Actas Dermosifiliogr. 2008;99:772-8

PRACTICAL DERMATOLOGY

Strategies for Getting Published in High-Impact Dermatology Journals

M. Pulido

Edición Médica del Institut Municipal d'Investigació Mèdica (IMIM), Council of Science Editors, Expert Committee of Medicina Clínica, Barcelona, Spain

Abstract. For a manuscript to be published in prestigious dermatology journals, its content must be of sufficient scientific merit and properly presented in terms of structure, format, and style. Even when this is the case, targeting the wrong journal may cause substantial delay in publication. When choosing a journal, authors often give too much priority to English language journals, overestimate the actual importance of the study, give too much weight to the impact factor or reputation of the journal, and fail to examine carefully the instructions for authors. However, one of the main mistakes is to fail to assess whether the information in a manuscript is in line with the editorial policy or the interests of the readers of a given journal. An honest and objective assessment of the true scientific value of the study and the relevance of the conclusions is the best criterion for selecting the dermatological journal of choice, regardless of prestige, impact factor, inclusion in databases, or other considerations.

Key words: selection of the right journal, impact factor, biomedical journals.

ESTRATEGIAS PARA PUBLICAR EN REVISTAS DE DERMATOLOGÍA DE IMPACTO

Resumen. La publicación de trabajos en revistas de Dermatología de prestigio requiere un nivel científico adecuado de la información y una estructura correcta del manuscrito en cuanto a forma, estilo y presentación. Aunque ambas circunstancias coincidan, errores en la elección de la revista pueden conllevar un notable retraso en la publicación final del manuscrito. Algunas de las equivocaciones frecuentes a la hora de escoger la revista idónea incluyen la priorización del idioma de publicación (inglés), la sobrevaloración de la importancia real del estudio, la elección basada en el factor de impacto o en la reputación de la revista, o la falta de atención a las normas de publicación. Sin embargo, una de las principales equivocaciones consiste en no valorar si la información contenida en el manuscrito coincide con la línea editorial o los intereses de los lectores de una revista determinada. Con independencia del prestigio de la revista, el factor de impacto, su inclusión en las bases de datos y otras consideraciones, la estimación honesta y desapasionada del alcance real del estudio y de la relevancia de las conclusiones es la mejor medida para seleccionar la revista dermatológica adecuada.

Palabra clave: elección de la revista, factor de impacto, publicaciones biomédicas.

The process of converting a scientific study into a text suitable for publication in a prestigious dermatology journal is complex and it is necessary to overcome many different obstacles, some of which can be just as difficult as those encountered during the design and conduct of the study itself. For a manuscript to be accepted in a high-impact dermatology journal with a solid scientific reputation, the scientific information must be of a sufficient level and the structure of the manuscript in terms of format, style, and presentation must be appropriate. This requires knowledge of how biomedical publications work, writing skills, good judgment when choosing an appropriate journal and the ability to follow its requirements, aptitude for creating an impeccable document in terms of formal requirements, and, finally, the ability to respond correctly to the questions raised during the peer review process.[1]

In general, many manuscripts submitted for publication in dermatology journals report well-designed studies and satisfy the minimum demands for valid methodology, scientific rigor, and originality, and as such are potentially suitable for acceptance. However, faced with 2 manuscripts

Correspondence:
Marta Pulido
Vía Augusta 160, 3.º 1.ª E
08006 Barcelona, Spain
mpulido@imim.es

Manuscript accepted July 7, 2008.

of similar quality in terms of scientific content, the best organized, written, and presented paper will be at a considerable advantage. This is particularly true if we bear in mind that many international journals with large readerships not only receive many unsolicited manuscripts, leading to a high rejection rate, but also that initial decisions concerning the importance of the study and, therefore, whether the critical review process continues, are made after a perfunctory reading of certain sections of the manuscript (for example, the abstract), along with an assessment of the quality of writing and presentation of the manuscript. That is, the first mistake lies in believing that content and form can be separated, or in other words, if the dermatological topic is of interest, the structure and style of writing is less important. The main reasons for rejection of manuscripts are listed in Table 1.

