

Nutrition & Dietetics

Journal of the Dietitians Association of Australia, including the Journal of Dietitians New Zealand

WRITING FOR PUBLICATION IN AN
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL



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Introduction

This short Guide attempts to help potential authors. It offers advice on how to choose a journal, how to write an article and how to submit an article to a journal. It also provides some comments on publication ethics and what to expect after you have submitted your paper.

It will focus on how to write original research papers but not review articles or short communications.

This Guide has been written with the concerns of new researchers in mind. It draws upon insights from experienced journal editors and scholars. It is particularly intended for inexperienced and early-career researchers.

Throughout the Guide, we have provided you with further resources. There are other excellent reference books in print. The best of them is probably *How to Write a Paper*, 4th Edition, George M Hall (Editor). For a list of books on writing papers and on peer review, including the one above see http://authorservices.wiley.com/bauthor/more_resources.asp

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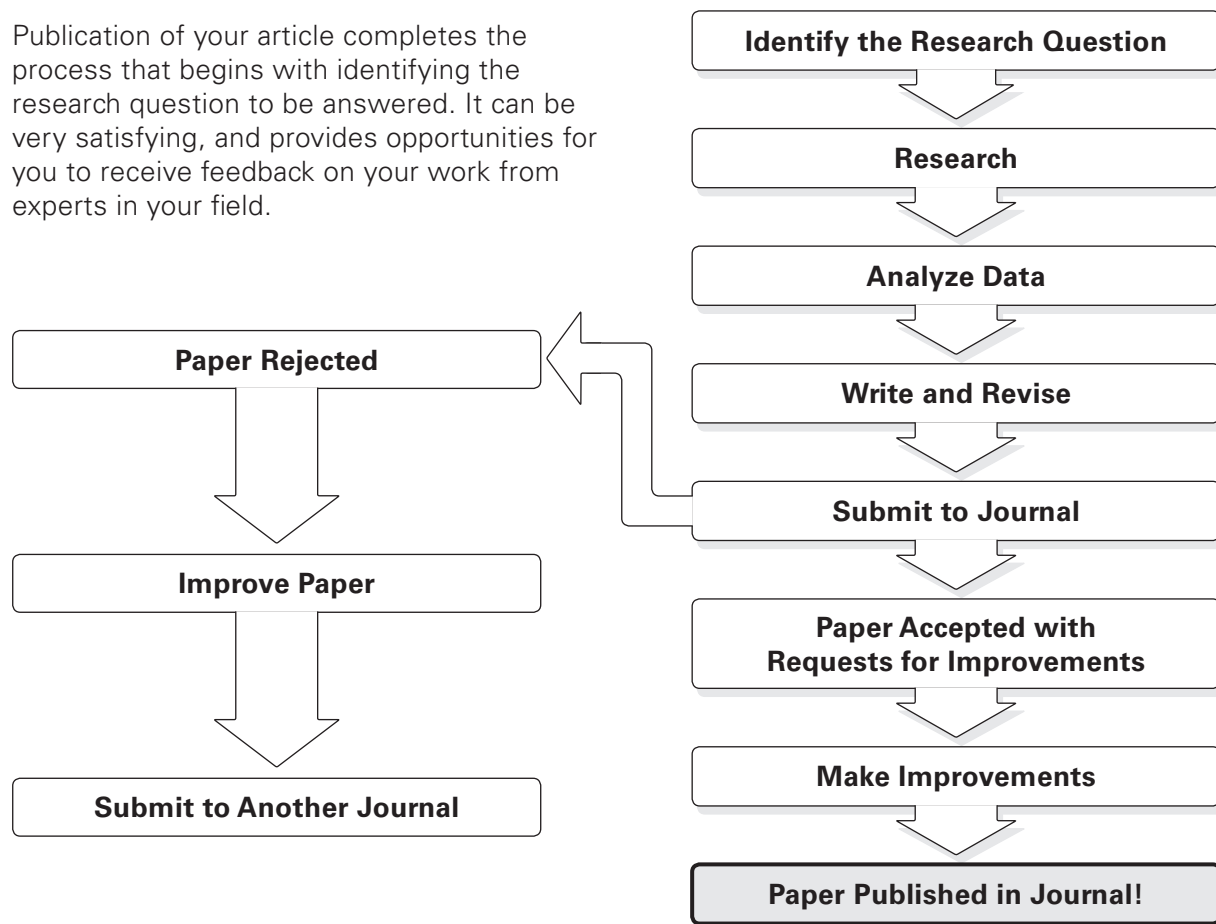
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The process at a glance

Publication of your article completes the process that begins with identifying the research question to be answered. It can be very satisfying, and provides opportunities for you to receive feedback on your work from experts in your field.



