

# How to Get Published: What Are Journal Editors Looking for?☆



A. Robert Denniss, MD, MSc, FRACP, FCSANZ<sup>a,b,c</sup>,  
Ann T Gregory, MBBS, GradDipPopHealth<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Editor-in-Chief, Heart Lung and Circulation

<sup>b</sup>Department of Cardiology, Westmead Hospital, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia

<sup>c</sup>Department of Cardiology, Blacktown Hospital, Western Sydney University, Sydney, NSW, Australia

<sup>d</sup>Commissioning Editor, Heart Lung and Circulation, Sydney, NSW, Australia

In 2016, *Heart, Lung and Circulation* (HLC) celebrated 25 years of continuous publication [1]. Special events included “Meet the Editor” sessions at the 2016 Annual Scientific Meetings of the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand (CSANZ) and of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Cardiac and Thoracic Surgeons (ANZSCTS) [2]. Led by Robert Denniss, Editor-in-Chief of HLC, the sessions featured panels of editors from several other internationally recognised cardiology and cardiothoracic surgery journals. These sessions gave both prospective early career and experienced authors direct insight into what Editors-in-Chief of peer-reviewed publications are looking for when identifying papers for publication in their journals.

## What Do All Journals Need?

Both sessions began with a point-by-point “back to basics” review of elements all journals need to be successful:

### All Journals Need Good Material to Publish

In HLC’s case, topical Reviews (both systematic and narrative), Original Articles (both basic and clinical science) and Position Statements and Guidelines are particularly sought as these are most useful to readers, as reflected in the Journal’s citation rates and downloads [3]; Case Reports are no longer sought.

### All Journals Need Lots of Contributors

HLC welcomes contributions irrespective of the authors’ country of origin. As seen in Tables of Contents, authors

from Australasia, China and the USA are particularly well represented. HLC welcomes contributors across the academic spectrum — from various disciplines, and at all career points, from entry to retirement. Since 2015, HLC has offered a Best Review Prize to early career “first” authors of published reviews.

### All Journals Need a Bank of Reliable Peer Reviewers

HLC is appreciative of the many members of the international scientific and medical community, with appropriate subspecialist interests and including statisticians, who engage on a regular basis to assist in assessing the merits of submissions, and in recommending enhancement to Journal content.

### All Journals Need an Enthusiastic Editorial Team

HLC is fortunate to enjoy the active participation of Section Editors for submissions relating to various disciplines and areas of interest, including basic cardiovascular science, interventional cardiology, heart rhythm disorders, cardiac imaging, cardiovascular nursing and allied health, and Indigenous cardiovascular issues. An International Editorial Board provides further breadth and depth in relevant expertise. A small, dedicated “in-house” team comprising a part-time Editorial Manager, Deborah Edward, and Commissioning Editor, Ann Gregory, and publishing support provided by Elsevier, are also essential to success.

☆ This Editorial is based on a Presentation given by Professor A. Robert Denniss at the ANZSCTS Annual Scientific Meeting, Cairns, Qld, Australia, November 2016.

## All Journals Need a Rapid Turnaround Time From Submission to Acceptance or Rejection

HLC continually aims to reduce this time with ongoing initiatives, such as seeking appropriate expert reviewer suggestions from submitting authors, and increasing the number of Section Editors available to handle manuscripts.

## All Journals Need Wide Readership, With Ready Access to the Journal in Print or On-line

HLC is readily accessed at [www.heartlungcirc.org](http://www.heartlungcirc.org), and some material is freely available.

## All Journals Need Continuing Engagement With Research and Practice Communities

Social media provides a general forum for such engagement (via [tweeting@heartlungcirc](https://twitter.com/heartlungcirc)); specific key events may also be attended, such as Festschrifts [4,5], or national and international scientific meetings.