Before thinking about how to approach the writing, it is worth considering whether the future publication has a purpose. This implies having obtained solid evidence and clear answers to the predefined hypothesis and objectives, as well as having evaluated the practical relevance and applicability of the conclusions of the study in the light of the current state of knowledge. This process of reflexion and self-criticism is extremely useful and necessary because it avoids a biased evaluation of the value of your study and challenges any inflated opinions about its importance, how interesting the readers will find it, and the choice of journal. It is worth remembering that an article should provide substantial scientific information. This could mean, for example, that new concepts are developed, important facts are observed, previous studies are reevaluated in a critical light, poorly supported data are reaffirmed, or understanding of fragmented or uncertain areas of knowledge is increased.

Then the format of the article must be decided on and, in accordance with this decision, the ideal journal should be selected. Although the manuscripts need not necessarily by submitted as an original article, letters to the editor, research notes, case reports, brief reports, systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and other formats are not always admitted by all journals. The format of articles may vary greatly from one dermatology journal to the next and we should be aware of this. For the original article format,[2] some common mistakes in each of the different sections are summarized in Table 2.

Once the real importance of the scientific message represented by the study has been weighed up, and the most appropriate structure decided, the preparation begins.[3-5] The issues that should be addressed during this phase refer to many different aspects, but resolving (before starting to write) certain ethical aspects such as authorship and choosing the most appropriate journal will make the process more efficient and almost always help to avoid untimely delays.

Table 1. Reasons for the Rejection of Manuscripts Submitted for Publication

Most Frequent Reasons for Rejection
Problems with the study design and/or concept
Poorly defined scientific issue
Deficient or inadequate review of the literature
The study is too preliminary, the topic of investigation is already known (no new contribution)
Inappropriate hypotheses and objectives (at times, unattainable objectives)
Methodological errors (sample size, patient selection, definition of primary and secondary outcome variables, procedures, statistical tests, etc)
Insufficient description of the study data (findings)
Excessive emphasis on the importance of the results
Confusing presentation of tables and figures
Study limitations not addressed
Conclusions not based on the results
Error in choice of journal (topic not of interest to the readers)
Biased or incomplete referencing of previous studies
Error in the choice of format
Lack of compliance with the editorial guidelines or ethical aspects
Poor drafting or presentation of the manuscript
Reviewer comments inadequately addressed (failure when reviewing the manuscript)

A crucial part of the publication process today is correctly choosing the most appropriate dermatology journal (or journal from another specialty) for disseminating the results of our study.[6,7] The consequences can be serious if we opt for an inappropriate journal. For example, the manuscript may be rejected without any chance of entering the peer review process. If the mistake made in the initial choice is not corrected, history will repeat itself and successive rejections of the manuscript will ensue.

So how can we judge the quality of a journal and what are the most important aspects when deciding which is the most appropriate? Contrary to what it might seem or what for many authors is common practice, delaying the choice of journal until near the end of the process, when the manuscript is written and almost finished, is usually a mistake. Bearing in mind the fierce competition for space in a core of prestigious, widely read, well-established dermatology journals with a solid scientific reputation,

