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How to get published in an international journal (editorial)

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How to get Published in an International Journal

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I would like to share with readers some of the skills required for successful publication in a refereed journal. I have over 12 years experience as a reviewer for a number of refereed journals, 4 years experience as a journal editor and over 35 refereed publications.

A paper is ready for publication in a refereed journal when it meets the scholarly and scientific standards that have general consensus within your broad discipline field; in this case Health. All scientific, scholarly journals have guidelines for reviewers to use when considering the merit of a paper. The review criteria for ***Women and Birth*** are available on our website at:

<http://www.ees.elsevier.com/wombi/img/ReviewCriteria.doc>. So, the first tip for successful publication is to check your own work against these criteria to be sure that your paper measures up both in terms of scientific merit and scholarly writing. To be sure that your writing style is appropriate for a scholarly journal check your work against guidelines for writing for publication; there are two articles within the ***Women and Birth*** guidelines for authors at:

http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/707424/authorinstructions.

Before submitting your paper, make sure that you have a structured abstract which succinctly summarises your work. Be sure to select keywords which best match your paper because keywords are used by editors to match reviewers to papers. If there are any reviewers whom you think should not review your paper then write an email to the editor and make your case about why particular reviewers should be excluded. A paper with scientific merit will always include a search and review of related literature; if your paper does not have a review of relevant literature then it is best to submit it to a non-refereed journal. Your paper must be concise as this will make it easier for the reviewers to read whilst keeping the word count low (if you can write an abstract you can reduce your words to meet journal requirements). Now you are ready to begin the submission and review process. First you need to match the type of paper that you want to publish with a particular journal and their requirements.

Within Midwifery there are different types of professional journals where you might consider publishing your paper. All of these have editors and some degree of editorial review but only the scientific, scholarly journals have a double-blind peer review process. For example in Australia we have *Midwifery Matters* and *Midwifery News* which do not have a double-blind peer review process and ***Women and Birth*** which does. Matching your paper to a particular refereed journal requires you to clarify your primary purpose in publishing. If your primary audience is midwives then one of the Scholarly/Scientific Midwifery journals would be your choice: ***Women and Birth***, *Birth*, *Midwifery*, *Midwifery and Women's Health* and the *British Journal of Midwifery* all publish articles which are available internationally via large scale online publishing. If you want obstetricians to read your work then you should target a medical journal such as the *British Medical Journal*. If your article is primarily about midwifery education or midwifery management, then depending upon the audience you want to reach, you may want to publish in a health/nursing management or education journal. If your article is a systematic review you may want to

consider publishing in the *International Journal of Evidence-Based Health Care*. If your article is more sociological then you might consider a journal such as Health Sociology. If your qualitative research article is longer than the journal's recommended word limit you may want to publish in a Qualitative Research Journal where word limits are double or more than the usual journal word limits of 2500-4000 words.

If your article challenges mainstream thinking then you should select the intended journal with care. Read the editorials and articles that have been published in the journal you are considering to see if your views are likely to fit with the particular journal. If you are unsure about which journal to offer your paper to then send an abstract with a cover note to a number of journal editors and ask if they are interested in considering the full paper. You may also want to consider how long after acceptance it will be before your article is available. Some journals; such as *Women and Birth*, publish online within a few weeks of acceptance whereas other journals only publish when the paper journal is released; creating a delay of 9 or more months after acceptance.

The submission of a paper is most often an online process. The process is clear and straightforward. Before submitting be sure that your paper conforms to the journal's formatting specifications, referencing requirements, tables, images etc. This information is available on the journal's Guide for Authors on the Journal's website. Make sure that no identifying details are included in the paper (such as the name of the hospital or university); these details are on the title page only. The title page is not sent to reviewers thus ensuring a double-blind review. Before you start the submission process you do need to know the names, qualifications and addresses of all co-authors. You will receive a confirmatory email once submission is successful. Expect to wait 3-4 weeks to receive feedback from reviewers. If you have not heard back after 4 weeks send a query to the journal office: remember reviewers are unpaid and busy senior people.

The outcome of the review process may be 'Accept', 'Minor Revisions', 'Major Revisions' or 'Reject'. I have personally experienced each of these outcomes. It is easy to manage an 'Accept' or 'Minor Revisions' decision as you should feel elated; about 2-3% of authors get one of these outcomes. Any minor revisions should be made quickly and the paper re-submitted. Being asked to make major revision often feels upsetting; after all you did the best you could before submission; about 90% of authors get this outcome. Sometimes authors give up if they get a lot of reviewers' comments. If your paper has not been rejected outright then, obviously, the reviewers and editor would like to be able to publish your paper. Your name will be attached to that paper forever. What the reviewers want is to help you get your paper to a higher quality standard and, surely, this is also what you want. In that light it is helpful if you look on reviewers' comments as a gift to you.

When you get negative feedback you need to first manage your emotions by not responding for a few days. During this time think about the reviewers; they have different backgrounds and knowledge to you and in that sense they represent your potential readership. If reviewers don't understand you in the way that you want, then the best thing is for you to make it easier for them to understand you! Before responding to the reviewers' comments re-read the comments to establish a clear understanding of what is being asked of you. Number each comment where a change has been recommended. Use this numbered

list of comments as the basis for your response to reviewers' comments. Make the changes under that numbered comment and write what you have done and where you have done it. For example:

Reviewers' Comments;

1. The key words used in the search strategy have not been included.
Response; the key words have now been added under the heading 'Search Strategy' on p. 2.

2. You mention Smith (2007) for the first time in the conclusion. Please do not introduce new material in the conclusion.

Response; the section where Smith (2007) is referenced has been moved to a new section 'Discussion' on page 10.

Sometimes the reviewers are wrong and you are right and the matter is important. For example the reviewer may make a comment like:

3. You should have included Jones et al (2009) in your discussion.
Response; Jones et al was not directly relevant to our question and aim as our paper is focussed on avoiding perineal trauma, not repairing it. Therefore, we have not included Jones et al (2009) as they limited their research to perineal suturing.

The editor will normally send your re-submitted paper and responses to comments back to the original reviewers. If you think that a particular reviewer has been biased or unreasonable you should write to the editor. You should tell the editor why you think a particular reviewer is biased and request that the editor considers using a different reviewer. Once your revised paper has been reviewed one of the following decisions will be made: 'Accept', 'Minor Revisions', 'Major Revisions' or 'Reject'. The editor is the final decision-maker. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome, and you believe that you have good scholarly and scientific grounds for your concerns, then write to the editor. In your letter point out why you think your paper should be published in its present form. I have done this only twice in my career but, in both instances the paper in question was published in the form submitted.

I hope you now feel more confident about submitting a scholarly/scientific paper to an international refereed journal and that you feel empowered to respond professionally and positively to reviewers' comments. The final outcome is one we are all wanting; a quality paper that is significant to midwifery practice, research, theory, education and/or management. So, now you should make a commitment and set a deadline for submitting your paper. Do not be paralysed by fear! Accept that your paper will be critiqued and look forward to making the paper even stronger. Once you have your paper at a 'good enough' stage I advise you to submit it and then you can make recommended changes based on the reviewers' comments. Be careful however, that the paper is 'good enough' otherwise you risk outright rejection.