

Mini-Grand Rounds

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**“Writers Workshop – How to Write
a Paper for Publication”**



OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the key elements of the properly submitted manuscript for submission to a surgical journal.
2. Discuss the many common errors made in manuscript submission, which typically lead to manuscript rejection.
3. How do you respond to criticisms from the journal's editorial board?

OBJECTIVE #1

RECOGNIZE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PROPERLY SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPT FOR SUBMISSION TO A SURGICAL JOURNAL

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS FORM

Individuals claiming authorship should **meet all 3 of the following conditions** in accordance with the “Consensus Statement on Surgery Journals Authorship—2005”:

- 1) Authors make substantial contributions to conception and design, and/or acquisition of data, and/or analysis and interpretation of data;
- 2) Authors participate in drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and
- 3) Authors give final approval of the version to be submitted and any revised version.

Each author should have participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content. **Allowing one’s name to appear as an author without having contributed significantly to the study or adding the name of an individual who has not contributed or who has not agreed to the work in its current form is considered a breach of appropriate authorship.**

Title of Your Manuscript:
Thoughtful and Informative

Paul McCartney, M.D.
George Harrison, M.D.
Ringo Starr, M.D.
and
John Lennon, M.D.

The Department of Surgery
Liverpool University
Liverpool, U.S.A.

Presented as a plenary talk at the 50th annual meeting of the Society for Surgery of the Alimentary Tract, Hamburg Germany, May 2013

Running Head: Your thoughtful and informative work

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ABSTRACT

Objective:

Background:

Methods:

Results:

Conclusions:

Key Words:

INTRODUCTION

- **Set the stage... What is the topic you have designed this study to investigate?**
- **Tell the reader, in a single sentence, why this paper deserves to be read.**
- **What prior studies have been done in this area? (Any new study is a piece of a larger puzzle.)**
- **“This study was designed to test the hypothesis that...”**

METHODS

- What population used?
- Retrospective v. Prospective
- Database review v. RCT
- IRB approval
- Statistical analyses
- For “bench” work the details are important
- Follow published guidelines for RCT (CONSORT) and meta-analyses (PRISMA)

RESULTS

- **Start with the population, demographics and the big picture**
- **Hone in on the key findings**
- **Use text, tables and figures, but avoid full repetition**
- **For most clinical studies, supplemental tables and figures not needed**

DISCUSSION

- **First paragraph – why is this study important and did you prove or disprove the hypothesis?**
- **Then in the next few paragraphs provide a thoughtful review of the key elements of the Results**
- **One paragraph on other studies in the area that support or refute your findings.**
- **One paragraph on the limitations of the data/study; every study has limitations**
- **Summarize in the final paragraph – what is the take home message? Use “In conclusion,...” or “In summary,...”**
- **Beware that overstating the conclusions is a sure way to annoy a knowledgeable reviewer.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- **Why not thank those who did not do enough to be an author?**
- **Gifts of special reagents, animals, software, etc. can be described here.**
- **Did you get inspiration from a colleague?**
- **Many journals ask you to list funding agency support here.**
- **How about nurses and residents who cared for these patients?**

REFERENCES

- **Format as per the journal requirements**
- **Common place for errors, typos and omissions – so proofread these carefully**

TABLES

- One table per page
- Title at the top of the page
- Not every minute piece of data needs be presented
- Footnote - defines abbreviations in the table

