



## How to Prepare Papers for Top-Tier International Journals

This document has been prepared to assist authors in preparing and submitting papers to high-impact international medical journals.

### Objectives:

- Describe journals' editorial policies
- Identify the most suitable audiences for your work
- Select the right journal for your manuscript
- Demonstrate the best practices for preparing manuscripts and supplemental materials
- Develop skills for dialog with editors
- Explain the review, revision and resubmission processes

### Journal Selection

Selecting the correct journal for your paper is the most important step in getting your article published.

### Among the questions you should consider when choosing your target journal are:

- Whom do I want to reach (target audience)?
- How do I intend to reach the desired audience?
  - Is the journal open-access?
  - How will readers access my article?
- What type of journal will best meet my needs (general or specific, local or international)?
- How soon do I need to publish the data?
  - Speed of review
  - Speed of publication

## Research journal options

- Request input from peers, mentors, librarians
- Research *PubMed* (MEDLINE) for similar topics
- Explore journal directories (e.g., Directory of Open Access Journals)

## Identify your journal of choice

- Determine the fit between your study and a target journal
- Research the journal thoroughly
- Consider the needs of co-authors and research sponsors

## Additional Considerations:

- Scope and aims of the journal (e.g., narrow, broad, how well it matches your topic)
- Typical readership (e.g., researchers, clinicians...)
- Methodology preferences, balance of reviews and original research
- Credibility and prestige of the journal, impact factor, visibility, journal accessibility
- Open access? Available on mobile? Indexed by PubMed

## Once you have your target journal selected:

- Review *Author Instructions*
- Ensure article falls within the mission of the Journal
- Read the content of a few issues

## Predatory Journals

Be wary of unsolicited spam invitations from journals promising expedited review and rapid publication. Predatory invitations can be difficult to identify. Characteristics of such e-mails include the use of flattering language, requests or demands for urgent response, and advertising of open access for a journal that is not actually indexed or searchable (e.g., in PubMed). Negative consequences include decreased quality of science, publication of a work that is unlikely to be read, used, or cited, wasting research time and resources, and duplication of research efforts. A recent study by Clemons et al. [The *Oncologist* 2017;22:236–240] addresses this growing concern.

## Pre-submission Inquiries

Pre-submission inquiries can help to determine your target journal's interest, but should not be used to circumvent the peer review process.

- These inquiries are directed to the Editors to gauge their level of interest in the topic of a manuscript and can help to determine whether the paper will likely be considered for peer review.
- This under-utilized tool streamlines the manuscript submission and review process
  - Facilitates the receipt of timely and useful feedback

- Helps clarify Instructions for Authors
- Reduces strain on journal resources (e.g., peer reviewers)
- Enhances efficiency and speed of publication
- Improves transparency in article selection process

Submit a pre-submission inquiry especially:

- If you are unsure about your article's suitability for a journal
- If you have questions about the submission or review process

Provide sufficient study information for decision-making:

- Abstract
- Perceived value to a journal's audience
- Relationship to an existing body of work for a specific topic
- Disclosure of prior submissions
- Description of unusual circumstances

### Best Practices

- Be concise
- Stay open-minded if your article is not accepted
- Request suggestions about more suitable journals (if the submission is not encouraged)

A well-written pre-submission inquiry should:

- Describe the question being addressed in the proposed manuscript
- Briefly summarize the findings
- Highlight what is unique about the proposed manuscript and what sets it apart from others on similar topics

## Manuscript Preparation

Compliance with journal guidelines makes it easier to evaluate your submission.

- Follow the journal's instructions regarding:
  - Formats and lengths
  - Graphic sizes
  - Types of supplemental data
- Use proper grammar, punctuation, and language; enlist a language editing service if necessary.
- Check that data and results within all text and accompanying materials are internally consistent.
- Data and results should be internally consistent. Ensure that results noted in tables are the same results noted in the text.
- Be as transparent as possible when disclosing the research question, how the study was conducted, and what findings are included.

## Major Challenges for Authors

- Keeping up-to-date with original sources and reviewing the literature
- Providing complete disclosure statements
- Addressing the utility and importance of drugs not currently available in authors' home countries

## Mistakes to Avoid

- Missing and/or illegible pages
- Visible comments by internal reviewers
- Poor grammar and typographical errors
- Failing to ensure that all authors have read and approved the submission
- Submitting to multiple journals at once and noting the wrong journal in the cover letter (Duplicate submission)
- Duplicate publication (plagiarism—submitting a previously published article to a different journal)
- Rambling text and formatting errors
- Over-interpretation, or ascribing more importance to the findings that can be supported by the evidence
- Uncritical discussion
- Excessive length, references, and figures
- Figure legends and text that do not match
- Lack of senior authorship involvement in writing introduction and discussion
- Lack of proper acknowledgment of authorship and other contributors (*e.g.*, medical “ghost” writers)

For additional information, visit <https://authorservices.wiley.com/author-resources/Journal-Authors/Prepare/index.html>

## Discoverability

### Search Engine Optimization

Although all published articles are accessible online, authors can take steps to improve their article's online discoverability. Search engine optimization (SEO) techniques can help boost content to high-

ranking positions in search results, resulting in greater visibility, readership, and citations for your article.

Key techniques you can use to improve your article's SEO are

- Carefully select at least 5 relevant key words
- Lead with key words in the article title
- Repeat key words 3–4 times throughout the abstract
- Link to the published article on social media, blogs, and academic websites

Because they are highly utilized by search engines when ranking search results, selecting appropriate key words (i.e., search terms) and using them frequently and appropriately in the title, abstract, and article is critical.