Why publish in an international journal?

Understanding why you hope to publish in an international journal should help you decide to which journal you should submit.

Researchers usually publish in an international journal because they want:

- Their research findings to become known to others working in the same field.
- To reach clinicians or specialists, those who will implement the results of their research in the treatment of patients.
- To get tenure, promotion or research funding.

Quite often the journal must have an impact factor or at least an impact factor is preferred. The dominance of the impact factor is unfortunate. There are many good journals without impact factors. No new journal can have an impact factor until it has been published for two years.

How to choose a journal

Several reasons for publishing in an international journal have been mentioned. Sometimes a journal will reach the community a researcher wants to reach and have a high impact factor but this is not always the case. The researcher has to decide what is most important to him or her.

The prestige of the journal is very important to most researchers. Prestige often depends on factors other than an impact factor, for example the editor, the editorial board, the perceived quality of the refereeing and the ERA ranking.

Speed to publication is often the most significant factor for authors. Most journals now put accepted articles online, as soon as they are ready for publication and well before the print version (if there is one) is available.

In some disciplines, but generally not in nutrition and dietetics, there are Open Access journals which are well regarded but which ask for a payment before publication. These journals can be read online by anyone who has an internet connection. Open Access journals do not necessarily take less time processing the paper. Note also that many publishers offer the possibility of your accepted paper being made freely accessible for a fee.

Specific suggestions for finding a journal:

- Make sure that the journal is published online. There are still journals that only come out in print.
- Check the aims and scope of a range of journals, to see where your article would fit best. It is better to browse these on the journal's online site, rather than from an old print copy. For links to Wiley-Blackwell's nutrition and dietetics journals visit <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/subject/nutrition>.

- If your research is very specialized, aim for a specialist journal rather than one intended for a general research audience. Choose the journal that is likely to be read by those who share a common interest in the content.
- Look at a recent copy of a journal (or the free content online) to see what areas of research it publishes.
- Look at the dates of submission and acceptance which most journals give and then note the month of publication. This demonstrates speed to publication.
- Check the affiliations of authors in recent issues and also the affiliations of members of the editorial board. An international journal edited from your region is likely to be more sympathetic to papers submitted locally.
- If your work has important clinical implications and is written to be understood by specialists and practitioners, consider a membership journal that will go to a significant number of such people.
- If the topic of your paper can only be properly explained by the use of high quality colour prints, make sure by inspection that the journal you choose routinely produces color of high quality.

It is worthwhile researching the journals thoroughly. You will waste a lot of time if you choose an inappropriate journal for your work.

Writing a paper

The first question to ask is – how good is your work? Is the research on which the paper is to be based worth publishing in an article? Would it be better in something less formal such as a short note or a letter? This question can be expanded as follows:

- How good is your experimental design or data?
- Are you repeating someone else's work or is your approach novel or original?
- How robust are the conclusions in relation to the evidence presented?

All international journals share the same basic rules about how papers should be written, but you cannot assume that the instructions given for writing a paper in one journal will be the same as the instructions for another journal, even from the same publisher. **It is always vital to read and follow the guidance for authors for the journal on the online site of the journal.**

Structure of the main text

Formal scientific communication depends on providing a concise and highly structured account of research findings and there is no escape from organizing your discoveries in this way. The main text of nearly all scientific papers has the same basic structure. This has been summarized by an expert using the acronym **IMRAD**.

INTRODUCTION

what question was asked in the research?

METHODS

how was it studied?

RESULTS

what was discovered?

and

DISCUSSION

what do the findings mean?

Planning your article

1. Make a list of the data to be presented, then consider what data analysis is necessary.
2. Interpret your data and draw conclusions and on that basis decide how you are going to "tell a story".
3. Plan each section of the manuscript using key points.
4. When you have everything you need, start writing properly, expanding on your bullet points to form a coherent report.

Style of writing

Use simple language and write clearly and succinctly. Try to read what you write from the outside and see if you can understand what you are trying to convey. If your message is not clear, the referees and the editor will not always spend their time trying to work out what you are trying to say.

