

CHOOSING A JOURNAL

You will most probably find the right journal for your paper among those periodicals you most often read. That is where you have your readership.

Submission

If you think that more than one journal seems appropriate, you may wish to rank them by quality. One way to do so is to look at the “impact factor,” which tells how often the average article of a journal is cited. Such information is provided by the Institute for Scientific Information in its annual Journal Citation Reports.

The impact factor is especially useful for comparing journals within a particular field of research. Let us take, for example, Orthopaedics. The 41 journals listed for 2005 had an impact factor in the range 0.1- 4.2, with a median of 0.9. It is reasonable to assume that journals with an impact factor of 4.2 attract the best papers in the field, and that these journals have a greater impact on science in that field than a median (0.9) impact-factor journal.

However, if you select a high-impact journal, the publication of your paper may be delayed, as is hinted at in this question from a course participant:

Should I send my paper to a journal with a high impact factor and risk having it rejected, or should I send it to a journal with a lower impact factor and get it published quicker?

If you feel in your heart that yours is a first-class paper, then try the high-impact journal - provided that it is a specialized journal in your own field. However, if it is a journal outside your specialty and your paper is accepted and

published, this journal might turn out to be a publication that researchers in your specialty do not read. For example, a colleague of mine complained that his excellent paper published in one of the highest-ranked medical journals, *The Lancet*, was not cited. However, when you have been around for a while, you may feel by intuition which journal is the right one.

The impact factor ranks journals; it does not evaluate individual papers. Some articles may not be cited at all, while others become classics. Although it may be outside the scope of this book, I will tell you about one way to find the best papers in your field: visit the website Faculty of 1000 Medicine (www.f1000medicine.com) or Faculty of 1000 Biology (www.f1000biology.com). These sites rate individual papers according to their merit, irrespective of where they are published. However, you must be aware that a top-ranked article may not necessarily be well written.

Instructions to Authors

When you have chosen a journal, the next step is to read the current version of its Instructions to Authors. Several journals print these instructions in every issue, others only in the first issue of each volume. They also appear on the website of the journal. If you work in a biomedical discipline you will find that many journals use “Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals” (Vancouver Document, www.icmje.org), a set of instructions intended to allow authors to use the same format and style for papers submitted to different journals.