

Where to publish

“If you want to make an impact among your colleagues, look especially at the journals that they’re reading and publishing in”
Dr H Goldman, Chief Editor of *Polar Research*

Writing medical articles is highly competitive. Many hours are expended conducting research, and even more hours writing and rewriting the manuscript. Furthermore, countless hours are spent chasing references and performing complex statistics. However, when it comes to understanding the target audience, are authors guilty of not investing as much effort to get maximum impact from the fruits of their labour?

The issue of where to send your manuscript has never been more critical. Most clinicians receive daily invitations via email to submit work to journals that sound legitimate and valid. But are they? Although many journals are reputable, many others are not. This stems partly from the sharp decline in paper journals and the parallel exponential rise in digital journals. With intense pressure to publish, it is hard not to be seduced by online journal marketing ploys. For instance, one researcher used www.randomtextgenerator.com to make up an article and submitted it to 37 open access journals over a period of 2 weeks.¹ At least 17 accepted his work and agreed to publish his article once a \$500 ‘processing fee’ had been paid.

Investing time and effort in ‘where to publish’ is time well spent. It is an exercise in understanding the target audience that will benefit most from the publication. Doing this at an early stage in the publishing process saves valuable time and resources. More importantly, this increases the chances of acceptance.

So what are the tips for checking journal legitimacy and avoiding the trap of predatory journals?

- > Check the journal website and look through a recent issue.
- > Is the journal indexed? Check journal databases like PubMed Central® or the Web of Science. Is there a link on the journal web pages to the spoof www.medline.com?
- > Check the name of the editor-in-chief and associated board members.
- > Check the registered address on Google Maps.
- > Have your colleagues and friends read, reviewed or published in the journal?
- > Is the journal identified in Jeffrey Beall’s list of potential predatory journals?²

Finally, a word about blogs and social media. As the internet revolutionises the whole business of publishing and makes information easy to access, are blogs and self-publishing a way forward for scholarly publications? Such open narratives encourage comments and dialogue with readers, leading to an open and transparent form of peer review. This process itself leads to change, revision and expansion. Is this the future?

In this article, Anna Sharman, who launched Cofactor in 2014, provides readers with some useful insights into where to publish. Anna did a PhD degree in biology and then entered the world of journal publishing. She worked for publishers such as BMJ, Public Library of Science, BioMed Central and Nature Publishing Group. Her latest venture, Cofactor, is a company that offers editing advice and training for scientific researchers to help them publish their work more effectively.

JYOTI SHAH
Commissioning Editor

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So you've got some exciting results from your study and you want to publish them. But where? First, let's think about why you want to publish these results. Is it so that the world can benefit from them? Is it to help you get the next grant, job or promotion? Is it so that others in the field read it and you can hear what they think? Your reasons can affect your choice of publication venue.

You may think that getting your paper into a journal with the highest possible impact factor is your only concern. However, this makes sense only if you think that you will be judged solely on the journal your paper is in rather than the quality and actual impact of the work. Although journal name and impact factor are still used to judge papers (or even researchers), the problems with this approach are becoming more widely known.¹ Within one journal, papers can vary enormously in their quality and citations so it is unfair to judge a single paper by the mean number of citations in a whole journal.

Making sure your paper has the most impact it can have is a laudable goal. Nevertheless, there are also other factors to consider when choosing where to publish.

Speed

If you want fast review and publication, check how fast your target journal is. In biomedical journals, a month in review, and then a month between acceptance and publication are fairly typical so think twice before picking a journal that is routinely slower. Look out for the newer, faster journals that can review within a week or two and publish in days.

Access

Open access papers are not only more widely accessible to doctors and patients in more countries but they are also read and shared more as well as getting more citations.²

Reputation and scope

Make sure you submit to a reputable journal. Be wary of new journals that email you out of the blue calling for submissions; check out their editorial boards, make sure they

are indexed in Web of Science, Scopus[®] and MEDLINE[®]/PubMed (not just Google Scholar), and be extra wary if the publisher is on librarian Jeffrey Beall's list of potential 'predatory' publishers.³

Consider the scope of the journal and how broad a subject area it covers. Do you want your paper to be read just by specialists or also by a wider readership?

