

Effective Medical Writing

Pointers to getting your article published

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Title and title page

ABSTRACT

The title gives the first impression of a scientific article, and should accurately convey to a reader what the whole article is about. A good title is short, informative and attractive. The title page provides information about the authors, their affiliations and the corresponding author's contact details.

Keywords: medical writing, scientific paper structure, scientific paper title, title page

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INTRODUCTION

Scientific writing follows certain expected conventions. In preparing a manuscript for submission to a medical journal, organisation and structure takes precedence over literary skills. Although individual journals have their own in-house style, scientific manuscripts submitted to most journals follow standard conventions. For original articles, the components are: title and title page, abstract, keywords, text arranged according to IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results And Discussion), acknowledgements (if any), references, tables, figures and figure legends, and appendices (if any). This article discusses the title and title page.

TITLE

The title is usually the first part of a submitted manuscript to be seen by the editor, and then by the reviewers. After publication, it is usually the first part of the paper to be seen by journal readers. The title also appears in the journal issue contents page, and may also be part of an email notification or internet search result. The title therefore gives the intended audience its first impression of the author's work. If the title is unable to attract the attention of the potential reader, the rest of the article is less likely to be read. Having a good title is therefore desirable.

The title should accurately convey to the reader what the whole article is about. Ideally, this should be done in as few words as possible. Try to avoid lengthy titles as

these may not only be difficult to decipher, but may also put off the potential reader. The subject matter should be indicated in the title. Authors should avoid the temptation of adding extraneous details, such as the objectives, methods or results from the study. In summary, the ideal title should be concise and yet informative.

For example, a title such as "A novel study on the usefulness of thermoimaging in the diagnosis of osteoid osteoma of bone: analysis of imaging features and comparison with radiographs, ultrasonography, computed tomography and other conventional imaging techniques, with clinical follow-up of lesions in 24 patients at the Sotong General Hospital" not only contains too many unnecessary and unhelpful words, but is downright boring. It can easily be replaced by "Thermoimaging in diagnosis of osteoid osteoma", or simply "Thermoimaging of osteoid osteoma". On the other hand, a title like "Imaging of osteoid osteoma" or "Diagnosis of osteoid osteoma" will not be specific enough. One should avoid abbreviations in the title (e.g. TI of OO) or jargon/slang (e.g. Thermoimaging rocks!)

The target readership should be considered when constructing the title, as the title should be tailored accordingly. For a subspecialty journal, the authors can assume that the reader will be familiar with certain terms which can then be omitted from the title. In contrast, these same terms may be required to provide clarity for readers of a general medical journal. However, articles that are wider in scope tend to have shorter titles, while highly specialised topics may need a longer title to fully encapsulate the subject content.

Indexing and abstracting services depend heavily on the accuracy of the title. Improperly-titled articles may not reach its intended audience. The title should also ideally contain the keywords of the subject matter. Short titles are usually more interesting to the reader, take up less space (fonts for the title are often larger than the rest of the text), and are favoured by editors. Authors can consider a provocative title—if the subject matter warrants it (e.g. Is thermoimaging really useful for diagnosing osteoid osteoma?)—but avoid being sensationist.

When should the title be written? Experienced authors

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Peh WCG, MD,
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Biomedical Imaging and Interventional Journal,
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recommend drafting a provisional title when doing the initial draft of the manuscript. This is usually revised and refined several times during the course of writing the manuscript, until the author is satisfied that it accurately reflects the article contents in an attractive manner. It is therefore worthwhile investing time and careful thought in formulating an appropriate and effective title.

Some journals require a “running title” which is a short version of the title. This is usually printed as a header at the top of each or alternate journal pages. The running title is limited in length by a maximum number of characters specified in the journal’s author guidelines.

Box 1. What constitutes a good title:

1. Short
2. Informative
3. Attractive

TITLE PAGE

Most journals require two title pages: one blinded and one complete (unblinded). The blinded title page consists of only the title and is sent to the reviewers with the rest of the blinded manuscript. There should not be any identifying information on the blinded title page.

The complete title page contains the title, as well as names of all authors, affiliations of all authors, and the complete contact information of the corresponding author. This part of the title page serves to identify and give credit to the authors who did the work and to the institution(s) at which the work was done. Criteria for authorship and listing of the order of authors will be dealt with in another article in this series.

