

Introducing a new series on effective writing and publishing of scientific papers

This article introduces a series of writing tips that will appear each month in the *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology (JCE)* over the next year. The 12 papers aim to cover the whole process from starting to write the first draft of a paper to responding to reviewer comments (Table 1). The primary target audience are novice academic researchers, although the series may also be useful for senior researchers who supervise less experienced colleagues.

Writing and publishing scientific papers is the core business of every researcher. Original research papers form the culmination of a usually long trajectory, which starts with the development of a research idea and continues with acquiring funding and collecting and analyzing data. Besides original research articles, there are many other types, including systematic reviews, commentaries, and editorials. The scientific output medical researchers generate is not only important for society to improve health through advancement of knowledge but also for the individual researcher's career [1]. Effective scientific writing, however, is not easy.

Many novice academic researchers, and even senior researchers, may struggle with writing papers. Researchers often learn to write by doing it and receiving feedback on drafts from their supervisors, coauthors, and journals. However, such guidance is not always optimal, and many useful tips and tricks may remain disregarded for too long. We (D.K. and J.W.L.C.) noticed these problems during our own early writing career and also observed the difficulties of other authors when reviewing submitted work in our role as editorial board members of journals. We have therefore developed a training course to help authors address issues relating to successful scientific writing and publishing of articles (www.heuvelandcursus.nl).

Various factors impact on successful writing and publishing. Good scientific content of a paper alone does not guarantee its publication in a good journal. Many variables in the writing process determine whether a paper will be accepted for publication, but the good news is that authors can influence most of these [2]. Anticipation and modification of such determinants will increase an author's effectiveness, enabling them to get more done in less time; offering editors, reviewers, and readers a clear storyline; increasing enjoyment and reducing frustration;

and raising the likelihood of having a paper accepted by a good journal.

Is there insufficient literature on writing and publishing in scholarly journals? Well, quite the contrary in fact. There are piles of textbooks and articles dealing with general aspects of scientific writing (e.g., see Ref. [3–8]). Furthermore, there is an important general guideline [9] and many specific guidelines (e.g., see Ref. [10,11]) to help authors improve the clarity, completeness, and transparency of their research reports. An exhaustive list of available guidelines and other resources to facilitate good research reporting is provided by the EQUATOR (Enhancing the QUALity and Transparency Of health Research) network (<http://www.equator-network.org>) [5,6]. However, it is perhaps not only the abundance of information but also its sometimes nonspecific nature, which prevents young researchers from getting a clear overview of ways to effectively write and publish a biomedical research paper.

This new series of monthly writing tips builds on the existing literature about research reporting in *JCE* [1,2]. It aims to provide clear and concise key information on all major aspects of the process. Each of the 12 papers of the series is constructed as an easy-to-read one-pager, divided into background information (“What you should know”) and advice (“What you should do”). The advice uses the imperative, which is unusual in *JCE*. However, it fits the purpose of this series, which is to provide readers with experience-based do's and don'ts of effective writing and publishing. Each paper also contains a checklist providing a brief overview of the main points. The series can be read as a whole but has the advantage you can also only pick a particular item you need while writing. The series will be published as open access on *JCE*'s web site to achieve maximum reach, partly because *JCE* wants to stimulate and facilitate researchers in low- and middle-income countries (<http://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-clinical-epidemiology>).

The nature of this series does not allow us to address all possible aspects of writing and publishing. For example, it does not provide specific information for papers reporting on qualitative research. We think, however, that most issues addressed in the series are also useful for qualitative papers. For more information, we refer to the existing reporting guidelines [12–15]. Furthermore, the

Table 1. List of subjects in the *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* series on effective writing and publishing of scientific papers

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1. How to get started
 2. Title and abstract
 3. Introduction
 4. Methods
 5. Results
 6. Discussion
 7. Tables and figures
 8. References
 9. Authorship
 10. Choice of journal
 11. Submitting a paper
 12. Responding to reviewers
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series does not address English spelling and grammar. General suggestions about language use have been very well addressed in a previous article published in this journal [2]. More specific suggestions, particularly tips for non-native speakers, largely depend on the individual author's background and are beyond the scope of the series.

The series was written to offer tips and tricks for clear and concise writing and publishing and to support authors in getting their message across to the scientific community. It is not a specific guide to successful publishing in *JCE*; its content applies to writing biomedical research papers in general. We hope that you will enjoy reading the series and that it will increase your pleasure in writing and the acceptance rate of your papers.

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