

Selecting the Right Journal



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According to an estimate, more than 70,000 research journals exist, growing at a rate of about 3.5% per year. More than 1,000 new journals were launched in 2014 alone. These numbers can make journal selection a daunting task. However, you can get help from various online tools to narrow down your search for the appropriate journal.

Find the Right Journal

One of the first steps in choosing the right journal is to know its scope and aim. This information is usually available on the journal's website. It will also help you find the kind of articles the journal is interested in publishing. You can also read some of the articles the journal has published. Is there any similarity between those articles and your own manuscript? If not, it might not be the right journal for you.

You can also get information from your literature review. Look for journals, wherein the papers you cited have been published. It is likely that those journals may also be interested in your work. This approach can be helpful when journal's scope does not give you enough details to decide whether that journal would be the right fit for your manuscript.

You should also consider how long a journal takes to publish articles. With some journals, there can be a considerable delay between submission and publication. Your choice of the journal can also depend on the type of the audience you want to reach out. Based on your requirements, you may also look for a journal with broad scope, wider target audience and an online presence.

Selecting the Right Journal

Chew (1991) surveyed manuscripts rejected by the *American Journal of Roentgenology* (AJR) to investigate whether, when, and where they had been published. The results showed that 82% of the major papers and 70% of the case reports that were submitted to AJR during the study period were eventually published elsewhere (Radiology, Clinical Nuclear Medicine, etc.) or even in AJR within 18 months of being rejected. This directly tells us that selecting the right journal is a very important factor in the publication process.

We know that publication of research in peer-reviewed journals marks the last step in the scientific process. Through the process of peer review and publication, a research study is validated, disseminated, credited, and archived. Once published, a paper and the information it contains can be indexed, retrieved, cited, and incorporated into the knowledge base. When a paper is rejected, this process comes to a halt. Unless the paper can be accepted for publication elsewhere, the work will be lost.



To choose a “suitable” journal is to select one that will maximize your chances of publication.

Covered in this ebook are six easy steps to selecting the right journal.

Step 1: List the Field of Study and Related Fields

The first step in selecting a journal is to consider as many fields of study that pertain to the planned article.

Sample list for a Physics Researcher

Research Topic: Fabrication of carbon nanotubes

Subject 1: Nanotechnology

Subject 2: Materials Science

Subject 3: Applied Physics

Subject 4: Physical Chemistry

Subject 5: Biomedical Engineering

Strive to create a list of at least five fields of study that overlap with the proposed manuscript’s content. Think broadly at this stage; the journal choices can be narrowed at a later time.

Step 2: Find Journals Related to Those Fields

Once you have listed the fields of study that overlap with the manuscript's content, consult online resources, a university librarian, and/or professionals in the fields and determine journals that are published in each field. The reference list from your thesis may also provide clues to journals that publish in these topic areas. At this point you should also consider the stated purpose of the journal. For purposes of illustration, four broad categories of journals are suggested based on the target audience:

- General or all-purpose journals contain elements of important social, political, and economic issues. They are usually designed for a broad audience and not limited to a specialty.

- Review journals contain the current state of knowledge or practice in a particular field. They provide background information to those who want an overview on the current status in a field.
- Research journals are predominantly devoted to reporting original investigations, including research in the basic sciences. They are usually read by specialists in a field.
- Clinical or practice journals have as their dominant purpose documenting the state of current practice. This is done through the publication of case reports, discussions, commentaries, etc.



Sample list for a Physics Researcher

General or all-purpose journals: Nature, Science

Review journals: Review of Modern Physics, Applied Physics Reviews

Research journals: Nano Letters, Advanced Materials

Tip 1!

Concentrate your search on journals with online editions. They naturally have a wider audience.

Here are some helpful online resources to get you started:

<http://scientific.thomson.com/>

<http://highwire.stanford.edu/>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

By now you would have listed around 10 or 15 journals. Based on online research and advice from librarians or colleagues, list some of the major characteristics and competitive factors of each of these journals.