As individual journals have their own in-house style, authors are advised to follow exactly the particular journal’s “Instructions to Authors” or “Author Guidelines” for constructing the title page. Some journals require each author’s full names, although the more common conventions are: first name, middle initial, then surname; or simply initials and surname. Some journals list the authors’ qualifications (usually limited to two or three), while others also include each author’s academic and/or professional appointments.

Authors embarking on their writing career will need to carefully consider the format of their names during first submission, and resist the temptation to change their names later on. For example, Lee Ee Meng may be inaccurately cited as “LE Meng” instead of “EM Lee”. Taufik bin Rosli may prefer to be cited as “R Taufik” rather than “TB Rosli”, and therefore may want to omit the “bin” during manuscript submission. Asian authors should ideally structure their names according to western convention, i.e. surname or desired name last, especially when submitting to international journals.

Female authors need to consider whether to stick to

their maiden surname or to adopt a new surname after marriage. After marriage, Dolly White may become Dolly McCall or even Dolly White-McCall. Religious conversions also often entail a name change. Therefore, the former Baliwani Dhillon Singh may be renamed BD Abdullah. A name change will mean separation of an author’s work in the scientific literature databases, and a source of potential confusion for other researchers.

Each author’s institutional affiliation should be clearly connected to the author’s name. The institution listed should be the one at which the work was done. When two or more authors are listed, each in a different institution, the addresses should be listed in the same order as the authors and clearly labelled to the author’s name, usually by alphabetical or numeral superscripts, or symbols. If the manuscript is submitted by, say, four authors from two institutions, each author’s affiliation should be similarly labelled. Authors should avoid listing multiple affiliations for a single author.

If an author has moved to another address before publication, the journal editorial office should be informed. Some journals add the new address as a “present address” footnote. This is particularly important for the corresponding author. Failing to provide an updated address may lead to a delay in publication. Following publication, the corresponding author may need to respond quickly to letters to the editor, to provide reprints, or answer queries from readers and other researchers. The corresponding author’s contact information consists of full mailing address (including postal code), telephone and fax numbers (with country and city codes), and current email address.

Box 2. Contents of unblinded (complete) title page:

1. Title and running title
2. Names of all authors
3. Author affiliations
4. Corresponding author’s contact information

SUMMARY

The title has served its purpose if the reader is attracted by it, has a good idea of what the article is about, and proceeds to read the abstract (and the rest of the article). The authors and their affiliations should be clearly listed, and accurately reflect apportionment of credit for the work done. The corresponding author’s contact information should be complete and current.

Box 3. Take home points:

1. Keep the title short, informative and attractive
2. List authors and affiliations accurately
3. Corresponding author’s contact information should be complete and current

SINGAPORE MEDICAL COUNCIL CATEGORY 3B CME PROGRAMME
Multiple Choice Questions (Code SMJ 200808B)

- | | True | False |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Question 1. The title of a scientific paper should include the: | | |
| (a) Subject matter. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) Objectives of the study. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) Methods of the study. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) Keywords. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|
Question 2. A complete (unblinded) title page should have the: | | |
| (a) Name of corresponding author only. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) Title of the manuscript. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) Contact information of the corresponding author. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) Institutional name. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|
Question 3. An ideal title should be: | | |
| (a) Concise. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) Sensationist. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) Accurate. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) Attractive. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|
Question 4. The following statements about the title of a scientific paper are true: | | |
| (a) A running title negates the need for a full title. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) A provisional title can be written when preparing the first draft. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) The title should be as long as possible in order to impress the editor. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) The target readership should be considered when constructing the title. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|
Question 5. Why is the title of a scientific paper so important? | | |
| (a) It gives the first impression to the readers. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) Indexing and abstracting services depend heavily on the accuracy of the title. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) It will attract the readers to read the paper. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) The reviewer's decision depends solely on the title. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Doctor's particulars:

Name in full: _____

MCR number: _____ Specialty: _____

Email address: _____

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS:

(1) Log on at the SMJ website: <http://www.sma.org.sg/cme/smj> and select the appropriate set of questions. (2) Select your answers and provide your name, email address and MCR number. Click on "Submit answers" to submit.

RESULTS:

(1) Answers will be published in the SMJ October 2008 issue. (2) The MCR numbers of successful candidates will be posted online at www.sma.org.sg/cme/smj by 15 October 2008. (3) All online submissions will receive an automatic email acknowledgment. (4) Passing mark is 60%. No mark will be deducted for incorrect answers. (5) The SMJ editorial office will submit the list of successful candidates to the Singapore Medical Council.

Deadline for submission: (August 2008 SMJ 3B CME programme): 12 noon, 25 September 2008.