## Submission Types

Selecting the correct article type is important. Consider what is the appropriate format for the data you have collected. Most articles are either Original Articles or Review Articles, but there are other options for reporting the findings of smaller studies, interesting observations, or results that may be negative or simply confirmatory. (See “Special Sections” for examples)

- Original Articles
- Review Articles
- Brief Communications
- Letters to the Editor
- Clinical Trial Results
- Precision Medicine Clinic: Molecular Tumor Board

## Cover Letters

- This is the first summary of your article and first chance to convey its significance and relevance.
- Explain why the selected journal is the right place to publish your article
- Describe how your article will advance the field
- Continue journal-author dialogue
- Disclose any prior submissions (including poster presentations)

## Cover Letter Best Practices

- Clearly articulate the purpose of the article
- Be open-minded and respectful

- Remind editors of previous communications (e.g., pre-submission inquiries)
- Show interest in issues of importance to the journal:
  - Regulatory requirements
  - Conflict of interest disclosures
  - Authorship and contributorship criteria
  - Mention prior submissions
    - Helps editors evaluate improvements made to a manuscript
- Utilize the cover letter template (appendix)

## Editorial Process

Upon submission, Editors assess:

- Suitability for the journal
- Strength of the methods
- Value to the field

Based on the assessment, the manuscript will either be reviewed externally or rejected without external review

## Review, Revise and Resubmit

When the reviewer comments are received, the Editors evaluate them and determine whether the submission should be revised to address the comments or rejected.

Specific guidance about a journal's review system are often found in the Instructions to Authors and can help set appropriate expectations regarding the review process and projected timeline.

If you receive a request to revise, it is your opportunity to address all reviewer and editorial comments and present the strongest possible response to the reviewer critique.

## Best Practices

- Remember that reviewers' comments are meant to be helpful
- Follow journals' guidelines for revising manuscripts
- Respond systematically to each point raised by the reviewers in a cover letter
- File formats (e.g., Word document with *tracked changes*)
- Address all reviewer and editorial comments point by point
- If a reviewer's comment is viewed to be incorrect or unjustified, provide an explanation and supportive literature references
- Avoid easy fixes - these are often transparent to editors

- Address all reviewers' comments
- Stay open-minded if your article is not accepted
- Persistence matters—so does being open to constructive criticism. All involved in the peer review process want the same thing—high quality research and publications that can advance the field.
  - However--Remember that major study design defects cannot be addressed by simply rewriting or formatting a manuscript. Sometimes despite your best efforts to respond to the critique, you will be unable to effectively address all the reviewers' concerns.

## Acceptance & Rejection

**Acceptance decisions are based on these main factors:**

- Importance of the research to the field of oncology
- Originality of the work
- Quality of the study
- Priority of the work to the Journal and its readership

**Papers are rejected if they are:**

- Not relevant to oncology practice issues
- Case reports not of educational benefit/relevance to the practitioner
- Written by a ghost writer, paid by a commercial interest, promotional or not fair and balanced.
- In violation of accepted ethics policies (Helsinki)
- Do not add significantly to the existing literature

Papers are usually not rejected solely due to language, formatting, or other issues that meaningful revisions and the assistance of a good copyeditor can help to fix

## If Your Paper Is Rejected

Following rejection, authors generally have two choices:

- Appeal the decision
  - Appeals can be lengthy and acceptance is not guaranteed even if the appeal is granted. The manuscript will usually go through additional rounds of review, which may lead to the same conclusion.
- Submit the manuscript to another journal

- Refer to the original list of researched journals and reconsider those identified as having a strong fit

Some journals will respond to follow-up questions.

- Engage in open dialogue about the editors' notes to develop a more effective new submission strategy
- Some journals may share submissions with partner journals if a submission may be more appropriate for one of the partners.

## Goals: The Oncologist's Editorial Board

- To encourage meaningful reviews and state-of-the-art papers
- To encourage original work that has relevance and impact on the practice of oncology
- To keep pace with programs at the clinical frontier, and to encourage a bit of exploration at the same time
- To keep our readership informed of the latest developments in clinical care and clinical research in each area of specialization

## Additional Resources

**Toolkit Manuscript – Chipperfield, et al. (2010).**

*Authors' Submission Toolkit: A practical guide to getting your research published, CMRO, 26:8, 1967-1982.*

**The Oncologist** : <http://authors.theoncologist.com/>

*Contains more detailed discussion of topics and additional information on submission best practice*

**International Committee of Medical Journal Editors: <http://www.icmje.org>**

*A comprehensive resource for writing articles for biomedical journals, including important ethical guidelines*

**Medical Publications Insights and Practices (MPIP) website: [www.mpip-initiative.org](http://www.mpip-initiative.org)**

*Provides a database of journals accepting "specialized interest" data and other helpful resources*

## Special Sections

### Clinical Trial Results

An article type designed to encourage the reporting of all clinical trial results

- **Rapidly publish results** that provide insight into pharmacology, drug interactions, and reason(s) for drug failure
- **Publishes positive and negative trials**; encourages transparency of clinical trial results
- **Fully indexed by PubMed**, ensuring thorough access to results worldwide
- **Combination format**
  - **Clinical Trial Results** available in its entirety online
  - **Author Summary**: abstract + brief discussion + 1 or 2 salient graphics published in print

### Precision Medicine Clinic: Molecular Tumor Board

A case-based series intended to help practicing oncologists optimize molecular testing for their patients and to better understand and plan for the rational cancer treatment based on new technology and a more complete genomic profile

#### ***Standard Format:***

**Abstract**

**Patient Story**

**Molecular Tumor Board**

- Genotyping results and interpretation of the molecular results
- Functional and clinical significance of the specific mutation in the particular cancer
- Potential strategies to target the pathway and implications for clinical practice

**Patient update**

**Key Points**

**Glossary of Terms**

**Figures/Tables**