

ON AUTHORIZING AN ARTICLE

I recently attended an Optometric Extension Program Foundation (OEP) Congress that lasted two full days. During my interactions with attendees at breaks, meals, and in the hospitality suite, I heard a number of unique conjectures regarding "what vision is all about," as well as some novel and apparently effective diagnostic and therapeutic behaviorally based techniques. Several people expressed some well conceived ideas on how to maintain vision therapy services in spite of decreasing third party coverage.

With my "editor's ear" well tuned, I engaged a number of these non-speaker-idea-givers in conversation to encourage them to put their thoughts in print. Most of them gave me assurance that they would, and expressed their appreciation for my interest. Now, I've done this many times in the past, and I've kept a record; about five percent actually put their thoughts on paper, and somewhat less eventually submit an appropriate manuscript.

Why is it that so many of us are willing and able to verbally express our ideas yet find it so difficult to write them so that they can be disseminated in a manner not limited by time to a far wider audience? There are undoubtedly many reasons, stretching from a deemphasis in writing skills, particularly in high school, college and optometry school, to the fact that today's information based society often forces one to absorb rather than express. However, I believe that perhaps the greatest obstacle to many potential authors is fear of the peer review or referee process that is often based in previous negative experiences.

Peer review is not only a universally accepted practice but is in place to assure that the author has presented his or her information in a logical, concise and

well conceived manner. It should be viewed as a service the publication provides the author in order to develop the best possible article. My experience as editor indicates that the following points can facilitate the ride of an article down the peer review highway for this or any journal.

1. *Remember that you are writing an article, not a monograph or mini textbook.* I've found that many people have a lot to say and consequently write an article that tries to say it all. Countless times I've advised an author that he or she has submitted not one, but really several papers that are related. In these instances, there is a natural "break point" where the article can be ended. When the first article is published, it can be summarized and referenced in subsequent pieces. Understand that this advice does not preclude a long article if there is a lot to discuss on a focused topic; rather it is to avoid literary "shotgunning."

2. *Distinguish between what is accepted knowledge or standard of practice from what is your opinion.* The fact that what you are proposing is based in research or is common practice within optometry and/or the larger realm of health care professions is established by documentation. This helps you make a better case. However, there is also great value in reporting your unique ideas, hypotheses or clinical impressions. These should be clearly identified as yours by statements like..."My experience leads me to believe that..."

3. *Use the format that the particular journal requires.* Virtually all journals annually publish an Instructions to Authors statement. This *Journal's* most recently appeared in Volume 6, Number 2 (1995). I find that many people omit the abstract and key words; further, remember that the abstract should reflect

what is in the text and give the reader the essence of the article. Be sure that you use the system of documentation described in the Instructions to Authors; virtually all optometric journals use the superscripted numbering system and not the format of parenthesized author's names followed by the date. Using "op cit" or "ibid" is something that might still be used in many English 101 courses, but rarely elsewhere. Remember to double space the text; the editor and reviewers will have room to make suggestions and recommendations. Submit the number of copies specified in the Instructions.

4. *Use a computer.* This might sound ludicrous to many of you, but there are people who still use a manual or electric typewriter. In today's world it is analogous to doing a tough Sunday crossword puzzle with a magic marker. If you are not a computer user, have someone who is, input your article. Moving, changing and modifying text can be done in minutes rather than hours, and this greatly facilitates the process from review to publication.

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5. *Make sure that you have submitted to the appropriate journal.* I recently received an article reporting very involved research on changes in corneal structure and physiology consequent to the wearing of contact lenses. The author obviously had a very poor understanding of the mission of this Journal. However, I've published articles that were rejected by other journals because they were too "speculative" or "not contributing to the scientific literature." Each journal is unique, has its own culture, and it's up to the author to determine whether his or her work is appropriate to that uniqueness and culture.

I have a friend whose hobby is to build things; patios, stone walls and outdoor decks are his specialties. Now, these require a good deal of knowledge, experience, planning, labor and sometimes partial or complete restructuring. However, he once told me that it was well worth it; he experiences a feeling of pride every time he views one of his completed projects and knows that it is built to stand the test of time. The same ingredients are required in authoring an article as in building a solid patio or wall and the rewards can be similar to those of my friend. Many of you who have not yet done so can experience the same feeling of pride and permanence when you see an article you have created appearing in print. And yes, it's well worth the effort.