Navigating the submission maze: what do publishers look for in a good paper?

Niall Boyce
What are we looking for?

Two questions:

• Is it a good research question?

• Is it answered in the best possible way?
  • Study type
  • Execution
Prepare the ground

• Look up the reporting guidelines: CONSORT, STROBE, etc.
  • See https://www.equator-network.org/

• Pre-register
  • A MUST for trials
  • Desirable for everything else

• Get good statistical advice

• Sort out authorship
Authorship

• Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND

• Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND

• Final approval of the version to be published; AND

• Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Choosing a journal

A targeted approach is best

- Look for
  - Interest expressed in editorials
  - Commissions
  - Appearance in your own reference list
  - Turnaround time
  - Funder requirements
Submission

• Read submission guidelines and get important things right (eg, RiC panel or similar)

• Concise covering letter that explains why this is an important question, and why this journal

• Beware of cut and paste

• Consider preprint options
Preprints with The Lancet

Preprints with The Lancet is part of SSRN's First Look, a place where journals identify content of interest prior to publication. Authors have opted in at submission to The Lancet family of journals to post their preprints on Preprints with The Lancet. The usual SSRN checks and a Lancet-specific check for appropriateness and transparency have been applied. Preprints available here are not Lancet publications or necessarily under review with a Lancet journal. These preprints are early stage research papers that have not been peer-reviewed. The findings should not be used for clinical or public health decision making and should not be presented to a lay audience without highlighting that they are preliminary and have not been peer-reviewed. For more information on this collaboration, see the comments published in The Lancet about the trial period, and our decision to make this a permanent offering, or visit The Lancet's FAQ page, and for any feedback please contact preprints@lancet.com.

DATE POSTED (click to see all Preprints with The Lancet papers sorted by DOWNLOADS)
Dealing with rejection

• Keep your temper

• If you are unclear as to the reason for the reject, ask the editor

• If you think the decision was wrong (e.g., misinterpretation by reviewer), see if you can appeal

• Appeals usually need to do very well at re-review
Dealing with revision

• If you are asked to revise, this is generally a good sign

• Make sure you address all reviewer points

• If points are unclear or contradictory, ask editor

• Keep a tracked changes version of your paper

• Stay focused and respond promptly and comprehensively
Post-publication

- Ask editor and your internal press team if you think a press release is warranted. Consider Science Media Centre.

- Figure out potential pitfalls, misunderstandings, and criticisms.

- Prepare social media strategy in advance.

- Avoid hype and keep your temper.

- Prepare for journal correspondence.
Summary

• Start with a focused question, *then* identify the best method

• Make publication planning part of your strategy from the start

• Target journal that is the best fit, not just impact factor

• Move swiftly when you can, but prepare for the long haul

• Be ready for public outreach, but remember that good work speaks for itself