

The target journal: choosing the right place to submit your paper

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After having written a wonderful paper, full of interesting ideas, fascinating data and exhaustive statistics you make a terrible mistake: you send it to the wrong journal. What does *'the wrong journal'* mean? For many it would be a journal with an unsatisfactory *impact factor*.

In my opinion, it is a journal where you will not have any interested readers.

Impact factor is, of course, crucial as it looks good on your CV and can earn you research funds, but citation will only occur, at least in most cases, when you are read with interest by fellow professionals from your own specific field of biomedicine.

Choosing the right place to submit your paper is therefore the first thing you have to do, even before you actually start bashing it out on your computer keyboard.

You might feel that your paper is of fundamental importance to the biomedical community, but it is always a good idea to be realistic and aim for a journal that is within your reach.

What I mean is, if you are convinced of the quality and importance of your paper, and

also feel that it could be of interest to a particular group of readers, then by all means submit it to a high-impact-factor journal.

For example, who wouldn't like to be published in the New England Journal of Medicine? What you have to remember is that the NEJM receives around 4,000 papers a year yet only has the chance to publish around 450 of them.

The selection process is extremely severe, therefore, and your paper really does have to be out-of-the-ordinary and of extreme relevance to the journal's reading population to even begin going through the peer-review process.

Submitting a paper that is even slightly below this level would mean immediate rejection (NEJM normally rejects within one week when they are not interested), so think carefully about where you decide to send your manuscript.

In any case, the destination of your paper is known as *the target journal*.

As I said at the beginning, your target journal does not necessarily need to have a high impact factor, but must guarantee you a reading population.

The next thing to remember is that you can only send your paper to one journal at a time.

Stick to your specialty and even try contacting the *Editor* via e-mail before submit-

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ting your paper to find out whether or not he will consider publishing it, based on its subject matter.

This can save you time, sometimes a lot of time.

When you have chosen the journal be sure to follow its *Instructions to Authors*.

Although more than 500 journals use the **Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals** (<http://www.icmje.org/>), also known as the Vancouver Document, each journal will also have its own set of rules and regulations.

Uniform requirements include:

- *the use of double spacing throughout the text*
- *the necessity to use the standard IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results And Discussion) format*
- *the sequence to be used: title page - abstract - key words and abbreviations - text - acknowledgements - references - tables and figures - legends*

Specific requirements might include:

- *the use of abbreviations*
- *the type of spelling to use (American or British English)*
- *the maximum length of the paper*

So, remember:

- *choose a journal that is relevant to your specialty to guarantee you an audience*
- *choose the target journal realistically as you can only submit your work to one journal at a time: inevitable rejection means delayed publication*
- *get in touch with the editor of your target journal beforehand to see whether your work might be of interest or not*

Finally, if you are convinced that your paper deserves to be published in the *NEJM* then don't worry about the 90% rejection rate and send it to them as your *target journal*. He who dares sometimes wins. There's no harm in trying.

“Questo è il terzo di una serie di articoli sull'argomento.

Potete indirizzare domande (in italiano o in inglese) a michael.john@hsr.it e vedrete le risposte pubblicate su questa rubrica”.

‘This is the third of a series of articles on this topic.

Send any questions to michael.john@hsr.it who will answer them as part of this column.’

Questions from the readers

1 Should numbers be written as words or numbers at the beginning of sentences?

The rule is that in a biomedical manuscript single-digit numbers (1-9) have to be written as words, except when indicating units of measurement, but all other two or more digit numbers should be written as numbers. However, when the sentence begins with a number, whatever the number of digits involved, you should always write it in words.

2 What is the correct spelling for compound numbers in English: with or without a hyphen?

In the literature all compound numbers are hyphenated (e.g. twenty-five patients were enrolled)

3 Is it possible to use the present perfect form (have been) in a biomedical manuscript?

No. At times, the present perfect tense is unavoidable: e.g. when you are speaking of past events where time is not defined. However, a biomedical manuscript reports a procedure, therefore you should ALWAYS use the simple past (and simple tenses in general) throughout even when time is not specified.

4 Is it better to use the active or passive voice in medical English?

Active. Many people mistakenly feel that the passive voice is 'more scientific' than the active voice. Indeed, some journals might specify their preference for the passive and, at times, use of the passive is unavoidable and even necessary. However, the active voice is clearer, simpler and improves the flow of the written text. Avoid the passive. Be active!