

Getting your paper published

Sharing our knowledge is vitally important for developing and promoting the contribution that allied health professionals make to patient care.

We need to publish the results of **research** and **service evaluation**, as well as present ideas for discussion and debate, so that these can be used by clinicians, managers, policy makers, researchers and service users to improve practice.

This leaflet provides a handy 'Top 10 Tips' to help you to get your paper written and published efficiently and successfully.

Tip 1 - The key message

Write down the main message of your paper. Have a go at completing the following sentence: "The most important – and new – thing I want people to know or understand as a result of reading this paper is..." Be clear and specific, and do not try to cram too many separate ideas into one paper.

Tip 2 - The audience

Who is your audience? Is it clinical AHP colleagues in a similar field? Or members of the wider multidisciplinary team – the doctors and nurses who work with your patients? Or the research community? What journals do people in your target audience read? Thinking about this will help to shape your key message and to identify the most appropriate journal.

Tip 3 - The journal

Decide on your journal at an early stage, before you start writing your paper. Make a short-list and have a look at the titles and abstracts of papers that these journals have published in the past year or so. Read the articles in your topic and methodological area – does your work fit with the journal's content and readership?

Tip 4 – Author guidelines

Before you start writing, read the journal's author guidelines carefully. These will tell what categories of paper the journal accepts ('original research', 'practice report' etc.), as well as how the paper needs to be structured for that journal – for example, the word length, section headings and the referencing requirements. 'Not following the author guidelines' is a common reason for rejection.

Tip 5 - Your co-authors

People who have made a significant contribution to the work being reported and who have been actively involved in writing the article will qualify as co-authors. Agree co-authorship (and the order in which authors are listed) at the outset. It is helpful to discuss each individual's input and timescales for review and revision. Co-authors are a valuable source of ideas and encouragement.

Tip 6 - Planning and structure

Pay attention to structure, coherence, grammar, spelling and punctuation. They matter! Craft each paragraph using 'topic sentences' to signpost what is being discussed. Make sure that each new idea clearly follows from the previous one. Use similar papers from your target journal to guide your structure. Proof read your work, and ask others to proof read it – reading it out loud can help you spot errors.

Tip 7 - Title and abstract

Repeating words and phrases that describe your topic and methods across your title, abstract and key words will optimise search results, making your paper easier to find. The abstract should stand alone and grab attention: it might be the deciding factor in whether people read further. It should include purpose (why?), methods (how?), results (what you found) and conclusions (and so what?).

Tip 8 - Peer review

If you are invited to revise and resubmit your paper, pay close attention to the peer reviewers' comments and respond carefully and in detail. Write a covering letter that addresses each point the reviewers have made, and show how you have responded to their comments. Be courteous – even if you disagree! Most feedback will help you to improve your paper.

Tip 9 - Write, write, write

Get into the habit of writing. Decide when and for how long you will write and set yourself short-term goals – “I will write 500 words in the next three hours” rather than “I plan to have this written by the end of next month.” Use your co-authors to set and meet deadlines by agreeing when you will send drafts for review.

Tip 10 – Persistence and resilience

Don't give up. Good writing takes time and much of it is a solitary activity. Identify the support you need to be able to write – from your manager, your colleagues, your family and friends – and negotiate this. Keep going – the opportunity to share new ideas in a paper with your name on it makes it worth it!

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