

# Getting your paper published: *An editor's perspective*

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**I will make the entire lecture available to SEAP-IAP**

# Explaining the publication process in 10 easy lessons

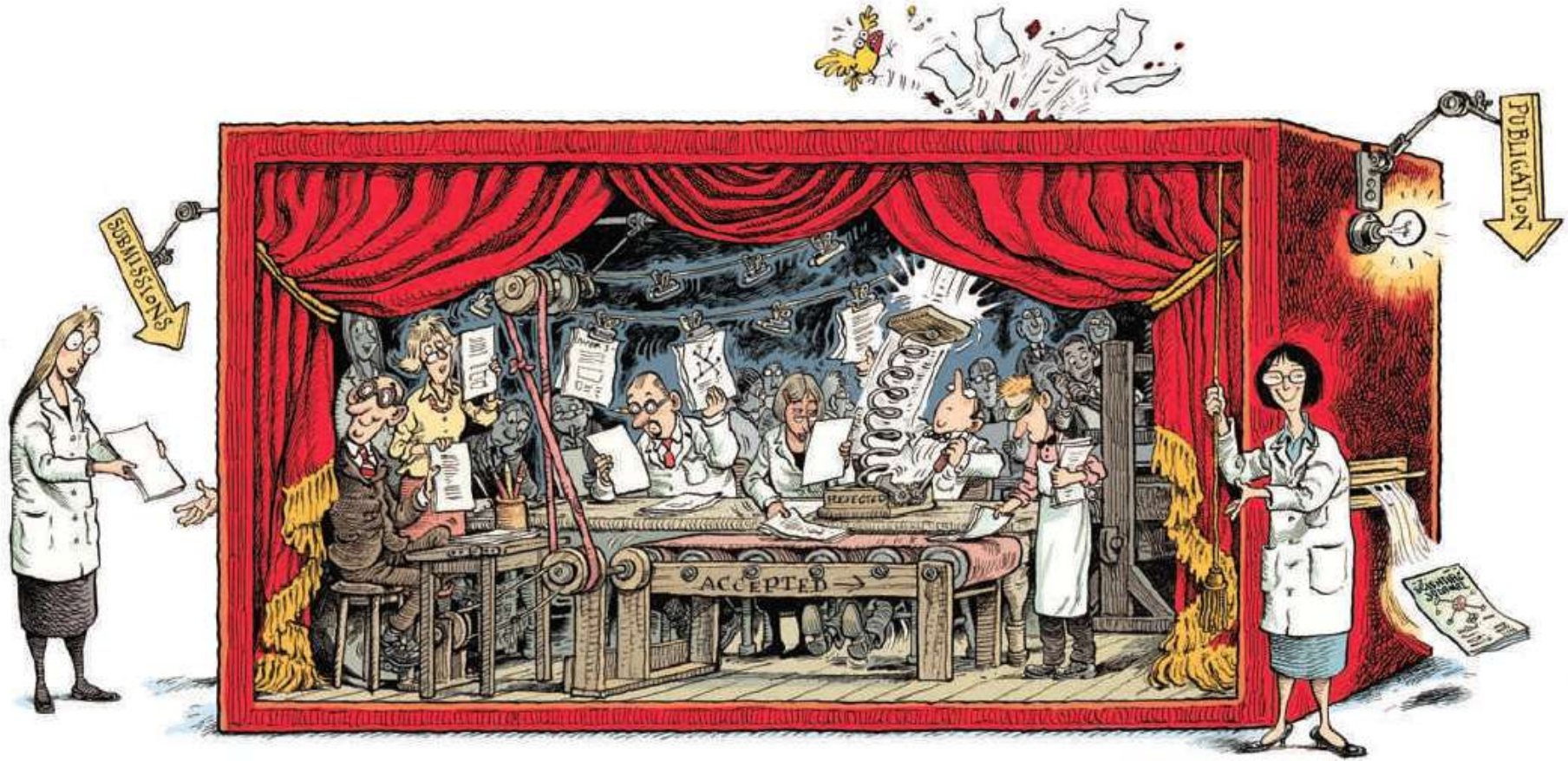


Image from *Nature* 2010;468: 29-31

# Lesson one

Develop your skills by  
reading

# Lesson two

Have something to say

# Have something to say . . .

- The majority of papers are not cited
- Most are probably not read!
- Only when you have a clear message should you think about the publication process
- Your message should be clear
- It should be a **significant** addition to the field

