Author's Guidelines

It is not so much what you write that decides on publication, but more how it has been written.

The process of publication of an article in any magazine or journal can seem quite difficult for aspiring authors. If you intend getting published then you need a knowledge of the requirements of the particular magazine, its readership profile, its style and, obviously, an interesting topic. I have placed the actual content of the article last, not because the content is unimportant, but because the content means relatively little in the publication process as long as it is relevant to the readership. In publication, it is not so much what you say but how you say it that counts.

Scientific publishing, makes things easier for hopeful authors by providing comprehensive guidelines for authors that include the first three of the subjects I mentioned above; requirements of the journal, readership profile and style. The *British Dental Journal* is no different, and the latest version of our guidelines has been published on the inside rear cover of each *BDJ* since 1998 with a slightly longer version available on the web site. Before then the guidelines were published less frequently, depending on space.

Recently it was brought to my attention that the guidelines in the *BDJ* are very helpful for authors of research papers, but there was little to help authors of general articles, guest leaders or letters to the editor. People also felt that the refereeing process was unclear (from the author's viewpoint) with uncertainty about whether there was any difference in refereeing research, practice and educational papers. In answer to these concerns I have recently reviewed our guidelines and rewritten them completely, and the updated version should be up on the web site by the time this edition of the *BDJ* is published. Naturally we will be updating the written version of the guidelines published in every *BDJ* as well. This leader has been written to alert authors to this change, and to clarify one or two points that have caused confusion recently.

Firstly, I would like to confirm that the refereeing process used at the *BDJ* is the same for research, practice and educational manuscripts. In each case the manuscript is sent to at least two independent referees chosen by me for peer review, and then assessed by the appropriate advisor before returning to me for final decision. Research papers are sent to the Scientific Editor, currently Professor Philip Sloan, practice papers are seen by Dr Ian Needleman and educational papers are sent to Dr Peter Mossey. In each case they consider the referees' comments and provide me with a report which includes their view on the manuscript's suitability for the appropriate section of the *BDJ*.

All other submissions, such as letters and opinion papers, are checked for accuracy rather than being refereed in the same fashion as the papers described in the previous paragraph. This process involves sending any manuscript, letter or article to an appropriate expert who will provide advice on both accuracy and suitability. While the former is usually relatively easy, the latter can cause difficulties, especially for authors of some of the more controversial topics in dentistry. It can also be difficult trying to balance the need for discussion and debate within the *BDJ* with the possibility of misleading the readership, and I believe that there are times when it is impossible to be sure that publication of a particularly controversial topic is appropriate. When this occurs, my own feeling is that the *BDJ* should refrain from publication rather than allow misleading material to be given the 'approval' of a respected scientific journal such as the *BDJ*.

Finally I would remind all authors, but especially those submitting articles or letters on controversial topics, of the comment in the first paragraph. If you want to be published, then remember that it is not so much what you write that influences publication, but more how it has been written.

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