

What you say depends on how you say it: updated Instructions for Authors

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With this issue, the senior editorial board of *CJEM* announces revised Instructions for Authors. This announcement reflects both a continued rise in the quality of submissions and our ongoing aim to publish clear, accurate and important contributions to the medical literature. New blood in the editorial office has provided the opportunity to update these instructions, and in certain cases raises the reporting standards for original observations.

The duality of form and substance is central to literary criticism, the arts and rhetoric. The style and structure of the archival scientific literature, however, requires uniformity to maintain the emphasis on the message. *CJEM* has long recognized this and continues to endorse the Uniform Requirements statement from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.¹ In fact, the deceptively simple instruction in the Manuscript Preparation opening sentence, which refers readers to the ICMJE website remains unchanged, and provides an excellent first step for any author crafting a paper. Contrary to popular opinion, these requirements deal with much more than criteria for authorship and formatting of citations, and experienced authors will also benefit from this resource.

Facilitation of the peer review process

Prospective authors should not stop there, however, and should read the entire instructions carefully throughout the manuscript preparation process. While many of us bristle at the thought of preprinted orders for managing asthmatic patients in our department, standardizing the format of manuscripts facilitates the peer review process. Complying with these instructions demonstrates a respect for our

reviewer's valuable time. Reviewers also learn that sloppy writing and sloppy science go hand in hand. The same meticulous attention that is given to the research itself should be paid to the accuracy in writing the report.

Initiatives to improve quality

There is abundant prima facie evidence that scientific writing needs all the help it can get.² A variety of initiatives, such as the CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) statement for reporting randomized controlled trials and the STARD (Standards for Reporting of Diagnostic Accuracy) statement for reporting the diagnostic accuracy of tests, have been developed not only to standardize, but also to improve the quality and clarity of such papers.³ It has been more than a decade since Gilbert and colleagues proposed methodologic criteria for assessing the quality of retrospective medical record reviews (a.k.a. chart reviews),⁴ but the uptake remains poor for this popular design.⁵

Clinical trial registration

In addition to endorsing these initiatives, *CJEM* now requires registration of any clinical trial. Investigators should be aware that the ICMJE defines a clinical trial as any research project that prospectively assigns human subjects to intervention or concurrent comparison or control groups to study the cause-and-effect relationship between a medical intervention and a health outcome. These medical interventions include not only drugs and devices, but also surgical procedures, behavioural treatments, process-of-care changes and the like.¹

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In the end, however, obtaining the imprimatur of these checklists should not distract authors from their primary goal: to deliver a clear and cogent message to the current and future readership. *CJEM* has always encouraged precision and clarity of thought expressed in concise and direct language. Many of us may be guilty of emphasizing adherence to methodologic standards and rigorous statistical analyses over language in both our work and our reviews. A variety of excellent monographs can be recommended,⁶⁻⁹ and will be assigned as penance to our most egregious offenders. Consider yourselves warned.

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