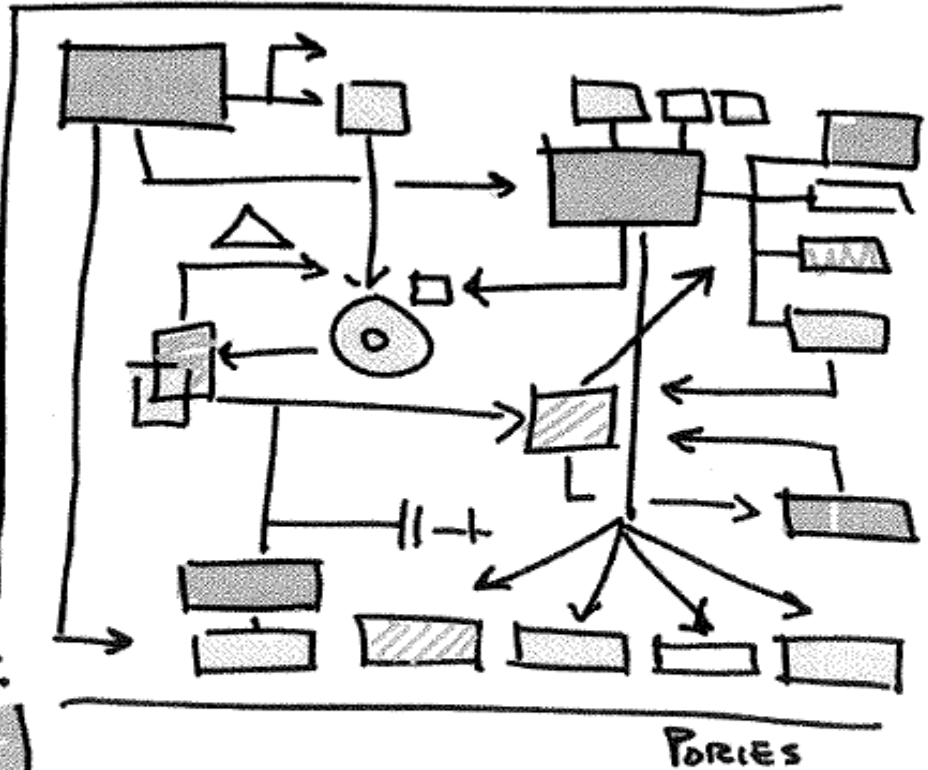
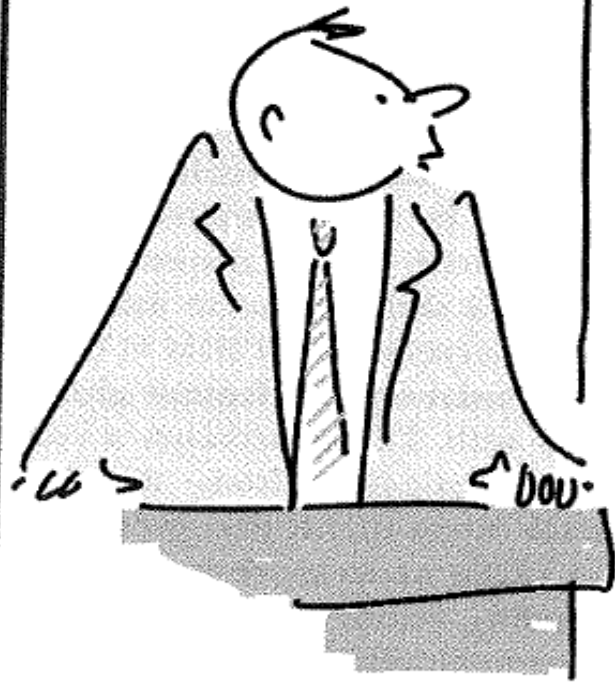
FIGURES and LEGENDS

- For radiographic images: describe the findings, add arrows and use high quality original work
- Follow the format requested by the journal
- Avoid poor quality intraoperative photos – often not interpretable
- Teach the readers
- Make Kaplan-Meier survival curves readable
- Include statistical information, if appropriate

FIGURES

- Last element of the submission
- One per page
- High quality
- No patient names or identifying features
- If K-M survival curves with two or more groups, the curves should be clearly labeled and disparately displayed.
- Beware you may be asked to pay for color in the print version

I.V. League



"This next slide clarifies this concept..."

