

Editorial

## Following the Rules

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### Abstract

### Prerequisites of Ethical Publishing

1. The corresponding author guarantees the approval of all other listed authors for submission and publication of the manuscript, at the same time confirming that all these individuals have made a significant contribution to research and manuscript and that nobody has been left out.
2. All authors accept to be held responsible for all aspects of their work when published.
3. The submitted manuscript is original and has not been published elsewhere. It is not presently under consideration of publication by any other journal.
4. The data reported have been acquired according to the current ethical standards.
5. There is no copied material from anyone else. Adequate referencing/citation of any sources used, including own prior publications, has been done.
6. The Conflict of Interest form as developed by the International Committee of Medical Science Editors (ICMJE) has been completed.
7. The authors accept that if any statements listed here are found to be no longer true in the wake of publication, an official withdrawal/retraction may result.

Now what's all this?

**Instructions for Authors** are meant to be the general guidelines on how to compile a manuscript for a certain journal. Many items are identical or similar between journals, others are not. Publishing remains an individual task which, in turn, makes the scene of scientific literature refreshingly diverse. With a changing environment and further development of techniques and facilities, it is one of the Editor's numerous tasks to update these instructions every now and then. For *The Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgeon* and its open access sister journal *The Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgeon Reports*, this time has come.

In the new version, authors will find more detailed information on requirements for figures and tables as well as video submissions and more. Adherence to technical regulations should avoid prompt unsubmission for formal reasons, something we unfortunately still see far too often. Authors must bear in mind that these instructions were not written to make their life more miserable but with the optimistic basic composure that the manuscript will be

accepted and then undergo the publisher's production process—which is where most of the purely technical prerequisites do come from.

In addition there are the **basic conditions for a scientific manuscript** as such which one would think should be matters of course. Unfortunately they are not.<sup>1</sup> Although we are a relatively small journal with a select and close author- and readership, we still see cases of fraud every year. For big journals with a high reputation and lots of submissions this is even more of a problem, resulting in a constant number of retractions, which in turn damages their renown.<sup>2</sup> The scientific community has developed a series of requirements, let us call them "moral instructions," the adherence to which should in fact guarantee that the published material is true and was acquired under decent circumstances.

The **International Committee of Medical Science Editors (ICMJE)**<sup>3</sup> constantly updates its recommendations deliberating on such seemingly trivial subjects like who should be called an author (and, perhaps more important, who should not).

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The **ICMJE** has also published a very explicit **Conflict of Interest** declaration form which was gladly accepted by many journals including this one.<sup>4</sup>

The **Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)** is a valuable source mainly for editors and publishers to resort to in case of doubt about ethical integrity.<sup>5</sup> Authors are well advised to be familiar with these best practice consensus statements.

The **CONSORT Statement (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials)**<sup>6</sup> is required by many journals for manuscripts reporting randomized clinical trials. For authors, it provides a flow diagram and a helpful checklist to be submitted together with the manuscript.

For observational studies, more common in the surgical community, there is a similar helpline: **STROBE Statement (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology)**,<sup>7,8</sup> again providing useful checklists tailored to the type of study (to be) done.

In the field of secondary sources, such as systematic reviews and the overly popular meta-analyses, there is the **PRISMA Statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)**,<sup>9</sup> complete with checklist and flow diagram for manuscript submission.

Animal rights are a big issue with the cardiothoracic surgical community because the evaluation of new operative techniques and medical devices often requires testing in large animal models. The standards universally agreed upon can be found in the **ARRIVE guidelines (Animal Research: Reporting of In Vivo Experiments)**.<sup>10</sup> Local regulations may apply in addition. There are detailed ones issued by the European Union<sup>11</sup> and the United States of America.<sup>12</sup>

A very helpful organization offering access to all these and other useful Websites as well as providing excellent guidance for the conscientious scientist is the **Equator Network (Enhancing the QUALity and Transparency Of health Research)**.<sup>13</sup>

The **Declaration of Helsinki**, as developed by the **World Medical Association (WMA)**, defines the fundamental “ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects including research on identifiable human material and data.”<sup>14</sup> One cannot repeat often enough its simple point of origin “the health of my patient will be my first consideration.”

**Data retention:** Authors must be prepared to provide the original research data, on which their manuscript is based, to the Editor. These data must be retained for several years in case there are doubts about reproducibility or, worse, the suspicion of manipulation or fabrication. Many journals are introducing mandatory open data sharing, especially in the basic sciences.

**Originality:** The same research should not be published in more than one journal. Multiple, redundant, or concurrent submission or even publication is considered unacceptable unethical behavior and will be reported if detected.

Bearing in mind that Instructions for Authors are to facilitate the writing process we have now compiled the relevant standards in one source: this Editorial. It is linked directly from the Instructions. All authors should thereby be

aware of and agree to the statements made in the Abstract above. The number of forms to be filled in and submitted for each manuscript, independent of the type of research done, has consequently been kept to a minimum: (1) the declaration of any or no conflict of interest, according to the ICMJE,<sup>4</sup> and (2) our very own Conditions for Publication form which needs to be manually signed (for a good reason) by each individual listed as an author. Where required, IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval must, of course, be individually stated in the Methods section.

One may still brazenly lie, of course, but to do so in public in detail and in writing should have a comparatively high inhibition threshold. With technology for fraud detection being constantly updated and utilized routinely, also by this journal, the chances of being found out are very, very likely. And the higher one tried to rise, the deeper one is bound to fall—and rightly so.

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