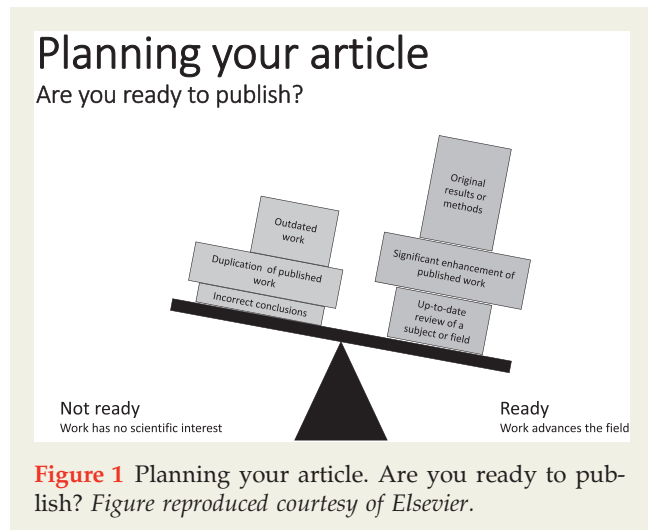
## All Journals Need to be Prepared to Move With the Time and Appeal to a Global Audience

Just as HLC developed from an idea to reality in a quarter of century [6], HLC continues to evolve [2]. It has been predicted that HLC will still be published in 2040, even stronger and more interesting, but will in no way look like the Journal we are familiar with today! [7]

## Are You Ready to Publish?

A critical question for authors to consider is whether they are ready to publish their work. As a simple guide, the work is *not* ready for publication if it has little or no scientific merit or interest, if it is outdated, if it duplicates already published work or if it reaches incorrect conclusions. However, the work *is* ready for publication if it advances the field, if it presents original results and methods or if it is an up-to-date review of a subject or field (Figure 1). A strong manuscript will carry a clear message presented in a logical manner: readers will be able to grasp the meaning of the work.

When planning your article, think about what type of manuscript you will be writing: a full original research article; a brief communication or letter to the Editor, or a review. A full article is appropriate for a substantial, complete and comprehensive piece of research. Short and early communications can be considered when results or message are so thrilling that they should be shared as soon as possible. Review papers may be submitted by invitation, and generally are summaries of recent developments within a specific area of interest or topic. Colleagues and academic



supervisors can be good sources for advice on the best manuscript types for your work.

When writing, think about how to make your paper important. Important papers are likely to have at least some, if not all, of the following features. They will be:

- Novel. Different from previous studies;
- Direct. The message of the paper needs to be presented within the first two sentences and the last sentence of the abstract;
- Definitive (in some way). For example, the paper may report the largest series, the most extensive study or be the best in its field;
- Interesting. Not boring or confusing but easy-to-read;
- Succinct. A paper is not a thesis;
- Thoughtful. The discussion section of the paper needs to focus on the novel findings of your work, why they matter (and why they have not been reported previously); and,
- "Clean" and clear. Any grammatical and spelling mistakes, which can be unnecessarily distracting and confusing, should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Further, important papers will have no evidence of ethical misconduct, the most serious and common forms in publication being fabrication (making up research data), falsification (the manipulation of existing research data) and plagiarism, in which previously published work is "passed off" as one's own. Any ethical misconduct, once detected, will lead to likely repercussions for any associated authors, as with any form of academic misconduct [8,9].

## How Can You Get Your Paper Published?

Firstly, select the right journal for your work. The good news is that not only editors but also reviewers and readers want to receive well-presented manuscripts that fit within the aims and scope of their journal.

If you are uncertain where to submit, look to see if the journal has published papers in the same topic area. If you are seeking to publish in an Open Access journal, check that it is listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) at <https://doaj.org/>. If you are considering paying to publish your paper, beware of potential predatory journals: a general rule of thumb is that if a Journal sounds too good to be true, it probably is (too good to be true)! Rosenfeldt, HLC's first Editor-in-Chief, and colleagues suggested that authors decide which journal will receive their "completed masterpiece" before they begin the writing process [10]. This is because a journal's criteria for the format, length and file requirements for submissions will need to be addressed, and are generally defined in guidelines for prospective authors.

Secondly, do emphasise the novelty of your work but also acknowledge any overlap with the work of other in the Discussion. (In other words, ensure you discuss any relevant papers by likely reviewers.)

Thirdly, be as accurate as possible in your work, your writing and your submission process: seek early statistical input to minimise methodological errors and check for submission errors. For example, have you addressed your covering letter to the correct Editor and Journal? (Be aware that automatic spell checkers can play havoc at this point.) And, have you followed the submission instructions for the journal?