OBJECTIVE #2

**DISCUSS THE MANY COMMON ERRORS
MADE IN MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION, WHICH
TYPICALLY LEAD TO MANUSCRIPT
REJECTION**

COMMON ERRORS – 1

- Improperly formatted – follow “Instructions to Authors” for the specific journal
- Numerous errors in English grammar and usage
- Numerous spelling errors
- Failing to number the pages of the submission
- No clear development of hypothesis (in Introduction), to Methods, to Results, to Discussion
- Not stating the (many) limitations of the study in the Discussion
- Overstating conclusions... i.e. not making the correct connection from the data to the conclusions

COMMON ERRORS – 2

- The Introduction is too long, rambling and not focused
- Abbreviations not defined at first use: e.g.: congestive heart failure (CHF)
- Abbreviations not defined as footnotes in Tables
- Statistical analyses not clear and difficult to follow
- Figure legends do not describe the figure well, arrows not present, etc. (educate the reader!)
- Figures are sloppy intraoperative photos that do not focus on the key elements
- Tables misaligned

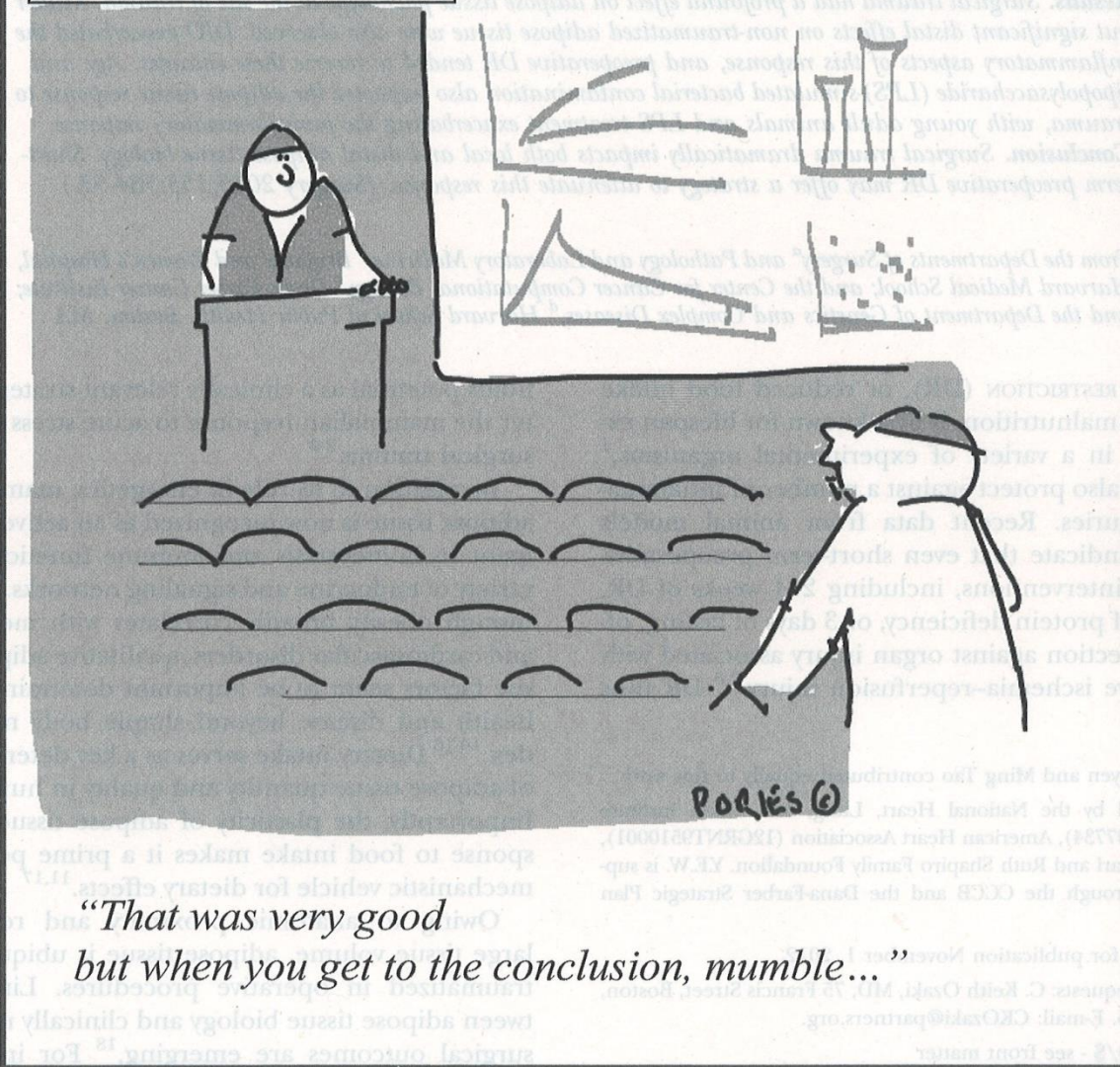
COMMON ERRORS – 3

- **Lack of agreement of data between text and tables/figures (e.g. number in text says $n = 15$, and the table says $n = 16$; oops!)**
- **Percentages in tables should add to 100% (e.g. $50\% + 24\% + 29\% = 103\%$; oops)**
- **Write out numbers one to nine, then use Arabic numerals for 10 and higher**
- **Avoid repetition of all values in Results section of text and Tables/Figures**
- **Remember, “data” are plural: “The data indicate...”**

FINAL TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- The key to a good manuscript – tell a convincing story.
- Always, always, always have your co-authors read the Abstract and entire manuscript text thoroughly – a must!
- Return colleagues' manuscripts promptly... the 48-hour rule
- Helpful to have someone completely naïve to the study read it... for clarity, presentation and content
- Simple, clear and concise are better than complicated, muddy and verbose
- Avoid “It was a dark and stormy night...”
- No one writes a final perfect draft on the first try. To paraphrase Nike: “Just write it!”

