

# Ten Steps to Writing an Effective Case Report



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A Case Report is a detailed report of the symptoms, signs, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up of a patient. Case Reports may contain a demographic profile of the patient but usually describes an unusual or novel occurrence.

- An unexpected association between diseases or symptoms
- An unexpected event in the course of observing or treating a patient
- Findings that shed new light on the possible pathogenesis of a disease or an adverse effect
- Unique or rare features of a disease
- Unique therapeutic approaches

- A positional or quantitative variation of the anatomical structures

Journal selection should be based on the type of your Case Report.

Example,

Unusual injury presentations are more likely to be accepted in journals such as Trauma, rather than more mainstream, general-interest journals such as *British Medical Journal*; this does not publish Case Reports but only Lesson of the Week.

Another important point with respect to journal selection is that it is extremely important to follow the basic format required by the journal. Your Case Report may be rejected because it does not conform to the standard format, no matter how good the content is. Therefore, formatting such as margins, spacing, figure numbering, and style of references (Vancouver, Harvard, etc.), all are important aspects.

Example,

A suggested outline of sections for a Case Report is listed below.

- *Abstract/Summary*
  
- *Case Presentation*
  - *Patient's Examination/Identification*
  
  - *Medical History*
  
  - *Analysis of test results*
  
  - *Appropriate plan and analysis*

- *Differential Diagnosis*
  - *Support for conditions considered*
  - *Support for additional investigations*
- *Pathophysiology*
- *Treatment/Patient Management*
- *Discussion*
  - *Etiology*
  - *Epidemiology*
  - *Prevalence*

- *Complications*

- *Prognosis*

- *Ethical*

*Dilemmas (if any)*

- *Conclusion*

So, how do you begin?

A Case Report is a way of communicating information to the medical world about a rare or unreported feature, condition, complication, or intervention by publishing it in a medical journal. Decide whether your Case Report is publishable. This can be decided based on the following criteria:

Does your Case Report,

- Describe rare, perplexing, or novel diagnostic features of a diseased state?
- Report therapeutic challenges, controversies, or dilemmas?
- Describe a new surgical procedure?
- Report how a drug can enhance a surgical procedure?
- Report new medical errors or medication errors?
- Describe rare or novel adverse drug reactions?
- Describe a therapeutic failure or a lack of therapeutic efficacy?



You should also ensure that you adhere to the following points:

- Do an extensive literature search—PubMed, Medline, Ovid, Embase, and even search engines like Google will give you a vast amount of information related to your topic.
- Narrow down the search to your actual topic
- If this comes up with very few search results, it means (assuming your search method is correct) that the case is rare, and the report is therefore more likely to be published.

- Use the patient's notes to record the details of all the events in the patient's care—that is, history, examination findings, results of investigations with dates, and operative findings, if any, together with the details of the actual interventions and follow-ups.
- Use copies—do not take the originals of radiographs, photographs, etc. (they are the patient's only records for future reference).
- Verify all patient data such as history and dates of examination with the patient again and make sure you have got the facts right.

Summarize the information that you have gathered:

- A brief history and important and relevant positive and negative findings with details of investigations
- Treatment
- The condition of the patient after treatment

Example,

A common form of presentation is to divide the content into a textbook style of presentation without the headings—history, examination, investigation, treatment, and outcome in separate paragraphs.

Follow the rule of brevity!

State the issue and its significance. You can also cite some articles that have already referred to this problem.

## **Tip 1!**

**Do not forget to mention how rare the condition is.**

Since a Case Report is usually about a single or a group of patients, this section plays a very important role. Patient consent is a very crucial point and should compulsorily be mentioned. Obtaining consent from the patient is not only a good medical practice but also mandatory for most journals, such as BMJ (which has its own consent form on the journal's website).

The case is usually described in chronological order.

## **Tip 2!**

**Provide the results of the relevant examinations and laboratory tests, usually only those with positive results.**

These sections are written differently from those in other types of research articles.

Proceed point-by-point when writing the Discussion:

- First, explain the objective of reporting the case.
- Describe what others have written before about the condition or any related feature.

## Note!

**Be generous in quoting literature but do not include unnecessary details.**

- The most important point to note is that your reviewers want proof of the rarity of the condition and the scientific explanations for it.

Example,

Answer these questions in the Discussion section:

- Describe the cause of the condition or why a particular procedure or feature was chosen.
- How did it influence the outcome?

- How does it differ from usual and what are your recommendations?
  
- Are there any lessons to be learnt?

The Conclusion is not always necessary in a Case Report, but if it is, summarize in a few sentences.



The reference section is extremely important. Adhere to the style (Vancouver, Harvard, etc.) that your journal requires. Also, as mentioned previously, the formatting will affect the acceptance of your report to a great extent. Therefore, take care of all formatting instructions related to margins, spacing, figure numbering, and the type of English.

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