Table 2. Common Errors in the Different Sections of an Original Article

Section	*Main Errors*
Abstract	Excessive numerical results; data in abstract and full text do not agree
	Poorly defined objectives, excessive statistical results, excessive use of abbreviations
	Conclusions not based on the results in the abstract
Introduction	Lack of clarity in the study rationale; excessive referencing
	Incorrect definition of the problem that prompted the study and its background
	Too long, poor definition of the hypotheses and objectives
Methods	Lack of order and clarity in the description of the processes (design, study population, intervention, outcome measures)
	No mention of ethical requirements
	Incomplete description of the treatment (for example, route, dose, duration)
	Incomplete description of the statistical analysis
Results	Not all the findings are reported
	Poor use of tables and figures (excessive); duplication of information
	Lack of order
	Results of interest not mentioned (eg, losses to follow-up, adverse events, complications)
	Too much emphasis on statistically significant results
Discussion	Interpretations are not based on the study findings
	Results are repeated without assessing their meaning
	Study limitations not addressed
	Biased comparisons with previous studies
	Generalizations not substantiated by the results
	Excessive referencing
	Conclusions do not align with the objectives
References	Not up to date, excessive number of references
	Tangential studies cited that do not support the line of argument
	Copying of references from other articles without consulting the original
	Inclusion of references when only the abstract has been read
	Excessive or no self-citation
	Biased referencing (certain articles for or against)

conceiving, developing, and writing the manuscript in accordance with the characteristics and guidelines for authors of the chosen journal are essential. An impeccable format, perfectly in line with the editorial requirements,[8] will let the scientific content stand out. Attention to detail gives a certain guarantee of success, at least in terms of the initial assessment of the study by the editorial board.

Increasingly, journals are imposing strict word limits, not only for the section dedicated to original articles, but also for other formats (letters, brief reports, reviews, etc). To overcome these word limits, many journals offer additional space in the form of electronic publication of supplementary data, although the preparation of such material is not free from requirements. Merely from a point of view of convenience, efficiency, and time-saving, it is clear that an appropriate choice of journal before starting to write the manuscript will facilitate the process.

Choosing a journal without having carefully analyzed its characteristics, an easy task today using its homepage,[9] is also a serious mistake. In addition to the many points

contained in the guidelines for authors referring to the formal aspects of structure and arrangement of text, it is essential to ensure that the topic of the study coincides with the editorial goals of the journal and, therefore, will be appropriate for readers. Although all journals describe their purpose, aims, content, and scientific areas of interest, objectively determining whether the question addressed and the principal message of the study fit with the direction and aims of the journal can only be achieved by reviewing articles published by the journal. This can readily be done by undertaking a search using the search engine of the journal in question with search terms that might be found in titles and summaries of the articles. Likewise, an effective approach is to review, one by one, recent issues of the journal from the last few months or the last year to check that similar studies to ours have been published. This is a revealing finding and an indication that the journal will pay attention to the topic of our study. It is helpful to include some references to recent studies published in the target journal, as this shows that you are aware of the content of that journal. This is something that will surely not be missed by the eyes of the editorial board. It may be possible to choose potential reviewers from among the authors of studies referenced or the members of the editorial board itself.

In addition, careful review of the journal also highlights other useful aspects, such as the characteristics of the published authors, the scope of their investigation, and their country of origin. Representation of authors from many different countries or, in contrast, the almost exclusive presence of authors from one particular country among the authors' affiliations is very telling one way or another.

In addition to the scientific projection of the journals—which covers aspects such as their history, whether they are the outlet for a scientific society, inclusion in the main databases, frequency of publication, readership, aims, coverage, and composition of the editorial board—the editorial policy of the journal in terms of addressing ethical considerations and compliance with guidelines and consensus statements is revealing, both in terms of quality and how demanding and meticulous the journal is in the process of reviewing submitted articles. We should also be aware that the instructions for authors will detail compliance with uniform requirements drawn up by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors or other guidelines (for example, the Consolidated Standards for Reporting of Trials [CONSORT, www.consort.statement.org], Quality of Reporting Meta-analyses [QUORUM, www.consort-statement.org/QUORUM.pdf], etc), which demand appropriate adaptation of the manuscript should that journal be chosen.

The guidelines of a given journal on such important and essential points as authorship,[10,11] conflict of interest, copyright, protection of patients' privacy, and others, in the form of mandatory signed statements as an essential requirement before reviewing the manuscript is a clear sign of quality and editorial distinction. No quality journals will ignore such details.

