
Newsletter: Selecting a Journal. San Francisco Edit

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Selecting a Journal

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Choosing to which journal to send your manuscript requires careful thought.

Many people leave the decision until they have written the manuscript. That is fine if you are experienced in publishing. You probably have identified two or three potential journals where to send your manuscript. However, if you are new – or even if you are experienced – in publishing, the more certain you are about which journal you are targeting, the easier it is to write the manuscript.

As will become clear, there are numerous factors to consider when choosing a journal. It is unlikely that one journal will have all of the features you are looking for, so you may have to compromise. However, there is one essential feature you should not compromise on – manuscripts must be peer reviewed for publication if they are to be considered research articles.

Once you decide on a journal, obtain and read that journal's Instructions to Authors. This document describes the format for your article and provides information on how to submit your manuscript.

Decide early before the writing begins. That way you can write for the journal's audience and according to their guidelines.

The following will help you make a short list of potential journals and decide which is the most appropriate and suitable journal for the manuscript you are planning to write:

1. Is the journal peer reviewed?
2. Does the journal currently publish papers on subjects such as yours? If you were looking for papers like your own, in which journals would you look?

3. Which journals have the best reputation for publishing in your field? Ask colleagues which journals they respect. Look at recent articles and judge their importance. Is the Editorial Board composed of leaders in their fields? What is the journal's impact factor?
4. Which journals are most likely to be cited by others in your field?
5. Is the journal published by a society? Society journals are usually the most prestigious and have the largest circulation. Be wary of new journals (in print or on the internet), especially those not sponsored by a society.
6. Is the journal indexed in the major electronic databases such as Medline, Biological Abstracts, Chemical Abstracts, Current Contents, etc.?
7. Which journals have the kind of expertise that would ensure your paper is given a "fair hearing"?
8. Are there journals whose readership you need/want to influence?
9. How often is the journal published? What is the usual time lag between receiving and publishing papers? Using the "date submitted", the "date accepted", and the date of the issue of published articles you can estimate the length of the review process as well as the time from acceptance to publication in print.
10. Is the journal published in English? English has become the language for international scientific communication. Therefore, if you are interested in communicating to the international scientific community, it is essential to publish in English. If you wish to communicate to a more localized community, you might choose a journal that permits another language.
11. What is the focus of the journal; is it broad or narrow? Which disciplines are represented? What is the journal's research orientation; is it basic, theoretical, or applied?
12. Do you like the appearance of published articles – the format, typeface, and style used in citing references? If relevant, does the journal publish short and/or rapid communications?
13. Do the figures published in the journal have the resolution that you need?
14. Is speed an issue? If so, monthly journals have a shorter lag time than quarterly journals.

Once you have decided on a journal, you must obtain a copy of the most recent author guidelines. You can usually obtain a copy of the journal's Instructions to Authors on their website or in the first issue of a new volume. You must follow these guidelines explicitly or you might delay the publication of your manuscript.

You should, by now, have some idea about why you want to publish, what kind of paper you will be writing, what your main message will be, who your primary readers are, and which journal you will be targeting.

For more detailed information regarding writing a manuscript for publication, please review some of our other articles at <http://www.sfedited.net/newsletters.htm>. These articles approach such subjects as Developing an Outline, Writing the First Draft, Writing Clearly, etc.

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