

Research 101: Submitting a Manuscript

COMMON MISTAKES THAT CAN KEEP YOU FROM GETTING PUBLISHED.

Editorial Staff

If you've submitted research papers to biomedical journals but have never been published, you might need to take a closer look not at the research itself, but rather the manuscript(s) you've submitted for publication. So say the editors of the *Journal of Manipulative & Physiological Therapeutics*, Drs. Claire Johnson and Bart Green, who teach manuscript submission 101 in the [January 2009 issue of JMPT](#).

In their article, "Submitting Manuscripts to Biomedical Journals: Common Errors and Helpful Solutions," Drs. Johnson and Green provide a comprehensive review of the submission process, providing tips on what to do (and what not to do) if you're looking to get your research findings published. According to the authors, ensuring your manuscript receives fair, adequate review is dependent on proper attention to a variety of details, from how the paper is written/organized to the submission process to communications with the journal editor. Here are some of the most common avoidable errors that may hurt your chances of being published:

Format and Writing: Common errors include making statements of fact without reference support; including incomplete author information; duplicating, plagiarizing or self-plagiarizing content previously published in another document; and omitting information (figures, tables, etc.). Believe it or not, relatively simple things such as grammar, spelling and formatting (e.g., column alignment, page breaks) can be overlooked. These oversights may decrease your chances of being published significantly.

Organization: A research paper must include specific sections, and those sections must be organized and formatted correctly. For example, the *introduction* must include background information and foundational research, and a specific description of the purpose/hypothesis being tested. It should be concise, detailed and include relevant information only. The *methods* section should utilize appropriate statistical methods, following current reporting or quality guidelines for study designs, and provide details of ethical approval/consent when required. Common errors when stating *results* include inappropriate or incomplete reporting of data/statistics, redundant reporting of findings in text, tables and figures, and inclusion of technical jargon focusing on statistical function, rather than results.

Submission Process: There are various steps to the submission process that can make or break a manuscript submitted for consideration. When writing a *cover letter*, make sure you disclose all conflicts of interest for all authors, and if any data has been previously published or presented elsewhere. Provide all required items stated in the journal's author instructions. When *submitting* the manuscript, always following the journal's submission instructions, including submitting all required materials, and never submit a revision as if it were a new paper. If the journal reviewers request *edits/revisions*, address all of the reviewer comments/requests by the stated due date, and never ignore editor requests for materials or revisions. And when *proofing* the manuscript for publication (following acceptance), address all queries from the editor/publisher, return all responses/corrections in a timely manner, and ensure you do not insert new errors or change corrected material into errors.

Drs. Johnson and Green emphasize that relatively minor errors or oversights can dramatically impact how journal reviewers will evaluate your manuscript - or if they will even review it at all:

"A manuscript submitted to a biomedical journal that is in compliance with the journal's instructions for authors is more likely to move smoothly through the submissions process than one that is rife with errors. In our roles as journal editors, we have observed mistakes made by authors that heighten the barriers to acceptance. Avoiding common errors could make the submission process easier for authors, regardless of the journal to which they submit their manuscript."

To purchase the full text of this *JMPT* paper, visit www.mosby.com/jmpt. The paper covers various other submission elements not addressed above, including writing an abstract, choosing keywords, formatting figures/tables, summarizing your study (conclusion section), and listing acknowledgements and references.

FEBRUARY 2009