# How do you know if something is a significant contribution to a field?

- See Lesson 1
- Read and know the relevant literature
- Know the background
- Know the issues and controversies
- Understand the field
- Understand the methods used, advantages & disadvantages, values and limitations

# Lesson three

**Understand the structure  
of a scientific article**

# Austin Bradford Hill

*Why did you start?*

Introduction

*What did you do?*

Materials and Methods

*What answer did you get?*

Results

*What does it mean?*

Discussion



# The Introduction

- Sets the scene
- *Concisely* gives the background to the problem
  - Should not be too long
  - Should be in proportion to the rest of the document
- Often useful to end it with a statement of the hypothesis to be tested
- Avoid rehashing all the results and discussion

# Materials and methods

- Should contain enough information for the reader to understand what was done
- Extraneous detail can be placed in Online Supplementary information
- Placing the entire M&M section in the Online Supplementary section is unwise!

# Results

- Clear statement of the core findings in a logical sequence
- Should not contain interpretation or inference
- Display items should not replicate information in the text
- Emphasise important controls
- Some results may be placed in online Supporting Information: *but they should not be core to the arguments . . .*

# Discussion

- The data should be placed in the broad context of the relevant prior publications
- Stay focused!
- Do not speculate beyond the data
- A balanced paper will consider the field in the round
- “Why might we be wrong” is an important element of a paper

# Lesson four

**Understand the simple  
rules of writing**

# Keep it simple . . .

- Never use a long word if a short one will do
- If it is possible to cut a word out, then cut it out
- Keep sentence constructions simple
- Avoid one sentence paragraphs
- Use simple punctuation
- Worry about spelling and grammar!
- Get other people to read the manuscript

## Two useful tests

- The '*Tell it to a friend*' test
- The '*Read it out loud*' test

# A good paper is like a good novel

- Immediately captures your interest
- It tells a story
- The story is told with enthusiasm and excitement
- It doesn't contain unnecessary information that detracts from the story line
- Each sentence reads easily and flows smoothly into the next



# Writing with a reviewer's perspective

- This is not about you – it's about them;
  - write for them, not for you
- Be respectful of the reviewers time
  - never make them work harder than necessary
- If they have to work too hard to find the message, it will be missed every time
- Use a writing style that makes it easy to understand and minimizes ambiguity

A good paper is easy to read,  
but is very difficult to write . . .

Writing Law one:

*The Law of Conservation of Effort*

- A fixed amount of effort is required to adequately write and review a paper.
- The less the author puts in, the more the reviewer has to put in.

Writing law two (a corollary of law one)

*Law of Diminishing Returns*

- “The harder I have to work at reviewing your paper, the less I will like it”

# Some thoughts on concise writing

“Brevity in writing is the best insurance for its perusal”

– Rudolf Virchow

“I didn’t have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead”

– Samuel Langhorne Clemens (Mark Twain)

– *However others have also claimed this line!*

# Lesson five

**How to decide where to  
send your paper**

# Journal rankings

- Impact factor
  - ISI Thompson Scientific
    - Eugene Garfield
  - A measure of how many times papers are cited by other authors
- Other bibliometric measures
  - Eigen factor
  - Article influence scores
  - Connection values

# Other problems

- Some work is influential and important but not cited
- Some fields are small . . . Work can be important but not cited by many
- Some fields are large so can have lots of cites even if not that important
- Games are played!

# How to choose where to publish?

- As 'good' a journal as possible
  - The top quartile of a subject grouping
- Higher the journal ranking the harder it will be
  - Multiple rejections . .
  - Papers slide down the list . . .
  - Reviewers comments might be helpful - but time lost
- Not just IF
  - *other quality issues, cost & access issues*
- Think of your target audience

# How to choose where to publish?

- Look at the journals!
- Do they publish the kind of paper you are writing?
- Do they 'like' the general topic and area?
- What do they say in their Instructions to authors about this issue?
- How fast (or slow) are they?
- ***Be realistic . . . .***



# Lesson six

**The instructions to  
authors and the need to  
worry about detail**

Instructions to authors

**READ &**

**FOLLOW**

**THEM**

Instructions to authors

**GET THE  
DETAILS  
RIGHT**

# Instructions to authors

- Failure to attend to detail in the context of the Instructions to authors has consequences . . .
- Delay . . .
- Irritation . . . *for all involved* . . .