Peer review

You may also want to consider the type of peer review used by the journal. A new breed of journals called 'megajournals' has recently emerged that select papers only on the basis of the science being sound, not on their likely impact.⁴ All megajournals are open access and online only. They are named after the enormous size of *PLOS ONE*, the first such journal and now by far the largest journal in the world.

While it might sound like these would become dumping grounds for the most pedestrian papers, it hasn't turned out like that. Although the impact of papers they publish varies, some have had a great impact, with many being well cited. Megajournals have become popular and most publishers now have one. Notable medical megajournals include *BMJ Open*, *CMAJ Open* and *SAGE Open Medicine*.

Journal selection strategy

There are several common strategies for choosing a journal:

1. Go down the 'impact ladder'. Target the highest impact journal first and if rejected, try another journal with a slightly lower impact factor and continue until your paper is accepted somewhere.
2. Go to a specialist and lower impact journal that is more likely to accept your research.
3. Go straight to a megajournal, which is more likely to accept your article.

These strategies all have their merits but the first option could take a long time and the other two risk not having the impact that you might have got from a more prestigious journal. Another strategy has therefore emerged:

Table 1 Publishers that have both selective journals and megajournals

| Publisher | Highly selective medical journal | Megajournal |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Public Library of Science | <i>PLOS Medicine</i> | <i>PLOS ONE</i> |
| BMJ | <i>The BMJ</i> | <i>BMJ Open</i> <i>BMJ Open Gastroenterology</i> <i>Open Heart</i> (and others) |
| Nature Publishing Group | <i>Nature Medicine</i> | <i>Scientific Reports</i> |
| BioMed Central | <i>BMC Medicine</i> | The BMC series (not technically a megajournal but publishing on the same principles as those above) |
| Springer | Various high impact medical journals | <i>SpringerPlus</i> |

4. Try a high impact journal first and if rejected, go straight to a megajournal.

This strategy ensures that the paper is as widely seen as possible, as soon as possible, while giving it a chance in a ‘top’ journal first. I suggest that you consider trying strategy 3 or 4 albeit with a few enhancements.

The first enhancement is to pick journals with an open access option. This could be one of the following:

- > Gold journal: This will make your paper open access immediately. Note that gold journals often charge a publication fee but your institution or grant funder may cover this cost.
- > Green open access through a subscription-only journal: This allows you to post a version of your paper in a repository (eg PubMed Central®), usually after a delay.
- > Hybrid journal: Some journals have an open access option for individual articles even though the rest of their articles are available through subscription only. Again, a publication fee is usually charged.

The second enhancement is to pick your first choice (high rank) journal from a publisher that also publishes a megajournal (Table 1). The reason for this is that if your article is rejected (because the research is not of sufficiently high impact), they will often offer you the opportunity to submit to their megajournal and facilitate the transfer of the reviewer comments, which can make acceptance and publication much quicker. This is called ‘cascading review’. Note that they cannot guarantee that your article will be published in the megajournal; the receiving journal will still make a decision based on the quality of your research (and the reviews).

The third enhancement is to send a presubmission enquiry to the first choice journal (if the editors encourage this). A presubmission enquiry consists of the abstract and a short cover letter asking whether the journal would

consider the paper. If you get a ‘no’, at least you haven’t wasted much time.

Selecting your journal

There are online tools available to help you choose a journal. One academic-run tool is the Journal/Author Name Estimator (JANE).⁵ This selects journals that publish papers similar to the abstract or keywords you enter. Another is my Cofactor Journal Selector, which is particularly useful for selecting a megajournal.⁶ It is complementary to JANE in that it doesn’t use an abstract but instead allows you to search for journals with particular access, speed and peer review features.

Conclusions

Do not assume that the traditional way to choose a journal is still the only or indeed the best way. Factors that may influence your choice of journal are summarised in the appendix. Innovations in journal publishing can give greater opportunities for your research to have a rapid impact.