I.V. League



*"That was very good
but when you get to the conclusion, mumble..."*

OBJECTIVE #3

**HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO CRITICISMS
FROM THE JOURNAL'S EDITORIAL BOARD?**

GENERAL CONCEPTS – 1

- If given a chance to revise, odds are in your favor for acceptance.
- Don't take criticism “personally”. View the reviewers' comments as suggestions to improve your manuscript.
- Don't be argumentative in your response. You will only hurt your chances for ultimate acceptance
- Follow instructions to shorten text or eliminate figures and tables, regardless how “important” you feel they might be
- If problems in English usage or grammar are cited, get professional help

GENERAL CONCEPTS – 2

- If questions related to statistical analysis, get professional help
- Make changes evident in revised manuscript (track changes or bold)
- If you cannot make “suggested” changes, respectfully explain why
- Be prompt in response to the request for revision
- Provide a point-by-point cover letter which deals with all reviewers’ criticisms
- If manuscript rejected, still use the reviewers’ comments to improve your manuscript for submission to the next journal

POINT-BY-POINT COVER LETTER

- Show appreciation to reviewers/editor for their review, and state that the revisions have improved the manuscript
- Address all comments; point-by-point
- Define specific changes in your letter and state how they are depicted (in bold)
- Make the reviewer/editors job easy, example:

Reviewer Comment: Please provide length of stay data for both groups

Response: The length of stay following EVAAR was 3.1 days versus 8.5 days in the open AAA repair

FINAL THOUGHTS

- From our expected faculty behaviors: “As part of the academic faculty, each faculty member is expected to bring to fruition at a minimum two or three academic projects annually....”
- H-Index – for people; suggested by Jorge Hirsch, a physicist at UCSD; attempts to measure both the productivity and impact of the published work of a scholar/scientist
- Impact Factor – for journals; a measure reflecting the average number of citations to recent articles published in the journal
- Nike - “Just write it”