Publication ethics

The Author Guidelines for each journal sets out the key ethical requirements. The information on these pages is based on the much-praised Wiley-Blackwell *Best Practice Guidelines on Publication Ethics: A Publisher's Perspective*, which is accessible from <http://authorservices.wiley.com/bauthor/publicationethics.asp>

The big topic for discussion is **Plagiarism**. In author instructions it is usually dealt with by the simple statement that the submission must be an **original** paper. It is important to avoid plagiarism. The term is a confusing one even to experienced researchers. What does plagiarism mean? In practical terms the following two sentences represent a good way of looking at the real meaning, though only the second refers to what is actually an act of plagiarism:

- Do not offer work for publication that has already been published elsewhere.
- Do not pass off the work of someone else as if it were your own.

Redundant (dual) publication

It is remarkably easy to publish what is substantially the same paper in more than one journal. It is called **redundant publication**. It is easy to forget that one presentation of results can, for example, have been published in the proceedings of a conference and then also offered for submission to a journal. Sometimes it can be allowed: for example, if one version is in a different language. There should always be attribution i.e. the first publication should be referenced.

Examples of allowable duplication are given in *Best Practice Guidelines on Publication Ethics* (see above). Editors of journals should always be consulted. Unfortunately there are scholars who are desperate to get published and who offer papers (with small alterations) to a number of journals at the same time. This practice is very harmful to a researcher's reputation and career. Publishers now offer editors plagiarism software to detect this duplication.

Redundant publication undermines science and can skew the scientific literature. This can have important consequences, for example where meta-analyses inadvertently cover the same results more than once.

Misuse of others' work

This second piece of advice relates to true plagiarism. It is against national law and international conventions to use copyrighted material without permission or acknowledgment. Carefully document any data creation of your research activities and those of your staff and always seek permission to use the work of others.

Transparency

There is growing insistence among journal editors in medical and related disciplines that certain publication policies have to be understood, accepted and followed by authors. In particular there are policies relating to:

1. Conflict of interest – it is important to declare all the funding which made the research possible. Journals differ in the way in which they want funding to be acknowledged. Read the Author Guidelines to find out how the journal you are submitting to wants the declarations to be made.
2. Registering clinical trials – clinical trials should be registered in publicly accessible registries. There is a growing tendency for journals also to insist on any data referred to in the paper to be deposited in an appropriate repository. Not all journals as yet have a firm policy on this point.
3. Respecting confidentiality – protect patients from being recognized. Their permission must also have been obtained.
4. Protecting research subjects, patients and experimental animals. Many journals ask authors to commit to following specific codes of practice and journal editors specifically reserve the right to reject papers if the authors did not abide by such codes.

Wiley-Blackwell, in common with most major publishers, has a strong position on infringements of copyright and failure to observe the conventions mentioned above. There is further information on the obligations of the researcher as author at http://authorservices.wiley.com/bauthor/faqs_copyright.asp

Authorship

Finally, it is important to discuss authorship. This is an area where misunderstanding is possible among researchers. It is very important to agree who will be listed as an author **before** writing the paper.

Many journals follow the guidance provided by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE). This guidance is so important that it is worth quoting:

An "author" is generally considered to be someone who has made substantive intellectual contributions to a published study, and biomedical authorship continues to have important academic, social, and financial implications (1). In the past, readers were rarely provided with information about contributions to studies from persons listed as authors and in Acknowledgments (2). Some journals now request and publish information about the contributions of each person named as having participated in a submitted study, at least for original research... The ICJME has recommended the following criteria for authorship.

Authorship credit should be based on 1) substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; 2) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and 3) final approval of the version to be published. Authors should meet conditions 1, 2, and 3.

1. Davidoff F, for the CSE Task Force on Authorship. Who's the author? Problems with biomedical authorship, and some possible solutions. *Science Editor*. 2000 ;23:111-9.

2. Yank V, Rennie D. Disclosure of researcher contributions: a study of original research articles in *The Lancet*. *Ann Intern Med*. 1999;130:661-70.

More detail can be found at <http://www.icmje.org/#author>. This may vary from the practices of authorship which is customary in the national literature. It is, for example, inappropriate for the Head of Department to be listed as an author unless he or she has made the contributions mentioned above. Note that the **corresponding author** is given a rather responsible role by most journals. It is not a role for a junior author.

Colleagues who have made contributions but not sufficient to qualify for authorship should be acknowledged and they should confirm that they are happy to be acknowledged.