In particular reference to the question of whether the dermatology journal is included in the Journal Citation Reports and has an impact factor assigned (Table 3), it is necessary to underline the disproportionate importance given to this magic number and huge misinterpretation of this number regularly made by many clinicians and investigators. First, the impact factor may be considered as the gold standard to judge the quality of a journal and, second, more serious given the dire consequences, the impact factor may be used as the only criterion for choosing a journal. Although the impact factor does indeed reflect the number of citations (and self-citations) received and can therefore be considered as a way of assessing how widely read the journal is, it should not automatically be considered a marker of the quality of that particular journal or, worse, of a given author.[12,13] We are all aware of cases of articles considered essential in different fields of dermatology that have not been published in journals of highest impact factor, or the apparent paradox that articles rejected by a given journal may be published in another with a higher impact factor. Thus, the quality of a biomedical journal goes beyond the simple analysis of its impact factor, as we should also take into account other internal characteristics that are hard to quantify, such as how rigorous the decision-making and editorial processes are. Assessment of the manuscripts by experts (peer review) is one of the main indicators of the quality of the decision-making process.

Another aspect to consider is whether the journal is included in indexes and databases, as well as its language of publication, which will affect, in part, its dissemination and impact. Table 4 lists the 51 Spanish journals currently included in MEDLINE (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). Of these, 12 (23.5%) are published in English. Spanish journals are of great value, not only for disseminating the results of a study of local interest with clinical application within the framework of the Spanish national health system, but also for publishing studies that may be of great use to colleagues in Spain. The true impact of many studies that are well conducted, current, and scientifically necessary is dissipated in international journals when, after a certain time, it transpires that they have not been referenced once. These studies could surely have caused large repercussions and, likewise, been published much more quickly if the authors had renounced their desire to publish in British and American-based journals and submitted to a Spanish one. This stubborn insistence on publishing in English is misplaced, as there are probably many very good articles that, had they been published in Spanish dermatology journals, would have served as a reference for many Spanish

Tabla 3. Journals Included in Journal Citation Reports (2007 JCR Science Edition) in the Dermatology Category

No.	*Journal Title*	*Impact Factor*	*Inclusion in Other Categories Besides Dermatology*
1	Journal of Investigative Dermatology	4.829	No
2	Pigment Cell Research	4.288	Cell Biology
3	British Journal of Dermatology	3.503	No
4	Experimental Dermatology	2.951	No
5	Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology	2.904	No
6	Archives of Dermatology	2.845	No
7	Contact Dermatitis	2.768	Allergy
8	Journal of Dermatological Science	2.500	No
9	Wound Repair and Regeneration	2.445	Cell Biology Medicine, Research & Experimental Surgery
10	Melanoma Research	2.225	Medicine, Research & Experimental Oncology
11	Acta Dermato-Venereologica	1.927	No
12	Dermatology	1.886	No
13	Dermatologic Surgery	1.769	Surgery
14	American Journal of Clinical Dermatology	1.767	No
15	Skin Pharmacology and Physiology	1.760	Pharmacology & Pharmacy
16	Archives of Dermatological Research	1.596	No
17	Journal of Investigative Dermatology Symposium Proceedings	1.576	No
18	Clinical and Experimental Dermatology	1.522	No
19	American Journal of Dermopathology	1.503	No
20	Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology	1.437	No
21	Clinics in Dermatology	1.402	No
22	Journal of Cutaneous Pathology	1.386	Pathology
23	Leprosy Review	1.333	Infectious Diseases Pathology Tropical Medicine
24	Mycoses	1.327	Mycosis
25	European Journal of Dermatology	1.294	No
26	Skin Research and Technology	1.253	No
27	Dermatologic Clinics	1.243	No
28	Burns	1.220	No
29	Dermatitis	1.197	No
30	International Journal of Dermatology	1.130	No
31	Seminars in Cutaneous Medicine and Surgery	1.109	Surgery
32	Photodermatology Photoimmunology & Photomedicine	1.081	No
33	Pediatric Dermatology	1.000	Pediatrics
34	Journal of Cutaneous Medicine and Surgery	0.919	No
35	Journal of Dermatological Treatment	0.911	No
36	Journal of Dermatology	0.694	No
37	Cutis	0.615	No
38	Wounds	0.425	Surgery
39	Annales de Dermatologie et de Venereologie	0.415	No
40	Hautarz	0.333	No
41	Journal of Cosmetic Science	0.283	Chemistry, Applied

