How to avoid major revisions?

Round Table #3 on writing and submitting manuscripts for publication in scientific journals

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Reviewer's assessment grid

Novelty/originality (state them)

Scientific quality (methodology, arguments, critical mind, results, transparency)

Clarity of presentation (wording, sentences, conducting line)

Grammar and spelling (English proof read)

Conclusions supported by the data (demonstrate it)

Manuscript appropriate for the journal (editor as first filter)

Structure of the manuscript appropriate (aligned to your goals)

Tables, figures and data appropriate (quality and selection)

Subject worthy of investigation/importance in the field? (show)

Outline

1. How to construct a paper?
   - different writing steps
   - structure and role of each part
2. How to choose a journal?
   - scope and estimated review duration
3. Cover letter
   - objectives and contents
4. Answer to the reviewers

Prerequisites

Clearly identified and formulated gap of knowledge

Awareness of the literature, originality identified

Solid, triple-checked, novel results available

Original main findings and sub-results are crystallized

Different steps of writing a manuscript

Step 1 (iterations with supervisor) – Build the skeleton/structure; for instance:

1. Introduction
2. Methodology
3. Results
4. Discussion
5. Conclusions and outlook

Different steps of writing a manuscript

Step 1 (iterations with supervisor) – Build the skeleton/structure

Step 2 (iter.) – Bullet point list of ideas (crude) in each section

Step 3 (iter.) – Selection of figures and data

Step 4 (iter.) – Transforming bullet points into paragraphs

Step 5 – Formatting and volume check (condensing)

Step 6 – Proof reading before sending to supervisor(s)

Birth of sections in chronological order

1. Methodology (while studying the results)

2. Results + discussion (after proper analysis and condensation)

3. Conclusions

4. Introduction + references (yes, intro finished last)

5. Abstract + title

Structure and role of each section

Title + keywords = search engine results

short title with all necessary keywords - always read!

Abstract = basis of deciding reading further

problem statement (gap of knowledge) + your approach and originality + achieved findings

1. Introduction = problem statement + gap + originality + method

targeted literature review that justifies your work (read if the abstract is interesting, together with the conclusions)

Structure and role of each section

2. Methodology = all relevant features of your approach
assumptions listed + sufficient details for reproducibility and transparency + justification of parameters/choices + recall originality (usually read when the paper is read in details)

3. Results = your original findings
description and interpretation of the results (usually read after reading the conclusions)

4. Discussion = validity of findings in view of the assumptions
demonstration of your critical mind + comparing to literature

5. Conclusion = relevant findings listed in decreasing order of impact (checked to decide reading further)

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How to choose a journal?

Your results are generally fit for several journals – finding a journal = compromise between impact – review time – probability

Good practice:

0. list potential journals (cited by you, known in the field,...)
1. find a journal at the level of the originality, novelty of your findings (IF) + their contribution to the state of the art
2. choose a journal that you are citing in your manuscript
3. double-check the promised review duration (no guarantee)
4. go from ambitious to more attainable choices, if time allows
5. verify that the work fits in the journal scope (see cover letter)
6. ask around for the target journal reputation and experience

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Cover letter

Objectives: state the originality and the alignment of the contribution to the scope of the journal to the editor (1st filter)

Contents:

1. main subject and originality,
2. brief description of what the work consisted of,
3. bullet point list of the novel findings,
4. statement of why the contribution fits the journal,

...addressed directly to the editor.

It should be straight to the point, concise (1 page) and complete!

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Answer to reviewers

Reviewers do the review in their free time + pressure from journal for rapid review = Expecting an appropriate answer to their effort.

1. Read, interpret and understand the raised points
2. Consider each idea separately = dissect into ideas
3. Give an exhaustive answer to each comment/question
4. Freedom of interpretation of unclear comments
5. Argument using external references
6. Good practice: comment – answer – action taken
7. Acknowledge the work of the reviewer
8. Neutral tone when disagreeing with proper justification
9. Prepare a manuscript with modifications highlighted