Last, but not least, sort out authorship, including the order of authors. In fact, ideally, decisions about who will be an author and the order of authors should be made before starting to write up a project. To be clear, an "author" is generally considered to be an individual who has made substantial intellectual contribution to a published study. Be aware that being an author comes with credit but also with responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

If you have done well, your manuscript will progress to peer review and you may receive an opportunity to revise your manuscript in the light of reviewer comments received. Such an opportunity is to be welcomed: consider all feedback, including editors' comments thoughtfully. Respond reasonably, politely, and never aggressively. Think of this step as a respectful negotiation between interested parties.

Hopefully, your paper will proceed to be accepted for publication. Sometimes it will not.

## Why Was My Paper Rejected?

It is just as useful to know when and why a paper was "rejected", as it is to know how to increase the chances of acceptance of a paper for publication.

A paper can be rejected at any point from submission onwards: on initial review, if judged not suitable for the journal (for example, a neurological case submitted to a

cardiology journal of limited interest to the readership) or of low priority for the journal (for example, many journals, including HLC, are no longer seeking to published reports of single cases); after appraisal by external reviewers; after re-evaluation by a journal editor; and, more recently, if so-called "plagiarism software" reports a high "similarity index" which, on investigation, is consistent with insufficient originality or even plagiarism [2].

The reasons for rejection can include any one or more of the following flaws: methodological concerns; lack of (or insufficient) originality; a high similarity index; an incorrect interpretation (usually an over-interpretation) of results; poor presentation and grammar; and, lastly, insufficient priority for the journal in question.

It almost goes without saying that the more prestigious the journal, the higher the rejection rate for submissions. On the other hand, all original work will have a degree of merit, and as today's scientific community continues to afford so many opportunities to publish, we are confident all authors of original works will find an appropriate "home" for their work.

## Acknowledgements

"Meet the Editor" session panellists at CSANZ 2016: Andrew Tonkin (Main Reasons for Rejection), Andrew Coats (Art & Science of Getting Work Accepted) and Paul Schoenhagen (Digital Journals and Social Media); and at ANZSCTS 2016: Joel Dunning, Julian Smith and Paul Bannon.

## References

- [1] Denniss AR, Gregory AT. Countdown to a Silver Jubilee for Heart, Lung and Circulation Journal in 2016 – Looking Back in Order to Move Forward. *Heart Lung Circ* 2015;24(12):1137–40.
- [2] Gregory AT, Denniss AR. Heart, Lung and Circulation Evolves: A Fond Farewell to Our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year and a Warm Welcome to New Initiatives. *Heart Lung Circ* 2016;25(12):1145–7.
- [3] Gregory AT, Denniss AR. Impact by Citations and Downloads: what are Heart, Lung and Circulation's Top 25 Articles of All Times? *Heart Lung Circ* 2016;25(8):743–9.
- [4] Figtree GA, Nelson GIC, Bhindi R. Festschrift for Professor Stephen Hunyor — Celebrating his Clinical and Scientific Contribution and the Legacy he has Left at Royal North Shore Hospital, and the Broader Cardiovascular Research Community. *Heart Lung Circ* 2017;26:6–9.
- [5] Denniss AR, Gregory AT. Festschrift in honour of David Leslie Ross: A Man for Whom no Electrogram is Goliath. *Heart Lung Circ* 2016;25(5):421–4.
- [6] Rosenfeldt F. Heart, Lung and Circulation: From Idea to Reality in a Quarter of a Century. *Heart Lung Circ* 2016;25(8):735–9.
- [7] Jeremy RW, Denniss AR. Qua Vadimus: Heart, Lung and Circulation in 2040. *Heart Lung Circ* 2016;25:740–2.
- [8] Binder R, Friedli A, Fuentes-Afflick E. The New Academic Environment and Faculty Misconduct. *Acad Med* 2016;91(2):175–9.
- [9] Fred HL, Scheid MS. Egregious plagiarism: more than misconduct. *Tex Heart Inst J* 2017;44(1):7–8.
- [10] Rosenfeldt FR, Dowling JT, Pepe S, Fullerton M. How to Write a Paper for Publication. *Heart Lung Circ* 2000;9:82–7.