

First Steps toward Publishing Your Paper

Students in the CRA Programs often do research that could be useful to others in the clinical research community. Before that information can be published in a professional journal, however, it's advisable to transform a class paper into a manuscript suitable for submission. Sometimes that can be a rather simple matter. Sometimes it requires a great deal of effort.

Whenever you consider publication, first decide where you would like to see that article in print. You probably read publications in your field, and you'll want to look at your target journal in some new ways.

Step 1

Read the publication not to learn about its content but to get a feel for its editorial style. A brief sample of the kinds of questions to ask as you read includes:

- How long are the articles?
- Does the journal use tables and figures? What kind?
- How does the publication attract readers' interest in an article? Does it use a formal abstract? If it uses formal abstracts, how long are they?
- What is the review process?

Step 2

Study the author guidelines (sometimes called Instructions for Authors or Information Sheets). That is the best way to make sure that the material you wish to submit fits one of the publication's categories. You may have to read guidelines for several publications to find one that is the perfect fit for your topic.

Some sample guidelines/instructions are in the Writing for Publication folder.

Step 3

A sure-fire way to endear yourself to editors is to demonstrate familiarity with the way they work with authors. If the guidelines instruct you to inquire of the editor, do that.

Follow the instructions on every matter that applies to your submission. For example, most publications have strict limits on the number of words for articles in various categories; some have looser guidelines. Prepare your references in the style specified in the instructions.

Step 4

Submit your manuscript to one publication at a time. Almost all publications put out a statement along these lines: "Articles are considered for publication with the understanding that they are not under consideration for publication elsewhere."

You may get advice from people who think it is acceptable to send a manuscript to several publications at the same time. **Don't do it.** Multiple article submissions are a major no-no! Most editors will distrust forever after anybody who submits the same manuscript to more than one publication at a time.

Step 5

Expect to make changes. Peer reviewers almost inevitably ask for at least a few clarifications or expansions. Welcome the comments and suggestions. They are valuable gifts that can help clinical research professionals strengthen their articles. Most people who write for their discipline's journals have knowledge or expertise to share, but they are rarely professional writers. Take all the help you can get.

The odds are against acceptance for most beginning writers most of the time. So don't be discouraged if your manuscript is rejected by two or three publications -- or every publication in the field. The reasons could very well have nothing to do with the quality of your work. The editor could be overstocked on articles on the same topic. It could be a simple matter of timing. Many publications have a preset editorial calendar that lays out topics for the year with deadlines for submissions on those topics.