

How to write your article: a few pointers

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Ethical issues:

- Should be addressed and resolved before starting the study.
- Don't make assumptions: read the Helsinki declaration, GCP rules, take advice with the local research ethics committee.
- When in the slightest doubt, obtain approval of the committee.

Structured reporting but helpful for planning as well:

- CONSORT + extensions: randomised controlled trials
- STROBE: observational studies
- STARD: diagnostic accuracy
- ORION: hospital epidemiology
- PRISMA: systematic reviews/ meta-analyses
- MOOSE: meta-analysis of observational studies
- SPIRIT: protocol for RCT

Equator network: <http://www.equator-network.org/>

You should be convinced that:

- The question is interesting (important/of major importance).
- The methods are ok (flawless).
- Then you have a duty to publish

English and style:

- If your results are earth-shaking the editor might take efforts with your style and English. Usually they (the results) are not.
- Ask an experienced, native English speaking colleague to read through your article.
- Don't copy-paste.
- Editorial help?

Title

Informative or declarative?

Antibiotic prophylaxis for neutropenic patients with acute leukemia: a randomized, controlled, triple blind trial

OR

Antibiotic prophylaxis reduces mortality in patients with acute leukemia

Abstract

- High chance that this is what the editor will read in order to decide whether to send it for peer-review.
- Most of the readers will read the abstract on Pubmed. A few will read the full text.
- Make it:
 - Interesting
 - Informative
 - Give actual, numerical data
 - Draw conclusions from your own data.

Introduction:

- Should raise the question and convince the reader that it is important.
- Put the question in context for the readers. Think who your readers are.
- Phrase the question or hypothesis in such a way that the Methods are convincingly suitable, and the results and discussion a direct answer.
- Concise.
- Not repeated in the Discussion.

Methods

Describe in detail:

- Locale and years of the study
- Who were the participants.
- How were they identified.
- Which part of the study was retrospective and which prospective.

Results

- Data should be given in Tables and Figures. Text should serve to highlight important points.
- Always offer numerator and denominator (and not only percentages, p values, trends etc).
- Make use of confidence intervals.
- Answer the question/hypothesis you have formulated.

Discussion

- Use the structured discussion format suggested by Docherty and Smith, *BMJ* 1999;318:1224–5. The discussion would include in this order:
 - Statement of principal findings
 - Strengths and weaknesses of the study
 - Strengths and weaknesses in relation to other studies, discussing particularly any differences in results and short explanations for the differences
 - Meaning of the study: possible mechanisms
 - Implications for clinicians or policymakers (translate into absolute difference or NNT).
 - Unanswered questions and future research
- Mainly discuss your own finding. It's not a review.

References

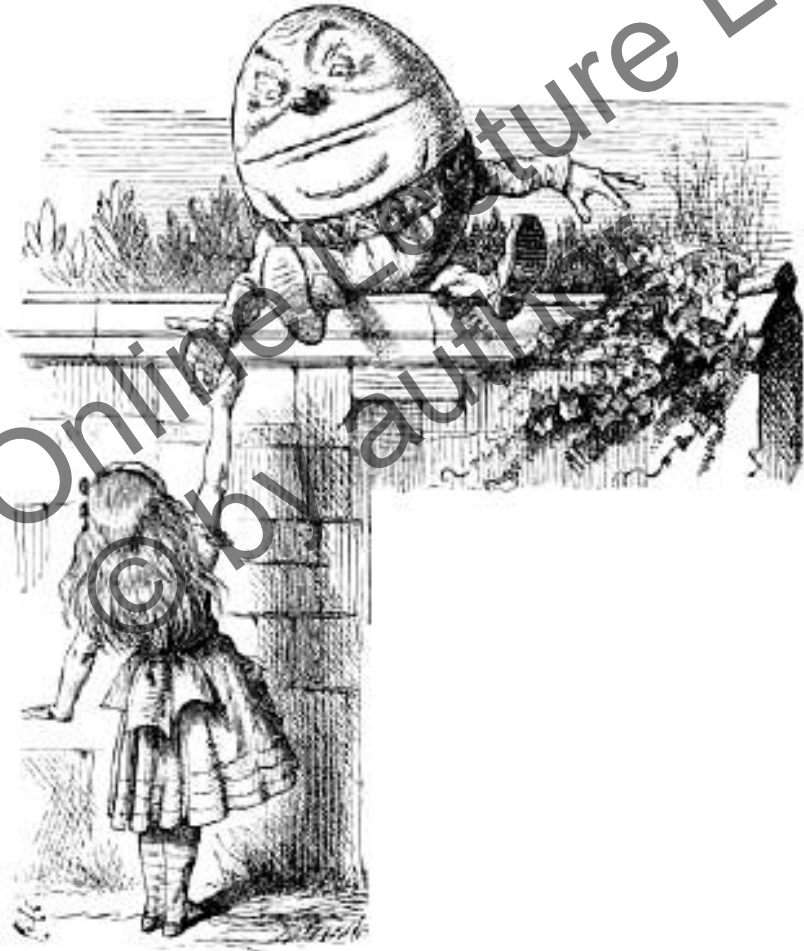
- Check your reference: is it really saying what you claim it does?
- Explosion of references.

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Be clear:

- Avoid very long sentences.
- Reduce use of acronyms to minimum.
- Don't spare details in your description of the methods.
- Ask a colleague (not necessarily very knowledgeable in the materia) to read it for clarity.
- If you are not a native English speaker, ask a colleague who is to read it for style and language.

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'I don't know what you mean by "glory",' Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't — till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!"'

'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument",' Alice objected.

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you **can** make words mean so many different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master — that's all.'

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything; so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. 'They've a temper, some of them — particularly verbs: they're the proudest — adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs — however, I can manage the whole lot of them!

Imperceptibility! That's what I say!

Be concise:

- Leave out (mainly in the Introduction) details that are well known to your audience.
- Avoid repetitions in the Introduction and Discussion.
- Avoid repetitions in the text of the Results and Tables or Figures. As a rule, results should be described in detail in tables and figures; and only important details emphasized in the text.
- Limit yourself to a very short review of the field; and mainly discuss your results.
- Limit yourself to conclusions that are based directly on your results.

Which journal?

- Explosion of papers, but also of journals.
- Impact factor... but also high standards. And nice dealings.
- Fits the subject?
- Which audience you want to reach.

Communication:

- Letter to Editor
- Choice of reviewers.
- Answer the reviewers:
 - In full.
 - Don't be ashamed to point (in a polite way) at inconsistencies and nonsense.
 - Journal style.
- Do peer reviews!
- Questions? Ask the editor.

Thank you