Table 4. Spanish Journals Included in MEDLINE in 2008

No.	*Title*	*Abbreviation*
1	Acta Otorrinolaringológica española	Acta Otorrinolaringol Esp
2	Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas	Actas Dermosifiliogr
3	Actas Urológicas Españolas	Actas Urol Esp
4	Adicciones	Adicciones
5	AIDS Reviews	AIDS Rev
6	Allergologia et Immunopathologia	Allergol Immunopathol (Madr)
7	Anales de la Real Academia Nacional de Medicina	An R Acad Nac Med (Madr)
8	Anales de Medicina Interna	An Med Interna
9	Anales del Sistema Sanitario de Navarra	An Sist Sanit Navar
10	Anales Otorrinolaringológicos Ibero-Americanos	An Otorrinolaringol Ibero Am
11	Archivos de Bronconeumología	Arch Bronconeumol
12	Archivos de la Sociedad Española de Oftalmología	Arch Soc Esp Oftalmol
13	Archivos Españoles de Urología	Arch Esp Urol
14	Atención Primaria	Aten Primaria
15	Cirugía Española	Cir Esp
16	Cirugía Pediátrica	Cir Pediatr
17	Clinical & Translational Oncology	Clin Transl Oncol
18	Cuadernos de Bioética	Cuad Bioet
19	Drug News & Perspectivas	Drug News Perspect
20	Drugs of Today	Drugs Today (Barc)
21	Enfermedades Infecciosas y Microbiología Clínica	Enferm Infecc Microbiol Clin
22	Enfermería Clínica	Enferm Clin
23	Enfermería Intensiva	Enferm Intensiva
24	Farmacia Hospitalaria	Farm Hosp
25	Gaceta Sanitaria	Gac Sanit
26	Gastroenterología y Hepatología	Gastroenterol Hepatol
27	Histology and Histopathology	Histol Histopathol
28	Journal of Investigational Allergology & Clinical Immunology	J Investig Allergol Clin Immunol
29	Law and the Human Genome Review	Law Hum Genome Rev
30	Medicina Clínica	Med Clin (Barc)
31	Medicina Intensiva	Med Intensiva
32	Methods and Findings in Experimental and Clinical Pharmacology	Methods Find Clin Exp Pharmacol
33	Nefrología	Nefrologia
34	Neurocirugía	Neurocirugia
35	Neurología	Neurologia
36	Nutrición Hospitalaria	Nutr Hosp
37	Psicothema	Psicothema
38	Radiología	Radiologia
39	Revista Clínica Española	Rev Clin Esp
40	Revista de Enfermería	Rev Enferm
41	Revista de Medicina de la Universidad de Navarra	Rev Med Univ Navarra
42	Revista de Neurología	Rev Neurol
43	Revista Española de Anestesiología y Reanimación	Rev Esp Anestesiol Reanim
44	Revista Española de Cardiología	Rev Esp Cardiol
45	Revista Española de Enfermedades Digestivas	Rev Esp Enferm Dig
46	Revista Española de Medicina Nuclear	Rev Esp Med Nucl
47	Revista Española de Quimioterapia	Rev Esp Quimioter
48	Revista Iberoamericana de Micología	Rev Iberoam Micol
49	The International Journal of Developmental Biology	Int J Dev Biol
50	The Spanish Journal of Psychology	Span J Psychol
51	Timely Topics in Medicine Cardiovascular Diseases	Timely Top Med Cardiovasc Dis