- Content and Coverage: Scientific journals publish numerous types of articles, including original articles, review articles, letters to the editor, editorials, news reports, commentaries, brief/short communications, and case reports. The research article is the most common type of article published in medical journals. Journals reporting original research are more likely to contain unique contributions to the coverage of a field and therefore are selected more often than those containing only case reports.



- Readership: International peer-reviewed journals attract a wider readership than regional journals. English is the universal language of science. It is clear that the journals most important to the international research community will publish only in English. This is especially true for natural sciences. Most regional journals have now started to publish abstracts in English.
- Publication Lag Time and Frequency of Publication: Different journals have different lag times for acceptance (from the date of submission) and publication (from acceptance to print). This depends on the format of the submission as well as the frequency of publication. For example, Rapid Communications are published quicker than Original or Review Articles. The frequency of a journal can be weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc. The publication lag time for monthly journals is usually obviously lesser than that for a quarterly journal. However, the popularity of the journal (the number of articles waiting to be published) also plays a role here).

- Impact Factor: The quality of most journals is judged by an index called Impact Factor. A high impact factor indicates that papers published in the journal are frequently cited in the same or other journals. Impact factor is a good indicator for popularity and quality of research. But be careful; this index is only meaningful in the context of journals in the same general discipline. For example, smaller fields like Crystallography do not generate as many articles or citations as do larger fields such as Biotechnology or Genetics.

None of the above journal characteristics are necessarily good or bad. The importance of the above information lies in matching your manuscript optimally to the goals and characteristics of the journal.



Evaluate Suitability to Your Research

We will now taper the list of potential journals by comparing their characteristics to those of the existing or hypothesized work product. This is a multi-step process.

To begin, consider the ultimate goal in publishing the manuscript. Some examples of goals are:

- To influence clinicians' behavior: You can focus on journals with clinicians as the audience. As clinicians are busy people, you should write a short article.
- To report details of a very specialized topic: You should focus on very specialized journals with specific circulation, albeit a smaller audience.
- To introduce an audience to a topic that people would not normally think or care about: Think about journals with a readership interested in the general topic of the manuscript (e.g., assessment) but who knows little about the focal topic (e.g., assessment of deaf children)

- To get something into print that is worthwhile but not particularly sophisticated or influential, rather than never publish it at all: A less competitive journal may be a wise choice in this situation.

Once you have got your goal in place, write down your desired characteristics, noting in each case whether a given journal on the list seems to be advantageous, disadvantageous, or neutral. This process should narrow down the list of journals by at least half.



Review the “Instructions to Authors”

The next step toward final journal selection is to locate each of the journal’s “Instructions to Authors” document. Most journals will have this document on their website. Some publish this in each issue, others only once per year. Study that page for additional information that can further narrow the list of journal options. The instructions page may contain lists of topics that are welcomed or discouraged and information on page limits. This is a good page to find out about the different types of manuscripts the journal publishes (e.g., some journals do not publish book reviews).

Tip 2!

It is always better to first choose the journal before you write the article. But in case you have done it the other way around, pay attention to details like the length of the manuscript, number of figures/tables allowed, etc.

Final choice

By now, you have all the information you need to make a decision. If the final choice is not yet obvious, it may be helpful to contact the journal editor to discuss the nature of the intended submission and whether or not the editor thinks it is appropriate for the publication. Editors are proud of their journals, and in some sense, are like talent scouts, in that they are always on the lookout for appropriate, quality submissions, especially from new authors. Most will give generously of their time and advice or guide in this matter.

Send the editor a brief email describing the following the essential features of the proposed manuscript and ask if the journal would be an appropriate one for a submission. This letter is different from a cover letter that you need to submit when a manuscript is being submitted. Some important points to include in this letter are:

- Title of Manuscript
- Type of Article
- Target audience
- Estimated number of words
- Brief summary (single paragraph)



After a final decision has been made on the most appropriate journal for submission, you are not ready to start writing your manuscript. Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the characteristics, style, and preferences of the chosen journal. Also, follow exactly the instructions given to potential authors. Before submission, don't forget to edit your manuscript!

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