

Academic Publishing, Part II: Where to Publish Your Work

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It may seem like this would be a very easy topic for the Editor-in-Chief of *Annals of Neurology* to address: Of course the paper should go to *Annals*! But in fact, the choice of journals is much more complex than that. Even when advising people in my own department or laboratory about which journal to choose to submit their work, I take into account a variety of factors, including matching the manuscript with journals that publish other papers in the same subfield, at the same level of analysis, and with the same breadth of interest. Authors are also concerned about the visibility or impact factor of the journal. And then, after submission, there is the issue of how to respond when the paper comes back for revisions...or worse...

In this article, we will cover these topics. In the next segment in this series, we will take up the best way to write your paper to maximize your chances of success.

Finding the Right Home for Your Paper

The first thing to do is to find journals that publish papers like the one you are planning to write. For example, when you were designing your study or assembling your bibliography, in which journals were the papers you read? Specific journals tend to specialize in certain areas, often ones in which the editors have special expertise. If an investigator in the field you are writing about is a journal editor, that journal is often the best place to send your work.

Some journals tend to specialize in papers that perform specific types of analyses. For example, many clinical journals are not interested in papers that incorporate animal experiments, while many basic journals rarely publish papers on human subjects. Some journals publish lots of functional imaging papers, while others may

publish relatively few. Papers in *Annals*, for example, tend to focus on the mechanisms of neurological disease and their diagnosis and treatment. These may utilize human subjects or animal models, but the focus is always on what the work tells us about the human disorder. We do not routinely publish single case reports unless they definitively identify a new mechanism of disease or treatment. It pays to go through the tables of contents of the journals you think might be best for your paper, and see if you can find other papers like yours in their pages. If not, they are probably not the right place to send your work.

A further issue is whether you wish to submit your paper to an Open Access publication. Open Access journals are available online to anyone with internet access, without a subscription. Journals where papers are freely available from the time of publication, like our sister journal, *Annals of Clinical and Translational Neurology*, are often called Gold Open Access, to distinguish them from Green Open Access journals. The latter are journals that keep their content available only to subscribers for some period of time, usually about 6 months, but then move it into full open access after that time (the *Journal of Neuroscience* is an example of this model). Other journals, like *Annals*, use a hybrid model, making most of their content available only to subscribers, but providing Gold Open Access for papers at an additional cost to the authors. Journals that are all Gold Open Access do not receive subscription fees, so are supported entirely by fees levied on their authors. Typical charges for publishing a paper in a Gold Open Access journal run from \$2,000 to \$3,000. But even subscription journals may have some page charges (for example, *Annals* charges authors for color pages printed in the journal, which are quite

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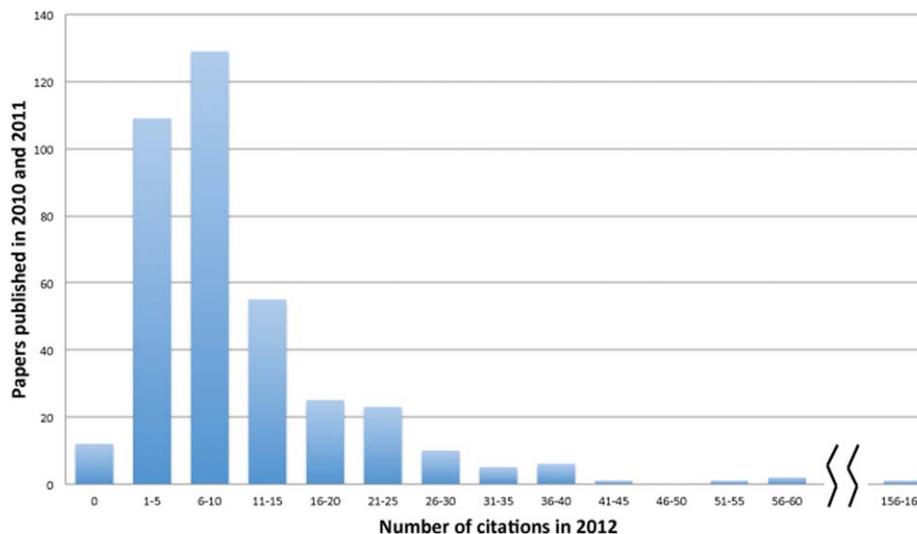


