Choosing the Right Journal for a Scientific Paper
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Abstract
Authors need to take the crucial decision of choosing the journal for their prospective manuscript before even starting to write it. Although, this choice is influenced by many factors, matching the intended recipients of the main message of the manuscript with a journal’s readership should override all other consideration in journal selection. That done, availability of time-bound review process, journal’s visibility, indexation in databases, regularity of publication, acceptance rate and expenses involved are some other factors that will help decide the choice.

Introduction
In the world of scholarship, it is not only important that scientists publish their work; but publish it in a good journal. It is often said the worth of one’s research work can be judged better by the names of journals where the work is published rather than by the titles of the articles that have been written. Selecting an appropriate journal early is important from a logistical viewpoint, as well. Journals have different styles and requirements in terms of sections, style in which abstract is written, permitted word count, way of citing references, etc. If the journal is selected first, the authors can write the manuscript in the way it is required to be written right from the beginning.¹,² If the manuscript is written prior to journal selection, the authors need to spend time and effort on altering the article format to suit journal style and requirements.

The authors should aim at publishing the manuscript is the best possible journal in the shortest possible time,³ but, selecting a journal is never straight-forward, as authors need to pay attention to several (some of them contrasting and contradictory) considerations. Author’s career stage and the urgency of receiving the acceptance also influence the choice. For example, a young researcher, in search of a job, would usually prefer a journal that will accept and quickly publish the article.⁴ In comparison those at a higher level would rather prefer journals that are indexed, have higher visibility and are considered prestigious; even though they may have lower acceptance rate and the acceptance would occur only after an arduous review process spread over months.

This communication would discuss some of the important considerations on which journal selection is generally based upon.

Factors that Influence Journal Selection
What is the Message and Who is it Appropriate For?
When it is decided to write an article, the first thing the authors should do is to recognize the main theme and the predominant message of the article they are intending to write. They should then identify the target group for who the message is primarily meant. For example, the primary theme could be of interest to general physicians, specialists or super-specialists. “We had interesting case of a child with prolonged fever and rash; which was diagnosed by most pediatricians as a case of measles. However, as the intensity and frequency of fever episodes continued even after the appearance of the rash, a diagnosis of Kawasaki Disease was considered and proved. Early diagnosis of Kawasaki Disease is important to spare the patient from long-term cardiac sequels. Although, such a patient would be managed by a pediatrician, we thought that most patients with fever and rash seek medical help from general practitioners. Hence, we decided to submit the case report to a journal primarily read by general practitioners.”

“There was another case of a three-day old baby having vomiting, aversion to feeds and lethargy. Most doctors considered the diagnosis of septicemia. However, the case was diagnosed to have a metabolic disorder, transient hyperammonemia of the newborn (THAN). If diagnosed early and managed appropriately during the period of hyperammonemia, this condition has a good prognosis. As sick neonates are generally taken

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to pediatricians for management, we decided to report this case in a journal read primarily by pediatricians with a purpose of reminding them to consider diagnoses other than sepsis.6

Depending upon the target group, one could then make a list of journals that are primarily read by the concerned group. It may also be useful to determine if the message is important for international readers, compatriot doctors or for those practicing in the local region. Based on this consideration, one can choose an international, national or a regional journal, respectively. For example, report of a case of an infectious disease for the first time in a country could be of interest to a national or regional journal; while a study related to a novel treatment for control of diabetes or hypertension could be appropriate for an international journal. Similarly, regional journals would be interested in reporting the pattern of antimicrobial resistance in ICUs in a city and a study on novel interventions to prevent severe malnutrition in children can be considered as appropriate for national and tropical journals.

One can also check the shortlisted journals’ websites to find out information about their aims and scope3,7 and their primary readership. Sending articles to journals without doing this exercise increases the chances of rejection. Remember, once an article is received by a Journal editor, the first step he takes is to check if the article would be of interest to its readers. While browsing the journal website, author should also check if the journal publishes the type of article he intends to write. For example, there is no point in sending a Case Report to a journal that has stopped reporting cases or submitting a narrative review to a journal which publishes only systematic reviews. The authors should also browse through the last few issues of the short-listed journals to see if the journal has published an article similar to what the authors intend to write. For example, if the journal has published a case report of a rare syndrome in the last few months, it is unlikely to consider another article on the same syndrome for publication.

