THE NITTY GRITTY:
How to get writing done for biomedical journals

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Join NIDUS to connect to Delirium Research

What is NIDUS?
• NIA-funded research network dedicated to advancing the study of delirium through development of research resources, career development opportunities, and dissemination of delirium science.

How to be involved:
• Apply to attend the Delirium Boot Camp – 2-day workshop on delirium research, Oct. 29-30 2020, Remote meeting
  – Applications due July 17: deliriumnetwork.org/career-development/boot-camp-application/ Small grant application for mock review
• Join a Junior Faculty Working Group—email us!
• Participate in the American Delirium Society Meeting, March 2021
• Register for website deliriumnetwork.org to access our blog, resources and receive NIDUS newsletter and announcements.

Follow NIDUS online!
Twitter: @nidus_delirium ● Facebook: NIDUSDelirium ● Email: nidus@hsl.harvard.edu
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Expert by a Different Definition

Definition: A person who has made every possible mistake in his/her field that there is to make.
TRUE CONFESSION

…I HATE TO WRITE

…Lessons learned from >300 articles
NOT THE CONTENT, BUT THE PROCESS

• Today, we will discuss the process of getting writing done.
• For the content of the paper: ideas, analyses—work with your mentor or writing group (NIDUS junior faculty working group!).
• This talk is focused on HOW to get the writing done.
Paper Timeline

• Setting your paper-writing timeline is key.
• Set deadline to identify key steps and establish benchmark dates; work with your mentor
  – Make it realistic
  – Consider other factors
• Put them on your calendar as hard deadlines (like abstracts/grants) and stay on track!!
WRITING THE PAPER
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• Lay out your tables and figures
• Create a detailed outline
  • Start with Specific Aims
  • Then Methods and Results
  • Finally end with key points for Introduction and Discussion
OUTLINE

• SPECIFIC AIMS/HYPOTHESES
• BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION
  – Pertinent review of background literature
  – Key points (2-3) about your topic
  – Lay the groundwork for the importance of your topic:
    – How common is the problem?
    – How bad is the problem? Dollars spent on problem?
  – Justify why this new study is needed
    – Limitations in previous work
    – What it will add to the existing work
METHODS

• Setting and subjects. Include IRB statement at end of this section.
• Study design
• Intervention (if applicable)
• Assessments
• Outcome(s)
• Statistical analyses (include software used)
RESULTS

• Line this up according to tables and figures
• Highlight key results
• Stress important points which will not be in tables or figures.
DISCUSSION

• Summary of key points
  – Do not reiterate results
  – Emphasize key points: take home messages

• Strengths of the study
  – Emphasize 2-3 key strengths

• Limitations of this study
  – Despite strengths, some caveats deserve mention
  – For each caveat, indicate why it does NOT invalidate the study

• Conclusions, implications, future work
  – Key take home messages and implications
  – Future work needed
WRITING

• Start writing; one section at a time
• Set goals to write so many paragraphs/sections per day
• Break each section down into more components, creating a more detailed outline that you will fill in
• Break it down to make it doable and feasible, and not overwhelming
REVIEWING AND REVISING

• First draft should be reviewed by coauthors and mentors for feedback
• Revised draft: two external reviewers
• Once all advice incorporated, ready to send out
• Adhere to all guidelines in journal’s “Information for Authors”
There is no such thing as great writing, only great rewriting

--Louis D. Brandeis
More than a half, maybe as much as two-thirds of my life as a writer is rewriting. I wouldn't say I have a talent that's special. It strikes me that I have an unusual kind of stamina.

--John Irving
IMPROVING STYLE OF WRITING

• Read through articles, papers or grants
• Adopt patterns/wording that are highly effective
• Be succinct and clear
• Have experienced mentors carefully review your manuscripts
CLEAR SCIENTIFIC WRITING

• Cut out the ornamentation, extra words that are not needed

“Write it as straight as you can” -- Ernest Hemingway
HOW TO GET WRITING DONE

• Block off time
• Defend the time--
  keep it uninterrupted!
• Set your goals; be disciplined
• Set appointments for reviews
  or other motivators
In academic medicine

• Why is writing important?
• Writing is our job—it’s also the main currency for promotion
• Nothing else matters as much as the papers
• Get it done!
SELECTING YOUR JOURNAL
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Target your manuscript toward the audience you want to reach:

• Search on your topic
• Put abstract into “JANE” website <https://jane.biosemantics.org/>
• Speak to experts in the field
• Pull past issues of potential journals and review
ONCE JOURNAL SELECTED

Once you have narrowed down to the journal:

• Get that journal’s guidelines (Information for Authors)

• Review Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals

www.nejm.com/general/text/requirements/1.htm
Writing during COVID-19

• So many competing pulls and demands on our time during this unprecedented pandemic
• Create focus: 2-3 essential things to get done each day—break it down
• Lessen expectations, but keep yourself accountable
• Prioritize to what’s most important
Get it done….

“Things may come to those who wait, but only the things left by those who hustle.”

~ Abraham Lincoln
Don’t be afraid to make mistakes

“It is a mistake to suppose that men succeed through success; they much oftener succeed through failures. Precept, study, advice, and example could never have taught them so well as failure has done”.

~ Samuel Smiles
Never give up…

After it took Thomas Edison 2000 tries to invent the light bulb, a young reporter asked him how it felt to fail so many times. Edison said:

“I never failed once. It just happened to be a 2000-step process”
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