FIGURE 1: Distribution of number of citations in 2012 to *Annals of Neurology* papers published in 2010 and 2011. Data were obtained using the Web of Science (Thomson Reuters) citation report for all full-length articles published in *Annals* from January 2010 through December 2011. Commentaries, editorials, abstracts, and letters to the editor were excluded.

expensive to produce). Some funders of research work (e.g., the Howard Hughes Medical Institutes or Burroughs-Wellcome Foundation) may require that work be published in Gold Open Access. Others, like the US National Institutes of Health, require that copies of the final manuscript be posted on PubMedCentral one year after the paper is published, which is essentially a form of Green Open Access.

What Is In a Citation Impact Factor?

A further consideration that concerns many young academics is the Citation Impact Factor (CIF) of the journal to which they are planning to send their paper. The CIF was originated by Science Citation Index (now owned by Thomson Reuters) and is calculated as the mean number of citations in their database during the previous year to papers published in that journal during the two years before that. So the 2013 CIF (the most recent one available at the time of this writing) for *Annals*, 11.19, was calculated from citations in 2012 to papers published in *Annals* during 2010 and 2011 (Figure 1). The CIF indicates the mean impact of papers published in a journal over a fairly small segment of time, and while it provides a reasonable estimate of the impact a journal makes, it does not really say anything about the citation impact of individual papers published in that journal, which vary enormously. For example, for full-length articles published in *Annals* in 2010–2011, the number of citations during 2012 varied from 0 (for 12 articles) or 1 (for 11 more) to 156 (for the 2010 revision of the McDonald criteria for the diagnosis of multiple sclerosis). A total of 129 papers, about 34% of those published, had the mean number of citations (11) or more. That means that

two-thirds of the papers published in *Annals* have fewer citations than our CIF. These statistics indicate why CIF is a poor surrogate for the quality of the individual papers. In some countries, the curriculum vitae of a faculty member is expected to list the CIF of the journal in which each paper is published, and the weight of the overall publication impact is judged to be the number of papers multiplied by the CIF of their journals. This is a clear misuse of the measurement.

On the other hand, there is a definite hierarchy of journals, so that many authors tend to start by sending their paper to the journal with the highest CIF where they feel their paper has a chance of being accepted. In many cases, this simply delays the eventual publication of the work, as it is shunted from one journal to another (see Journal Cascades, below). My advice would be to submit your paper to the journal that most frequently publishes work like your own. As long as the journal is indexed in PubMed, people will be able to find the work. And most readers these days either find papers by using search engines and keywords, or by subscribing to the journal table of contents email list. If you submit your work to a journal that publishes the appropriate type of paper, there will be a good chance of your work being reviewed by experts in your field and published if it is meritorious.

Getting Your Paper In: The Fine Art of Working with Editors

When you receive back the fateful decision letter, you need to read it carefully to decode what the editor is trying to say. In most cases, if the journal wants your paper, the editor will ask for appropriate revisions. Some editors

simply ask you to respond to the comments and requests of the referees. Other editors have requests of their own. If your paper is in this group, you should be as responsive as possible to the requests. If they have not been itemized and numbered, you should do that yourself, so you can be sure to respond to each of them. It is not always necessary that you do each thing that is requested, but if not, you should articulate a very good reason why it could not be done. In general, if the author is responsive and compliant, the reviewers quite often will sign off on the changes and the paper will soon be published.

On the other hand, some authors look upon the requests as an intrusion on their independence and try to rebut most of the points rather than comply with them. This situation often causes the reviewer to want to reject the paper. After all, the reviewer has spent his or her own time on the review, uncompensated and unrecognized. The sole satisfaction available would be to bring the paper to publication in a stronger form than its initial version. It is possible that the reviewers may have made an error in requesting the revisions. But more likely, they will also dig their heels in. Remember that the editor chose those reviewers because he or she trusts them. Thus refusal to comply with their requests is not likely to be met sympathetically.

