

# PUBLISHING RESEARCH FINDINGS



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*“Finally seeing your work published is one of the most rewarding activities associated with a research project—publication is a gratifying measure that the time and effort you have dedicated to the project has not been for naught and elevates your project to a level that has the possibility to impact clinical practice.”*

—Former PGY2 Ambulatory Care Resident

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Select a target journal for submitting a manuscript.
- Identify authorship criteria for a manuscript.
- Draft a manuscript for submission to a peer-reviewed scientific journal.
- Select keywords to accompany a manuscript submission.

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## INTRODUCTION

Publishing your manuscript represents the culmination of your work. This chapter presents an overview of the manuscript writing and submission process. This chapter seeks to demystify this process by providing key steps to improve your likelihood of success. Critical to the process, we begin with identifying how to select a journal to ensure that your manuscript is matched to an appropriate journal. Guidance on other topics that are important to enhance visibility of your work, such as selecting keywords, as well as issues that can be difficult to navigate, specifically authorship criteria, are reviewed in detail. Lastly, the component parts of an original research paper are reviewed.

## MANUSCRIPT PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION

### Selecting a Journal for Submission

Prior to writing the manuscript, you should select the target journal for manuscript submission so you can adhere to their instructions for authors and submission requirements. First, select a peer-reviewed journal that aligns well with the topic of your research. When selecting a journal, review the journal's aims and scope to identify if your topic is a good fit (e.g., will reach the most relevant audience). Review a few abstracts across different issues to see if your content is related to the types of articles the journal publishes. Look at articles of the same article type you plan to submit and consider how similar or different they are. A mismatch between the manuscript and the journal's scope is a primary reason that manuscripts are rejected. Also, consider the *format* for the publication. Format options vary from journal to journal, and they can include original research articles, research notes, case reports, or case studies. The majority of research articles are published as an original research article, although you may opt to submit your project as a shorter publication such as a "research note." Selecting the most appropriate article format can influence an editor's decision to publish your research.

Next, identify your target audience. Consider the readership who will value the study and its findings. Moreover, journal metrics—most commonly the *impact factor* (a metric that measures how frequently articles from a journal are cited by other authors)—may also affect your decision to select a given journal. The relevance of journal metrics will depend on your organization, career goals, and how robust your study and results are. Review who sits on the editorial board and talk with other mentors to learn about the readership of the journal. If possible, find out what the review process is like from other authors who have submitted manuscripts to a given journal. Think carefully about submitting your research to journals with reputations for excessive review turnaround times or overly critical reviewers. You may want to prioritize a few options as you go through the process of selecting your target journal. If your article is initially rejected, you will already have other options in mind that your co-authors agree upon, which can speed up the turnaround time to resubmit your manuscript, if needed. If you have presented your work at a conference, some organizations have first refusal rights. This means that you have to submit your manuscript to their journal first. If they reject your manuscript, you are free to resubmit to any journal.

A recent consideration for selecting a journal is whether the content is traditional versus open access (also known as open source). *Traditional journals* charge subscribers (e.g., libraries) fees to access their materials. In contrast, *open access journals* provide free content to the public online, but charge authors publication fees. You, as the researcher, will incur costs associated with open access journals; however, open access journals increase visibility to readers by not limiting access to only journal subscribers or academics with library access. Traditional journals are often viewed as more highly respected due to their rigorous review process and standards for publication, although perceptions are changing.

The resources listed in **Table 11-1** can be used to help you identify a journal. You may also need to submit a cover letter with your manuscript. The cover letter outlines the merits of your work and provides the editor with a brief overview of your manuscript. The cover letter should also describe why your manuscript should be of interest to the journal and its readership (**Exhibit 11-1**).



### KEY TIPS for Selecting a Journal

- Your article should match the scope and aims of the journal.
- The journal should accept the article format that you intend to submit (e.g., review article, original research).