

To Publish or Perish: Strengths, Weaknesses of a Medical Paper (I)

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Abstract

This is a review of studies on the explore the strengths, weaknesses of a medical paper and to show the reasons of why manuscripts are rejected. Writing is a process of thoughts converted into words and sentences on paper. It is an indigenous process and continues in some form or other as age advances. Publication are hot topics in the scientific community. So much of the community lives under the constant pressure of “Publish or Perish” that it must be a hot topic. The primary criteria for good scientific writing are accuracy and clarity. If your article is interesting and written with style, fine. But these are subsidiary virtues. First strive for accuracy and clarity. The first step toward clarity is good organization, and the standardized format of a journal article does much of the work for you. The second step toward clarity is to write simply and directly. Academic writing is as much an art as it is a science. The work must have a central thesis and follow a clear and logical plot line from introduction to conclusion. To learn the strengths, weaknesses and the reasons of why manuscripts are rejected would help to the authors to be more successful in writing a medical publications.

Keywords: *Publish, Perish, Strengths, Weaknesses, Medical Paper.*

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Introduction

“Hell has no fury than a woman scorned!” is a popular saying. Any editor who has had the misfortune of sending letters of rejection to some authors will agree and also, “Hell has no fury than an author whose paper intended for an on-coming promotion exercise is rejected!” Writing is a process of thoughts converted into words and sentences on paper. It is an indigenous process and continues in some form or other as age advances. Poor writing impedes peer review and is unlikely to prejudice editors in an author’s favor, although it is seldom the primary reason for rejection. Common deficiencies in the methods, results, and discussion sections prevent initial acceptance for publication but are at least potentially amenable to correction.^{1,2}

Language of the scientific work writing is different and needs hard work to learn. Proper scientific writing is different from literary or other field writings. Such courses should be available. It should be a part of curriculum in organizing scientific conferences or seminars held by scientific organizations. Scientific Associations have some responsibility to their members. Young generation is coming up with good work but needs guidance in responsible writing and responsible presentations. Writing with new message and conviction, always attract the attention of Editors and Reviewers. Responsible writing is not only important for the Authors of an article but for Editors and Reviewers also.³

A good rule of thumb is to write as if your paper will be read by a person who knows about the field in general but does not already know what you did. Before you write a scientific paper read some scientific papers that have been written in the format of the paper you plan to use. In addition to the science, pay attention to the writing style and format.⁴

Publication are hot topics in the scientific community. So much of the community lives under the constant pressure of “**Publish or Perish**” that it must be a hot topic. Tenures are granted, funding awarded, and professional reputations made based on how often – and how well – a scientist publishes. As far as the scientific community is concerned, even the most brilliant piece of research is useless unless reported – and reported well.⁵

The primary criteria for good scientific writing are **accuracy and clarity**. If your article is interesting and written with **style, fine**. But these are subsidiary virtues. First strive for accuracy and clarity. The first step toward clarity is good organization, and the standardized format of a journal article does much of the work for you. The second step toward clarity is to write **simply and directly**. A journal article tells a straightforward tale of a circumscribed problem in search of a solution.⁶

The purpose of this study was to explore the strengths, weaknesses of a medical paper and to show the reasons of why manuscripts are rejected.

The reasons for manuscript rejection

Scientific journals rely on peer review to maintain the high quality and standards of papers accepted for publication. Reviewers typically assess the quality of manuscripts according to two main criteria: contribution to the field and the adequacy of the research design.⁷ Review process, questions to address was presented by Table 1, Frequent reasons supporting reviewers’ recommendation for rejection of a manuscript was also showed by Table 2.

Table 1. Issues of manuscripts to assess during the review process and questions to address them.⁸

Importance of the research question	The reviewer's knowledge of the field is central for judging the importance of the question. However, when the topic of the study is too close to the reviewer's own research special attention is necessary. Is your personal interest in the topic weighting too much on your judgment?
Originality of the work	Do use bibliographic searches and systematic reviews on topics related to the manuscript to assess originality. What is new in this manuscript? The question? Any methods? Does the data shed light to a pending controversy?
Relevance for the journals' readers	Put yourself on the role of the Editor: would the readers of this particular Journal be interested in this paper?
Usefulness for medical practice, teaching and science	A paper may be used to inform clinical decisions, for teaching purposes and for improving scientific knowledge. How useful will this manuscript be for each of these purposes?
Strengths and weaknesses (content, methodological, ethical)	How accurate and complete are the contents of the paper? Are the methods used able to answer the study question? What are the limitations of the study methods? Did the authors follow the research ethical principles and practices applicable to the study?
Validity of results and adequacy of its interpretation	Did the study methods and the way it was carried out ensure the quality of the results? Are there methodological checklist/guidelines that can help in assess the validity of the study? Do the authors' conclusions match the results observed and the aims described?
Clarity of the paper – structured, interesting writing and good, relevant tables and figures	Is the paper well structured? What about each paragraph? Is the writing style direct and appealing? The authors have chosen the best format (text, table, or figure) for the data presented? Are there too many (or irrelevant) tables or figures?
Suitability for publication	Considering all the various issues, is the manuscript quality adequate for scientific publication?