The finishing touches

This section is concerned with those aspects of the paper which may cause particular problems for inexperienced researchers writing in an international journal for the first time. The title, the abstract and key words, the references and the presentation of illustrations are best left until the main part of the paper is written. It is important to take as much care with these elements of the paper as the main text. The title, key words and abstract which will first gain the attention of readers.

Title

It is important that the **title** should be concise and informative. One writer of a guide to writing in another discipline suggests that it should contain "the essential words that will grab readers' attention and let them know what your article is about". Unless the audience for your paper is very specialized, do bear in mind that the title should be comprehensible to other scientists in related fields and, it is often suggested, that it should contain no abbreviations.

Abstract

Writing a clear **abstract** is particularly important. It is the first part of the paper that the editor looks at. There is always a word limit for the abstract. Be careful to adhere to it. The abstract should not contain abbreviations or references. Whatever the format, the abstract should give a succinct summary of the content of the article so that readers are rapidly informed of its content.

Key words

Choosing meaningful **key words** is crucial. The key words must be specific enough for researchers with similar interests to find your article in their searches. Some journals will ask you to select key words from a defined list. The US National Library of Medicine also provides a list of Medical Subject Headings (MESH). See http://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/2009/mesh_browser/MBrowser.html

Reference style

If you have written the main text before making a final decision about the journal to submit it to, the references will need to be organized at the end of the process. It is important that the journal's author guidelines, usually quite detailed, are carefully followed. If a journal editor receives a paper presented using a different referencing system, they may return the paper without review.

Illustrations and tables

Most publishers give detailed guidance for preparing illustrations. For example the graphics resource for authors at <http://authorservices.wiley.com/bauthor/illustration.asp>

- Many journals like hard copy as well as electronic copy where colour needs careful reproduction.
- Tables and graphs should be self-contained and understandable separate from the text.
- Avoid abbreviations which reduce clarity.
- Use appropriate numbers of decimal places.
- Sizing of illustrations is often crucial and, where asked for, information should be given to make sure that the illustrations are presented in the final version in the correct size.
- Illustrations should always illustrate a point in the text.

There is a useful electronic artwork checklist at <http://authorservices.wiley.com/bauthor/eachecklist.asp>.

Submitting your article

The website for most journals will have instructions on how to submit an article. Many will have an online submission site. Most Wiley-Blackwell journals require online submission.

The use of these sites usually involves registering your details. Once you have loaded your article to the site and answered the journal questions, you will receive an article identification number. You can then track the progress of your article through the peer review process by using this identification number.

Be careful to load all the files required by the journal, including all figures and tables and any additional material, such as author declarations or copyright forms. If your submission is incomplete, it may delay the review process.

Peer review

In the end it is the journal editor who accepts or rejects an article. It is the wish of the editor to help the researcher bring science into publication. In the case of almost all journals, the editor seeks the help of at least two independent researchers (research “peers”) who are familiar with the subject area of the paper to be refereed.

Papers can be rejected outright after they have been through the peer review process although many articles are accepted with recommendations for revision. Most referees are careful in their recommendations. They want the journal to accept papers which have good science, but most reviewers will require some alteration or even some further work. Learn from the comments that are made and plan how to approach the issues that have been raised.

Make an ordered list of all the revision points. Are further experiments or analysis needed? Do you just need to improve the clarity of your statements?

Authors may decide that so much new work is required that it is better to withdraw the paper and try another journal. That is one route to eventual publication and may result in an earlier publication date in a journal which is less well regarded or it may not.

Publishing procedures

Researchers will have invested a lot of time in a paper and once it has been accepted, they will naturally want to know what happens next. Most major publishers make it possible for the corresponding author to track the progress of their paper in production by using a special identification number. For Wiley-Blackwell journals see <http://authorservices.wiley.com/bauthor/publications.asp>. Note that most journals will make the paper available online before it is printed and before it even has page numbers. It can be identified for citation by a digital object identifier (DOI). If there are special problems there will be a member of the publishing staff who will be looking after the progress of the article. After publication, some journals will provide the authors with an electronic offprint in PDF form from the journal site. There are usually opportunities to buy printed offprints.

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1. Submitted version
2. Accepted version (accepted and peer-reviewed, but not final version)
3. Final published version

Some publishers will allow authors to host the submitted version (Version 1) on their own personal websites and in their institutional repositories, as long as links are provided to the Final published version on the publisher's website.

Most publishers *do not* allow authors to host the Final published version (Version 3) on their own personal websites.

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