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Appendix Factors that may influence your choice of journal

| Factor | Comment |
|------------------------|--|
| Impact factor | An indicator of journal quality. Consider this but do not use it as the only factor when selecting a journal for your work. There are other journal metrics including Eigenfactor® and Google Scholar metrics. (This is the subject of the next article in this medical publishing series.) |
| Indexing status | Indicates how well the journal is indexed by citation databases (Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus®). Is it easy for others to find publications in this journal? When did the indexing start? Unindexed journals may be very new or they may have been rejected for indexing by citation databases. |
| Journal reputation | Includes the reputation of the editor, editorial board and publisher. Ask trusted colleagues and do web searches for the journal name. |
| Journal readership | Is this journal used by your mentors/colleagues? Do you read this journal? |
| Type of journal | Scholarly – also called an academic journal (eg the <i>Annals</i>) Trade – written for people who work in a certain field; articles less scholarly; tend to address workplace issues (eg the <i>Bulletin</i>) Magazine – appeals to a wider audience and written by journalists/professional writers; tends not to include references/bibliography |
| Journal aims and scope | Who is the intended audience? Which areas of research are covered? |

WHERE TO PUBLISH

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Journal market share | How widely is the journal read? Is the readership international or limited? Check the journal website. |
| General journal information | How long has the journal been in publication – is it established? What is the frequency of publication? How many articles does the journal publish each year? |
| Language | Do you want to publish in an English language journal? (This may be more widely read than one in another language.) Do you want to publish for a specific audience for whom another language is more suitable? |
| Type of article | Does the journal actually publish your article type? (For example, not all journals publish case reports.) This should be stated on the journal website. If not, contact the editor or the editorial office. |
| Online option | Does the journal publish in print and online or just online? Consider whether it is important to you that your paper is printed or not. How good and stable is the online edition? Can you trust that it will remain available in the future? |
| Acceptance / rejection rate | Indicates how selective the journal is (ie how much competition there is to get papers in). Specialised journals tend to have a lower rejection rate than general journals. The information should be on the journal website. If not, contact the editor or editorial office. |
| Peer review status | Will your article be peer reviewed? This is a system used to select what should be published. It can be single blind, double blind or open review. (This is the subject of a later article in this series.) Do you need to supply the journal with your recommended reviewers? If so, include their email addresses. Some journals also want details of non-preferred reviewers. |
| Speed of review | How long does it take from submission to first decision? |
| Speed of publication | How long does it take for accepted papers to be published online or in print? This tends to be longer if the journal provides thorough copyediting, typesetting and proofreading, and also if the journal publishes infrequently. |
| Deadline | Check if there is a deadline for submitting your article. For example, the final deadline for the Christmas <i>BMJ</i> issue is mid-September. |
| Open access options | Will your article be freely available online? Can you put your accepted (or final published) article in your institutional repository (and is there an embargo period before you can make it available)? Does the journal deposit the final version of your article in any trusted open access site (such as PubMed Central [®]) on your behalf or do you need to do this? |
| Publication fee | Some journals charge for each accepted article, or for all submissions, or for the use of colour images. Check the journal website. |
| Funding policy | Grant funded research articles often need to comply with funding agency policies (eg National Institutes of Health public access policy, Wellcome Trust open access policy, Canadian Institutes of Health Research open access policy). Does the journal support these policies? |
| Author rights | Check the copyright assignment or licence to publish agreement that the journal uses. Who owns the copyright of the article after publication and what can you, the author, do with your article after publication? Also check the rights given to readers, such as whether the article can be reused for commercial or non-commercial purposes. Check the journal website and review its copyright (or author licence) form. |
| Supplementary data | Does the journal publish supplementary data with an article? Many journals make this available on the website. Does the journal require you to deposit any datasets with data repositories? Do it provide any support for this? |
| Word count | Does the journal have strict length limits or does it allow articles of any length? Make sure you can comply with the stated limits or choose a journal with more flexibility. |
| Publicity | How will your article be publicised? Does the journal use social media, blogs and/or press releases? Does it help you promote your own article (eg membership of Kudos or ORCID)? |



Coming up next time

Pippa Smart demystifies the ‘impact factor’. Pippa is a publishing consultant with over 25 years of experience of working in scientific publishing, and now advises publishers and editors on the development of their publishing programmes, journals and editorial strategy. She also advises and trains on copyright and intellectual property issues, which is the subject of a later article in this series. She is Editor-in-Chief of *Learned Publishing*, writes a monthly newsletter for the publishing industry, is a council member of the European Association of Science Editors and is a non-executive director of Practical Action Publishing.