

Writing a better research paper: Advice for young authors



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Published manuscripts serve to expand our knowledge of skin disease with the goal of improved management and patient outcomes. When busy clinicians invest precious time reading a journal, they should feel their time was well-spent and the investment will have a positive impact on the care they deliver. Recommendations for authors who want to maximize the impact of their writing are summarized below.

- The selection of key words is the most important step in the submission process. This is how most clinicians and investigators will find your work, and the key words should be chosen carefully to allow ready retrieval of the study through PubMed and other search engines. Choose as many key words as necessary to ensure that literature searches capture your article. Make sure that every key term that appears in the title is chosen as a key word.
- An effective capsule summary should not duplicate the abstract. It should succinctly describe what was already known about the subject and how the practice of dermatology should change as a result of reading the article.
- A well-written structured abstract should convey the question the authors attempted to answer, essential elements of the study design, results, limitations, and conclusions drawn from the data.
- The type of study should be cited in the title. This is especially important for randomized controlled trials so they are appropriately captured in evidence-based reviews.
- The title should accurately reflect the outcome of the study, including efficacy or the lack thereof.
- Information should be presented in graphic and tabular form whenever possible to make it easy to understand. Graphs should be appropriate to scale and not exaggerate differences.
- Graphic or pictorial abstracts are becoming more common to convey the essential elements of a study in a single image.
- Information should be presented well, and only once—never repeated in subsequent sections of the manuscript.
- Include a statement of institutional review board approval and specify the study design including prospective or retrospective, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and statistical methods.
- Figure legends should highlight important teaching points and should include the diagnosis so images are searchable. They should clearly indicate if the image was taken before or after therapy.
- Remember the 3 cardinal rules of medical publishing: be concise, be concise, be concise. For a busy clinician investing precious time in a journal, brevity is next to godliness.

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