Is the Journal Peer-reviewed?

A peer-reviewed journal is the one wherein submitted articles are published only after being evaluated by other experts in the field. The multi-layered review process could consist of editors, reviewers and statisticians. Initially, the editor reviews the article for its focus and suitability for the journal and is then reviewed by technical editors (for the format of the article and adherence to the journal’s style), section editors (for its contents), statisticians (for the appropriateness of statistical methods) and subject experts (or reviewers). This is a time-consuming process that, at times, tries authors’ patience in trying to satisfy several reviewers. Still, authors should always attempt to publish their work in peer reviewed journals. Some journals guarantee publication of submitted articles. They do not carry any worthwhile content review and hence are able to publish the article quickly. First-time authors should resist the temptation of submitting articles to such journals, as articles published here are not valued highly by the scientific community.

Acceptance Rate

As authors do not want to face rejection; they may want to consider acceptance rate as one of the criteria for choosing a journal for submission. This information can be obtained from the journal website. The authors must check if the information is recent and updated. It is also possible, that journals that are not considered as prestigious have a better acceptance rate. Another pitfall is that most journals provide a composite acceptance rate for all types manuscripts submitted. It might vary greatly among various types of manuscripts. For example, a journal might be rejecting a host of case reports, but might be accepting most of the review and research articles submitted to it. The bottom-line is that journals are interested in quality articles. If a well-written article describes a novel idea, provides solid evidence and draws meaningful conclusions that have relevance to health issues; it would be considered for publication.

Indexed Journal and Impact Factor

There are multiple databases that index journals on the basis of various factors related to quality, regularity of publication, professional standing and review process, among others. Therefore, journals that are included in these databases (‘indexed journals’) are considered to be quality journals and are thought to be more prestigious. In fact, he Medical Council of India prescribes that teaching faculty in medical colleges should have a requisite number of publications in indexed/ national journals to be eligible for promotion to a higher post.8 Medline of the US National Library of Medicine (NLM), is a bibliographic database of articles from academic biomedical journals from around the world. It can be searched through PubMed. A specially constituted committee selects journals to be included in the Medline database on the basis of quality of content, editorial work and production.9,10 Being the largest database and being freely available on the internet, it is popular amongst scientists and practitioners.

Although there are many ways of assessing the importance of journals, Impact Factor (IF) seems to be the most popular one2,4 among authors, institutions and employers.4 It is calculated on the basis of number of citations received by journal articles (in proportion to the number of citable articles published) over a period of time. In fact, many researchers while listing their publications in
Table 1: Desirable attributes that make journals author-friendly

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<td>Availability of electronic submission</td>
<td>Most journals allow electronic submission of articles through email, journal website or online manuscript submission process managed by the publisher. This obviates the possibility of postal delays and loss of manuscript in transit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prompt acknowledgment of receipt of manuscript</td>
<td>This assures the author of the manuscript being received in the editorial office and provides a reference number for future correspondence. Some journals provide SMS and email alerts to the authors informing them that the article has been referred to them for revision.</td>
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<td>Fair peer-review process</td>
<td>The journal refers the article to a few (2-3) reviewers who are subject experts. A few journals allow authors to suggest reviewers and/or to provide the names of a few experts, who could be kept out of the review process. A few journals have an Ombudsman who can be approached, if the authors think that their manuscript has been rejected without a fair review.</td>
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<td>Facility of tracking the article</td>
<td>Many journals provide an online tracking system. An author can log into the manuscript management system and see the stage of review the article has reached. This allows the author to approach the editor in case of delay in any one stage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time-bound review process and publication</td>
<td>The authors need to be assured that the editorial- and peer-review would be completed in a reasonable period of time and once accepted, the manuscript will be published without great delay. Delay in review process and publication can rob a deserving author of due credit or may render the article ineffectual.</td>
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<td>Responsive editors and transparent decision-making process</td>
<td>The editors are prompt in answering contributors’ questions and concerns. The decision-making process is transparent and provides logical, scientific and cogent answers in case a manuscript is rejected. These evaluations help authors to improve their manuscript before submission to another journal.</td>
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<td>Availability of additional services for manuscript improvement</td>
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<td>Regular publication</td>
<td>Several journals are available on the net and at the stands at the appointed time. Irregularly published journals may inordinately delay publication of even accepted manuscripts.</td>
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| the Curriculum Vitae also state the impact factor of the journal they are published in. Authors prefer to publish in journals with high Impact Factor; but it should be remembered that journals with high impact factor also tend to have higher rejection rates. |

**Open Access**

Some journals provide immediate unfettered access to the entire content of research articles published by them. They are referred to as providing Open Access. Although, these journals are free to charge a fee for the remaining content (editorials, review articles, etc.) of the journal, some of them tend to compensate the loss of revenue due to provision of free access to research articles by charging the authors. Still, many authors consider publishing in open access journals as being “morally right” and think that it gives their articles wider readership.