Table 5. Common Mistakes When Choosing a Journal

The topic is not of interest to the readers of the journal (does not fit with the editorial goals)
The homepage of the journal has not been checked or only superficially checked
The instructions for authors have not been read
It has not been checked that the topic has been repeatedly dealt with in the journal
The characteristics of the publishing authors has not been analyzed (field of practice, country of origin)
The choice is based on the impact factor or journals with the best reputation
Decisions based on previous experience (manuscripts published or rejected)
Priority given to the language of publication (English)
Priority given to a general medicine journal instead of a dermatology journal
Lack of objectiveness when assessing the true scope of the study and clinical applicability

scientists. A number of bibliometric analyses of the Spanish scientific publications reveal the disparity between the contribution of Spanish scientists to the world biomedical output and the low percentage of citations this work generates.[14]

The legitimate aim of ensuring greatest dissemination of our work can be a double-edged sword when choosing internal medicine journals instead of dermatology journals, without having undertaken an honest evaluation of the contribution and applicability of the study to general medicine.

Previous publication in a given journal is no guarantee of future success. Likewise, nepotism, backing, influence, and position will likewise not ensure that an article will be accepted. Paying for publication is also no guarantee of success. Many journals have a cost of publication, especially for rapid (or ultra-rapid) publication sections and open-access electronic journals usually include a publishing fee. Another common practice is for journals, in exchange for a fee, to offer the option of providing free electronic access to the full text immediately after the manuscript has been accepted. Some common mistakes when choosing a journal are given in Table 5.

In summary, regardless of the prestige of the journal, its impact factor, whether it is listed in indexes and databases, the usefulness for extending your curriculum, and many other considerations, an honest and dispassionate appraisal of the true scope of the study and the relevance of the conclusions is the best way to ensure an appropriate dermatology journal is chosen. In short, determining how novel the main message of your study is and what readers would be interested is a strategy that almost never leads to erroneous choices.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Williams HC. How to reply to referees' comments when submitting manuscripts for publication. J Am Acad Dermatol. 2004;51:79-83.
2. Sollaci KB. The introduction, methods, results, and discussion (IMRAD): a fifty-year survey. J Med Libr Assoc. 2004; 92:364-71.
3. McGhee CNJ, Gilhotra AK. Ophthalmology and vision science research. Part 2: How to commence research–Eureka or that's a little unusual? J Cataract Refract Surg. 2005;31: 2205-11.
4. How to write a scientific paper: a general guide. Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol Endod. 2006;101: 9A-11A.
5. Sharp D. Kipling's guide to writing a scientific paper. Croat Med J. 2002;43:262-7.
6. Pulido M. ¿Cómo se valora la calidad de una revista? Med Clin (Barc). 1990;95:257-8.
7. Thompson PJ. How to choose the right journal for your manuscript. Chest. 2007;132:1073-6.
8. Bernhard JD. Rejection overruled: a few more notes on submitting papers to The Blue Journal. J Am Acad Dermatol. 2000;43:321-2.
9. Pulido M. Guía en Internet de "información para autores" de más de 2.000 revistas biomédicas: Raymon H. Mulford Library. Med Clin (Barc). 1999;113:119.
10. Pulido M. Reflexiones sobre el concepto de autor. Rev Clin Med Fam. 2006;1:213-4.
11. Pulido M. La autoría de los estudios multicéntricos. Med Clin (Barc). 1999;113:534-6.
12. Kurmis AP. Understanding the limitations of the journal impact factor. J Bone Joint Surg Am. 2003;85A:2449-54.
13. Cartwright VA, McGhee CNJ. Ophthalmology and vision science research. Part 1: Understanding and using impact factors and citation indices. J Cataract Refract Surg. 2005;31: 1999-2007.
14. Camí J, Suñén-Piñol E, Méndez-Vásquez R. Mapa bibliométrico de España 1994-2002: biomedicina y ciencias de la salud. Med Clin (Barc). 2005;124:93-101.