TOP TEN LIST

TEN BEST WAYS TO PREPARE AND SUBMIT A SCIENTIFIC MANUSCRIPT BADLY

With apologies to David Letterman, and thanks for editorial assistance to Elizabeth Kirby and for their insights to the following Internet contributors:

Charlotte Druschel, New York Congenital Malformations Registry
Judi Vessey, Boston College
Nancy Green, March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation
Michele Kiely, NICHD, co-editor, Paediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology
Erik Olsen, NICHD
Germaine Buck Louis, NICHD
Kevin Fiscella, University of Rochester
Tom Sadler, former editor, Teratology
Greg Alexander, University of Alabama-Birmingham, co-editor, MCH Journal

R.S. Kirby, May 2005

Top Ten List: Ten Best Ways to Prepare and Submit a Scientific Manuscript Badly

Number 10

There's Gold in Them Thar' Hills!

It's important to publish as much of your thesis or dissertation, as quickly as possible. But how?

The best way is to mail several unbound copies to the editor of the most prestigious journal in your field – and ask him or her to 'edit' whatever is worthwhile into a publishable manuscript.

After all, that's what editors do – they edit!

Number 9

One Size Fits All

All journal manuscript preparation and submission requirements are exactly the same.

Corollary: all journals are interested in the same types of material, regardless of their names or the topics of previously published contents.

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Number 8

When Narcissus Looks for the Best, What Does He See?

All papers submitted to the most prestigious journals have an equal chance of acceptance. Science, Nature, JAMA and New England Journal of Medicine are especially interested in:

Number 8
(continued)

- A state-based study of trends in well-documented public health measures
- Replication studies that provide results concurring with previous findings
- Hospital-based clinical case series with no comparison group or statistical analysis
- Research of any kind involving RCCTs or genetic epidemiology

Number 7

Living in a Sound Byte World

Avoid providing irrelevant details in your manuscript. No one is interested in details concerning data sources, sample size and power calculations, operational definitions for key variables, or the rationale for selecting the statistical methods you used.

If these are important to anyone, they can always contact you by email.

Number 6

Every Picture Tells a Story, Don't It

Include as many tables and graphics as possible, taking care to follow the suggestions in the Top Ten List on 'Bad Data Graphics'. Some helpful hints:

- **Create graphics in color with non-white background, so that no one can differentiate trends even with a legend**
- **Use 3-D wherever possible**
- **Graph everything, even when there are only two or three pieces of data**
- **Make sure tables and graphs cannot be understood unless they are part of the published paper.**

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Number 5

Persistence is Futile

If you send your manuscript to one journal and it is rejected for whatever reasons, give up. No other journal will want to publish it either.

If you do have the temerity to resubmit your work after a few years have passed, you needn't update the references or discussion. No new studies on your topic will have been done since you did yours.

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Number 4

Who's on First, What's on Second?

No one has ever done research in your field prior to your arrival on the international scene. In fact, it is so unlikely that anyone has ever had a similar research hypothesis that you can state with confidence:

"To our knowledge, our study is the first to examine the hot tub usage patterns of left-handed undulates transitioning from northern to southern hemispheric residence"

After all, if you can't find any other literature in a 45 second PubMed search using only a single primary MESH keyword, it's never been done!

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Number 3

How Thick is an Elephant's Hide?

Peer reviewer comments and criticisms are just helpful suggestions. Most peer reviewers are more interested in seeing their own work published than in advancing the science of the field.

So, feel free to ignore any comments you don't like – and if one journal rejects your manuscript, just submit it, as is, to another journal. Chances are good that the second journal will send it to the same peer reviewer, but it's well known that peer reviewers have very poor memories.

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Number 2

Which is Bigger – the Id, the Ego, or the Superego?

Pad your manuscript with citations to your own work, especially items "in press". This will help to ensure the objectivity of the 'blinded' peer review process, and should materially benefit your personal Science Citation Index.

After all, no one knows your subject better than you.

Number 1

It's the Same Boat, Brother . . .

The editor is your enemy. Editors make big bucks 'volunteering' their time and campus resources to provide a thankless public service. Because of their status, they are pariahs in their scientific communities.

If you don't like the editor's decision, send him/her a withering email, or stage a bitter confrontation next time you encounter the editor in a public place.