Occasionally a reviewer will simply be incorrect or will have misread the paper. You should point this out, respectfully, and explain the situation to the editor. However, you should expect that if the editor is not an expert in the field, your paper will probably be sent to additional reviewers for adjudication, and these reviewers may find other problems with it.

There may also be times when your paper is turned down for publication, but the editor opens the door to resubmission if you do additional work that would strengthen the paper. It is worthwhile considering at that point whether the work is something that you are prepared to undertake. If not, it is almost always better to move on to a different journal.

What To Do If Your Paper Is Not Accepted: Journal Cascades and Resubmission

What if the decision letter is less favorable? After all, *Annals* must turn down more than 90% of all papers that are submitted, so there will be a lot of those letters. In general, unless the reviewers have made a clear error or shown clear bias, it is best just to accept the decision and move on. There are lots of journals out there, and editors are notoriously reluctant to second guess their own opinions.

I generally read through rejection letters for my own work (yes, we all get them. . .), and then put them

away for a week. After the initial Kubler-Ross stages of grief have passed (denial, anger, bargaining, depression), I find that I can read the letter more analytically. I then work through the individual comments in the reviews, and try to see the paper from the reviewers' point of view. Quite often I find that there are grounds for their dissatisfaction, and I then go about systematically strengthening the paper. Remember that you may meet the same reviewer when the paper is submitted to another journal, and as with a paper that is being revised for the same journal, the reviewer will not look favorably upon a resubmission that contains the same problems. (I have seen such reviews that begin: "I reviewed this manuscript for another journal, and the paper has not changed, so neither has my opinion about it. . .")

A word of advice: Do not try to figure out who the reviewer was. First, most authors are incredibly bad at this. Over the years as an editor, I have found that such guesses, when sent back to me by disgruntled authors, are wrong the vast majority of the time. Many authors attempt to find the most favorable referees for their papers by listing their preferred and non-preferred reviewers when they submit their papers. Surprisingly often, it is the preferred reviewer who has the more negative view of the paper. We try to avoid using a non-preferred reviewer, but when we occasionally use one out of necessity, he or she is frequently the more enthusiastic reviewer. You could waste a lot of spite on someone who was innocent, and unwittingly take the more negative reviewer out to dinner at the next meeting.

In choosing the next journal, it is probably best to pick the next one in line that publishes papers similar to your own. However, this often requires that you reformat the paper and the references. To minimize the work in this, many journals have organized "cascades." These are groups of journals, often published by the same publisher and using the same editorial software, that agree to share reviews when the authors request it. Thus, if the reviewers are friendly but their main concern is that the paper is not quite right for the first journal (because it is not in the right field, or perhaps is not of sufficiently widespread interest), there may be an advantage to moving the paper to the next journal in that cascade. That journal may feel that the paper is right for them, and be able to use the original reviews to move it forward. *Annals of Neurology*, for example, has a cascade with *Annals of Clinical and Translational Neurology*. Both are owned by the American Neurological Association, and we share a website that allows us to give the *ACTN* editors access to our reviews. Other publishers may have similar arrangements. The Neuroscience Peer Review

Consortium is a voluntary collection of neuroscience journals that agree to share reviews among themselves, at the request of the authors.

Even if you revise your paper for a cascade, I recommend carefully reformatting your paper for the next journal. Fortunately, most medical journals, including *Annals*, now use the reference format of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), but many basic science journals use other formats, and many other features of the format will vary among medical journals. There are few things more disheartening to an editor than reading a manuscript that has just been

submitted to one's journal, and seeing that it is clearly in the format of a competing journal.

Finally, the most important thing to learn about the art of getting your work published is to be persistent. There is a right place to publish every manuscript, and if the work is good, it will get cited. Some of my most highly cited papers have been published in "lower ranking" journals. Once the work is out there, it transcends the journal in which it first appears. And the best revenge against a reluctant editor is for your rejected work to be more highly cited than papers that the editor decided to publish in his or her journal.