Table 2. Frequent reasons supporting reviewers' recommendation for rejection of a Manuscript.⁸

Insuffi cient problem statement	Not defi ning clearly and completely the research question (what does the study aims to answer)
Incomplete, inaccurate, or outdated review of the literature	While not essential to the validity and interpretation of results, the review of literature can be viewed as an indication of how meticulous authors were in writing the manuscript
Poor Methods or study Design	Inappropriate or incomplete statistics Sample too small or biased Inappropriate or suboptimal instrumentation Inadequate description of the Methods
Suboptimal Reporting of the Results	Inaccurate or inconsistent data reported Insuffi cient data presented Defective tables or fi gures
Getting Carried Away in the Discussion	Over interpretation of results
Poor writing	Diffi culty in following the logical fl ow of the manuscript

Peer review lies at the heart of scientific and academic publishing. It is an indispensable part of the manuscript screening and selection process for referees determine which papers are accepted or rejected. It is not surprising then to note that it can be controversial for the refereeing process involves a great deal of subjectivity,⁹⁻¹² as Seaton noted in his scathing commentary on tourism referees.¹³

McKercher and et al. have discussed the reports of 373 referees' with the topics of "Why Referees Reject Manuscript. The study indicated that multiple faults were common in poor manuscripts (mean of 6.2 per paper). Structural faults relating to method, significance, writing style, and organization predominated, whereas many manuscripts had deficiencies in the construction of the literature review and analysis sections. The study also suggested that within each of these categories, faults could be grouped into one of two subcategories: content problems relating to fundamental deficiencies with the research process and communication problems relating to how the content was presented. The former is harder to resolve, whereas the latter is much easier to address. Moreover, reviewing is an essentially negative process, with up to 9 of every 10 manuscripts being rejected by leading journals. Academic writing is as much an art as it is a science. The work must have a central thesis and follow a clear and logical plot line from introduction to conclusion. There can be no gaps in content or flaws in the logic. Each of the component sections must form a part of the whole, and each must also function as discrete complete sections in their own right. Journal articles follow a prescribed formula of introduction, literature review, method, results, and discussions and/or conclusions for a reason. Each of the sections sets the stage for the following section, and collectively as a whole, they contribute to form a cohesive piece of research. The writing of manuscripts must, therefore, be carefully planned to ensure that the desired story is told in a consistent manner. The best papers are a joy to read. The worst are little more than a rambling stream of conscious thoughts with no point.¹²

Authors, particularly inexperienced authors, may take comfort in knowing that manuscript rejection is common. One study showed that 62% of published papers had been rejected at least once. Authors should also be aware that many top-tier journals have high rejection rates.¹⁴⁻¹⁸

Manuscripts are desk rejected when they do not fit the mission of the journal or are too underdeveloped to benefit from the review process. In such cases, two members of the editorial team go through the manuscript and provide a developmental letter to author or authors to advance the article further. This helps free up the time of editors and reviewers to concentrate on the most promising manuscripts.¹⁹

Reflections of Craig as an author and an editor, and also rejection criteria adopted by FBR (Family Business Review) editors are as follows respectively:²⁰

Reflections of Craig;

Reflection 1: A desk reject decision can be looked at in a positive way.

Reflection 2: Desk rejection is an outcome of premature submission brought about by many factors including pressure to publish.

Reflection 3: At *FBR* a desk rejection decision is the result of a rigorous two-stage process.

Reflection 4: An *FBR* desk rejection can be avoided if authors understand and address the criteria guiding editors' decisions.

Rejection criteria adopted by FBR (Family Business Review) editors;

Observation 1: A well-crafted Abstract that clearly states the purpose of the paper, the procedures undertaken, and the principal findings sends a clear positive signal to the action editor responsible for deciding whether to desk reject the manuscript.

Observation 2: The theoretical contribution of the paper must be clearly evident to the editor and must clearly demonstrate how the paper builds on previous family business research.

Observation 3: The Literature Review section is a potential deal breaker and must clearly signal how the paper contributes to existing conversations.

Observation 4: Getting objective informed input on your paper will decrease the chances of a desk reject decision.

It is important to recognize that doing a literature review is different than writing a literature review. Doing a literature is ongoing and should be wide ranging to allow you to gain and maintain a wide and up-to-date understanding of your subject area and the areas that relate to it, even tangentially. However, writing a literature needs to be tightly focused and purpose driven. Your literature review needs to be shaped by your research questions, and so by the time you write it, you need to be clear on what questions you are going to ask and answer. This means that while much of the prior research you have read will contribute to your understanding of a field, only a subset of it is likely to be included in the literature review of any one individual paper submitted for publication. In sum, editors are looking to accept, not reject papers but the onus is on authors to do whatever they can to clear the two editorial desks.²¹

According to Osborne and Holland,²² scientific authorship was much simpler in the days of Einstein, Newton, Dewey, and James. Authorship was specifically traceable to individuals. As

science has grown more complex, joint- or multiply- authored journal articles have increased dramatically, and what constitutes authorship has become more of an issue.

Various guidelines' assertions about what authorship is, and is not. It seems that in this world of increasingly complex projects, a "substantial contribution" could include some combination of one or more of the following:

- a) Conception or design,
- b) Data collection and processing,
- c) Analysis and interpretation of the data, and
- d) Writing substantial sections of the paper.

In sum, the first objective is to enhance awareness and understanding that publication success involves a number of subjective assessment processes relating to the overall evaluation of how well an article conveys a high-quality journal image. Another objective is to provide clear and useful insights of the key elements editorial reviewers (or peer reviewers) look for in judging evidence of high quality, importance, relevancy, and contribution value of manuscript submissions for publication in prestigious and high-quality journals. The last objective is to validate previous research and publishing insights of past and current journal editors and academic scholars.²³

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