# Instructions to authors

- Failure to attend to detail in the context of the Instructions to authors has consequences . . .
- Delay . . .
- Irritation . . . *for all involved* . . .
- **It sends a message!**
  - *“if you fail to attend to detail in this, is there failure of attention to detail in your research?”*

# Lesson seven

**Understanding the steps  
after manuscript submission**

# The Steps in the Process

- Submission
- Editorial consideration
- Peer Review
- Editorial Decision
- Resubmission
- Peer Review
- Editorial Decision
  
- Acceptance . . . . .

# The Steps in the Process

- Acceptance . . . . .

*. . . a lot still has to happen . . .*

- Editing
- Copy editing
- Type setting
- Proofs
- Publication



# Editorial response to corresponding author

- Immediate acceptance is vanishingly rare
- The email letter usually says either
  - Your paper may be acceptable if you revise it, or
  - Your paper is unacceptable but it may be accepted if you re-submit after revision
  - Your paper is not acceptable
- If asked to revise, there might be a time limit on resubmission
- If you resubmit, the paper will probably be sent for review again. You may be asked to carry out further revision

## When you re-submit

- Include a covering letter indicating how you have responded to each point raised by the editor and reviewers
  - repeat in your letter each of the reviewers' comments in italics and follow each with your own response.
- Any changes you have incorporated into the revised manuscript should be highlighted by using a typeface other than black or use track changes

## When you re-submit

**Even if you judge the reviewer to be incompetent or not to have understood your paper, use temperate language!**

- **Do not *ever* get angry!!**

# Lesson eight

**Understand what  
editors like**

# What are Journal Editors looking for?

- Novel or original findings
- Credibility
- Clarity of data and conclusions
- Interesting to the international community
- Brevity

## Editors like...

- Good 'fit' with the Journal scope
- Clear research questions
- Messages that matter
- Brevity and clarity in writing
- Good abstract
- Good grammar and spelling
- Clear presentation of methods and results

# Lesson nine

**Be aware of what editors  
do not like!**

## Editors don't like...

- Poor fit with scope
- Unoriginal research
- Very long papers
- Incorrect or flawed research methods
- Unrepresentative samples
- Non-randomised interventions
- Poor controls
- Poor images
- Poor presentation



# Lesson ten

Do understand the review process

and

do not give up

# How do Journals make decisions?

- Fit with the scope of the Journal
- Originality
- Importance
- Substantial contribution to the field
- Methods correct
- Ethically sound
- Interesting to readers
- *There is huge competition . . . . .*
- *Many good papers get rejected*

# Peer review: *flawed . . .* *but the best we have*

- What is the principle role of an Editor?
  - Ensuring the quality of the published record
- Much debate about Peer Review . . .
  - The available evidence says ‘it works reasonably well’
- It is designed to improve papers . . . .

# Engage with reviewers' comments constructively

- Don't whinge !
- Use the comments to improve your paper.
- Not all suggestions **have** to be taken on board, but you should think about and respond to all the points that are brought up:
  - seek clarification if unsure
- If you think a reviewer is being particularly unfair, take it up with the editor (carefully!).

# Key points - 1

- Have something to say
- Chose carefully where to say it
- Say it well
- Read the 'Instructions to authors'
- Follow the 'Instructions to authors'
- Respond to reviewers comments positively and politely
- Do not give up - but be realistic

## Key points - 2

- Know the literature
- Read the literature
- Be guided by the literature
- Understand the process
- Learn to write . . . .
- How?
  - By reading and writing

# Summary: The ten lessons

Lesson 1. Develop your skills by reading

Lesson 2. Have something to say

Lesson 3. Know the structure of a scientific article

Lesson 4. Understand the simple rules of writing

Lesson 5. Where to send your paper

Lesson 6. Instructions to authors & the need to worry about detail

Lesson 7. Steps after manuscript submission

Lesson 8. Know what editors like

Lesson 9. Know what editors do not like!

Lesson 10: Do understand the peer review process & do not give up

review

## **Getting Your Paper Published: An Editor's Perspective**

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see also

**What does an Editor look for?** Dr Ed Gale, *Diabetologia*

<http://www.diabetologia-journal.org/eicadvice.html>

**Please come to the Writing Workshop at**

**ESP 2013 Lisbon**

**@ 14-15 on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> September**