

# Pearls of Publication

May, 2011

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More than 50? Come up here and give the presentation, or get outta here!!

What goes into a paper?

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(this is just an opportunity for me to tell a story about how non-scientists view science and scientists)

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Dealing with students, post docs and medical fellows on this issue.

# Authorship

## One of the perils....

Try to establish, with your collaborators, who in your lab is likely to be an author.

Although one can't plan it completely, try to define roles early on.

My philosophy is to be generous, rather than restrictive about authorship – it's the first author and the corresponding author that count most of the time.

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Not a trivial question. Try to get him/her to understand your need to establish a reputation as an independent investigator, and have him/her take a position as an inside author. Also discuss, in advance, the letter s/he will submit supporting your promotion, spelling out the vital nature of your contribution, and your leadership in intellectual contributions.

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It needs to tell the reviewer why s/he should want to read the paper – what’s the “take-home message”, the bottom-line they are going to tell the journal club about?

Avoid Hyperbole

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There is also one phrase that drives me nuts when I read it: “It has been shown that...”

“It has been shown that the moon is made of green cheese (ref).” can be much more simply stated as “The moon is made of green cheese (ref).”

This has nothing to do with hyperbole; I just had to get it off my chest when I was preparing the slides.

You do not know everything. And you don't know what you don't know. What may seem obvious in the draft, to you, may not be clear to other readers. It is very, very, very easy to understand what you meant to say, rather than what you actually said, when you are re-reading a draft for the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> time.

Therefore...

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Therefore...

Have your penultimate manuscript read by (at least) two colleagues whose judgment and frankness you know and respect. (At least) one colleague should know a great deal about the topic; the second colleague(s) should not be an expert in the area – but should have a good non-expert familiarity with the general topic.

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Relax, swallow your pride, and consider carefully the comments they made.

# The best-of-all-possible-worlds time line:

Finish the penultimate draft.

Put in a drawer

Reread it a week later, and re-edit it

Give it to those colleagues to read; give them a week.

Review their comments.

Get over your anger, despair, resignation.

Rewrite, considering what will now appear to be more helpful comments.

Submit the manuscript, and breath a sigh of relief.

Be realistic in the choice of the journal to which you submit!

Not all papers are *Cell, Nature, Science, New England Journal of Medicine* etc. caliber papers.

This is where consultation with senior members of your department and with your mentors can be very helpful and valuable.

# The role of the corresponding author:

You are responsible for the whole thing. The “bottom line” rests with you. You see that the final version of the manuscript is ready for submission. You correspond with the journal editor, even if you let/make your student or post-doc figure out the crap about how to submit figures. You make sure the forms are filled out, even if you delegate the responsibility. Errors by others will fall on you, so pay attention.

# The initial letter to the editor

Essentially – in, my opinion, useless – unless s/he is a personal friend. But – nevertheless – try to tell the editor what you did and why it is/will be important to a relatively wide readership within the specialty of the journal to which you are submitting.

# Responding to referees:

Point by point, and carefully.

*Comment 1: Number the referee's comment, and quote it (I do this in italics).* Response: Follow it by your specific comment, rebuttal, or description of the correction you have made, in standard font.

If you disagree with a referee's conclusion.... The "I'm sorry I didn't make this point more clearly..." ploy is usually the best – and probably valid.

# Responding to the editor:

This differs from responding to the reviewers.

If you think the reviewer(s) have made a fundamental error in their understanding of the work presented, here is where you should make your case.

You should make your argument as clearly as you can; it is at this point that you might want to ask for the manuscript to be read by another, new referee.

However, bear in mind that most editors will send the prior reviews to a new referee, along with the manuscript and your comments. Editors have a vested interest in siding with referees in close cases.

The “home run” theory of publishing papers, versus the “successive hits” theory of how to publish. What’s good for the investigator, and what is good for science. A question without an answer.

The Raff doctrine.

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