abstract!

Play with the data
Materials and methods

• Should contain enough information for the reader to understand what was done
  – How much detail? For debate?
  – Ethics
  – CONTROLS
  – WHAT STATS

• Extraneous detail can be placed in Online Supplementary information

• Placing the entire M&M online is reprehensible!
Results

• Clear statement of the core findings in a logical sequence
• No interpretation or inference
• Display items should not replicate information in the text
• Emphasize important controls
• Some results may be placed in online Supporting Information: but they should not be core to the arguments . . .
Tables and Figures

- Not overwhelming!
- P values
- % v number
- User friendly
- Consider innovation: Forrest plots, linking data etc.
- Good photomicroscopy!
Discussion

• The data should be placed in the broad context of the relevant prior publications
• Stay focused and do not speculate beyond the data
• It is good practice to mention caveats and potential problems - ask yourself ‘why might this be wrong?’
• What else needs to be done?
• A balanced paper will consider the field in the round
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- A list of all the sources used in the paper
  - Usually other papers but can be books: only rarely will they be websites!
References

• What is the purpose of references?
  – To provide support for the arguments being made
  – To recognise the work that has gone before

• What format should references take?
  – Standard formats
  – These may differ in different disciplines
  – Harvard or Vancouver
How to make life easy

- Endnote
- Reference manager
- Or similar
  - Reformat for different journals
  - Quick!
  - Worth every penny
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Frequently today additional data etc is placed online in ‘Supplementary material’ that is important and needs to be recorded but is not essential.
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Important to know who paid for research and are there any conflicts of interest that could alter your perception of what it all means.
Summary

• Clarity
• Transparency
• Logical sequence
• Presentation

• Have something worth saying!