

A well-written paper

A simple Internet search with the words “publishing scientific papers” immediately pulls up advertisements by different scientific publishing companies, promising: “*The best tutors on more than 200 scientific topics*”, “*consultancy to students for writing papers, ranging from high school term papers to PhD dissertations*”, and “*building bridges between research and publication*”. What has led to this proliferation in the supply of professional help that was considered unnecessary until just a few years ago?

The first answer is the pressure to publish, especially in certain highly competitive journals. Lucrative journals are the ones that stand out in this market with the best-written and most appealing papers. The common discourse among professionals in these publishing companies is that scientists need to learn to “sell their product better”. However, beyond the marketing stimulus, we should reflect on the process of producing scientific papers, especially in Public Health.

Let’s start by recalling how we used to consult colleagues for advice and opinions on our articles. A semi-finished article was read and criticized before submission. This allowed the author to polish the text, making it more readable. Not to mention the time it took for the paper to mature. The issue was not the number of articles that a research project could generate, but their content. But enough of nostalgia! Papers were also written by hand, and it was expensive to introduce any alterations after the text had already been typewritten.

This brings us back to our initial problem. What do we actually want with a scientific paper? That it be read, and that it contribute (even modestly) to knowledge in our field. Authors often forget the end reader in this process. The rush to submit an article makes the authors careless, which (in addition to lack of practice and limited help from more experienced researchers) leaves editors and reviewers with the unpleasant task of saying (although not always in so many words): your paper is awful!

Sometimes we say this with a heavy heart: the paper’s idea may be innovative, a huge amount of work may have gone into the data collection and research, but... the end result is virtually unintelligible. Other times we receive a well-written article, free of grammatical errors, but which gets so bogged down in details that by the end we can’t figure out the author’s point. Other papers are submitted with mismatches between the introduction and the discussion, or between the objectives and the methods. Not to mention the abstract, perhaps the most essential piece of the process, yet the most neglected. It is not uncommon for *Cadernos* to receive a submission whose abstract fails to make the paper’s content clear.

Reflecting on these issues, we are proposing some changes in *Cadernos*. We plan to begin with a revision of the instructions to authors, seeking to specify what is expected of each type of article in the journal’s various sections. We also intend to introduce an evaluation, and if necessary we will intervene in the wording of articles that are quasi-approved. In such cases, in addition to the routine grammatical revision, the paper’s structure and logic will receive professional treatment, as already provided by some journals. We do not intend to produce standardized texts, stripped of their original expressiveness, but rather to improve the final writing of papers that have been pre-approved for publication, making them more appealing and especially more comprehensible to readers. Importantly, we are not suggesting that authors hire professional writing services, but rather that they take a closer look and do a more painstaking job on their papers.

We have been increasingly rigorous with the quality of articles published by *Cadernos*, including the text itself. Based on the submissions we have received thus far, our rejection rate in 2013 should reach practically 90%. A well-written paper produces several advantages: better odds of being accepted, speedier publication, and especially more interesting reading.

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