**Journals Published by Professional Societies**

Several professional bodies and societies publish biomedical journal of the relevant specialty and provide free copies of the journal issues to their members. This ensures that the Journal is widely distributed and read. These society journals are appropriate if the authors wish to carry their message to members within a particular specialty.

**Publication in Print or Online Version**

Most journals are published in print version and also have an online version. Having one’s article printed in a journal that is also available online is the most desirable situation. Printed articles seem to carry additional prestige and online access increase the article’s (and author’s) visibility. Traditionally, seeing one’s work and name in print has been a matter of great pride and pleasure for authors. However, some experts feel that given the escalation of cost of printing and distributing journals, the easy availability of online journals due to almost universal and inexpensive access to internet through a variety of gadgets, and the heightened environmental concerns; the printed journals might become a rarity in future.

**Cost of Getting the Article Published**

Some journals charge fees for publishing articles. This could be charged at any stage till publication: at the time of submission, when it is sent for peer-review or once the article is accepted for publication. Some of them do provide concession in charges or waive them completely when requests made on the grounds of study being done in resource-poor settings, without funding or if it is an investigator initiative. The chances of waiver could be higher if the primary author is a student. There are journals that routinely do not charge fees for publication; but have charges if the word count, number of printed pages or number of figures (especially colored figures) exceeds a prescribed limit. The authors should read these requirements regarding fees diligently and should factor this cost while choosing a journal. Paying these fees adds to the cost of publication and if it has to be paid in foreign exchange, the costs could be quite prohibitive. This could be one of the factors considered while selecting the journal.

**Efficient Journal Administration**

It is worthwhile knowing if the Journal is well-managed and is being published regularly. It should be author-friendly and should provide a fair and time-
bound review process. Some of the attributes of a well-managed journal that the authors should consider while choosing the journal are listed and elaborated upon in Table 1.

**Other Factors**

Some institutions and employers attach higher premium to articles published in international journals. Although authors are forced to consider this factor; it is not correct to assume that every foreign journal is better than every journal published in the country. Besides, many journals published in the country have overseas experts on their Editorial Boards offering their inputs regarding editorial policy, they invite reviewers from different countries, receive contributions publications from authors of different nationalities and through internet, the published articles are read by an international readership. Hence, the differentiation just on the place of publication or printing seems to be superfluous.

Journals are published weekly, fortnightly, monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, semi-annually or even annually. Although, the more frequently published journals have fewer pages per issue, they publish greater number of articles in a given year. Being published more frequently, an accepted article sees the light of the day much earlier. Some believe that the chances of acceptance are generally higher in journals publishing several issues in a year.12

Authors write articles to put forth their ideas, work, views and opinions. Hence, they like to publish the articles in journals that are highly visible and easily accessible to the potential readers. In the pre-internet era, visibility was assessed on the basis of copies printed per issue, subscription by libraries, number of subscribers and free copies distributed (for example, association journals). After the availability of internet, journals indexed in bibliographic databases (such as Medline Scopus, and EMBASE; for example) have greater visibility.7 If they are indexed in a database that is available free of cost or if readers have unfettered free access to journal articles on the internet; the visibility may be enhanced even further.

From the discussion above, it is quite apparent that selecting the journal for submission of a manuscript should precede writing a manuscript. This is important as publication in a reputed journal attaches greater prestige to the article. It is important for logistic considerations as well. Authors need to think about several factors while choosing the journal. There can be no one solution that will fit all manuscripts, as type, context and content of message in each manuscript is different. Matching of group intended to receive the main message of the manuscript with the journal readership is most crucial while choosing a journal. Assurance of a timely and fair review process, high visibility and regular publication of the journal could be considered as some of the other important features that may guide authors’ choice.

**References**