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Getting published: Guidance for anaesthesia investigators

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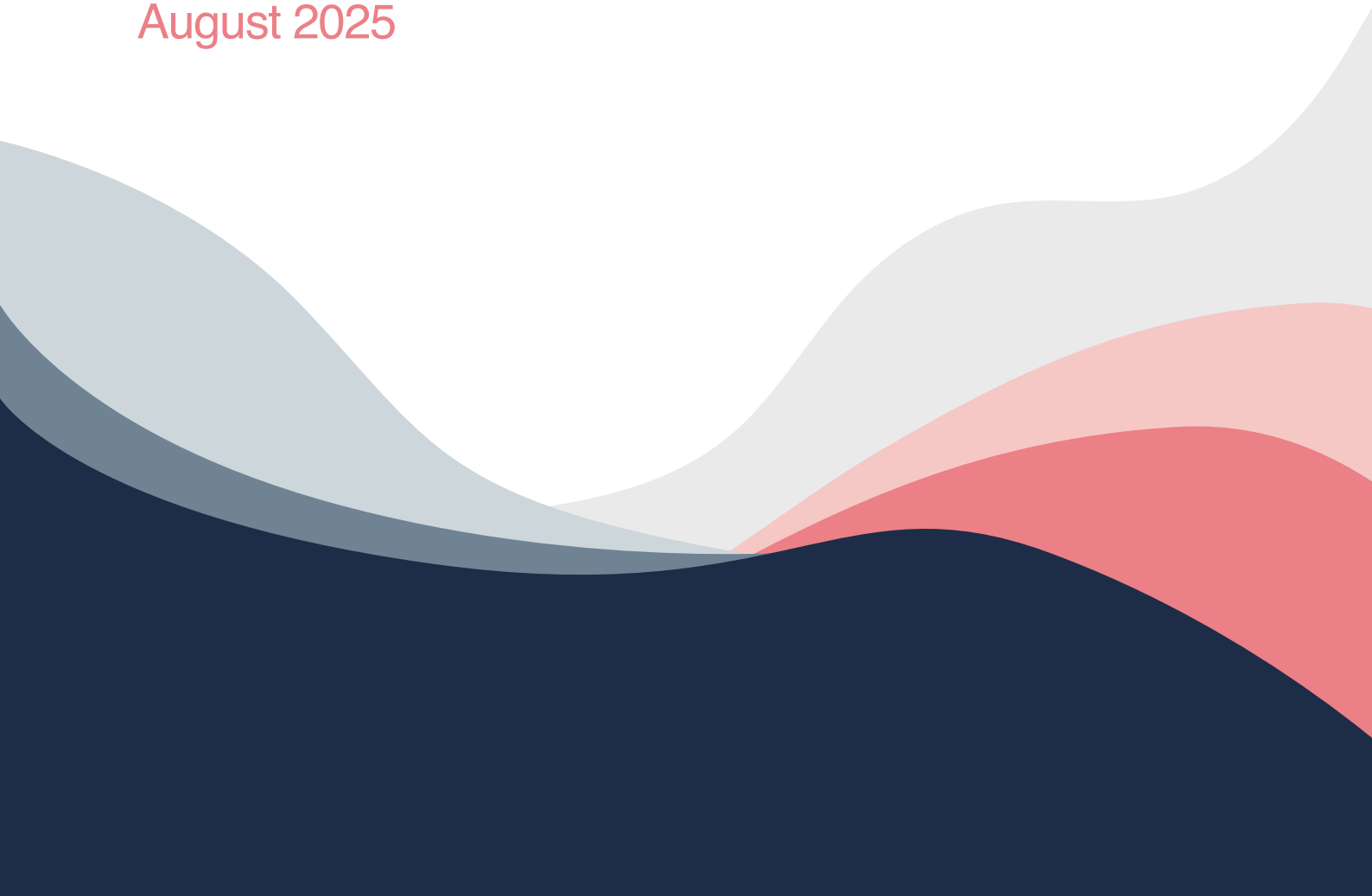

Purpose of document:

This guidance document supports researchers at all career stages in navigating the publication process in clinical research. Drawing on expert insights and real-world experience, it offers practical guidance on study design, authorship, journal selection, peer review, and post-publication strategy to help researchers publish with clarity, integrity, and impact.

Acknowledgements:

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Getting published: Guidance for anaesthesia investigators

Getting published is a critical milestone for any researcher, but the journey from idea to publication can feel daunting, particularly in the complex and competitive landscape of clinical research. Whether you're a novice writer aiming for your first paper or a seasoned clinician-researcher looking to sharpen your publication strategy, this guidance document is designed to guide you through the process.

Drawing on insights shared during the ANZCA Clinical Trials Network virtual research workshop in 2020 by A/Prof Lis Evered and real-life experiences of researchers across Australia and New Zealand, this guidance document demystifies the publishing process. It goes beyond manuscript formatting tips, offering strategic advice on study planning, authorship, journal selection, ethics, and responding to reviewers. It also tackles modern challenges such as navigating predatory journals, managing Open Access decisions, and promoting your work after publication.

At its core, publishing is not just about getting your name in print. It's about contributing meaningfully to the scientific community, advancing clinical knowledge, and ensuring that high-quality research translates into better outcomes for patients.

1. Publishing is a team sport

Publishing a research paper is rarely the achievement of a single person. Behind every published manuscript is a team of collaborators, research coordinators, statisticians, mentors, clinicians, and colleagues who contribute in visible and invisible ways.

While some seasoned academics may eventually publish single-author papers, this level of independence is built on a foundation of prior collaboration. Early-career researchers should view publishing as a team activity, drawing on the strengths and expertise of those around them.

Ethical publishing and authorship Practices

- Follow International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) authorship criteria
- Acknowledge contributors appropriately (e.g. "writing assistance provided by…")

Key takeaway: Acknowledge the collective effort behind research. Proactively foster collaboration and don't be afraid to ask for help or input—your network is your asset.

Tip: The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) is well regarded for guidance on authorship. Access through a hospital or institution library. https://publicationethics.org/guidance/discussion-document/authorship.

2. Mentorship is your secret weapon

A strong mentor can shape your research career. Mentors are more than just supervisors; they are connectors, editors, career advocates, and reality checkers.

Good mentors will:

- Offer guidance on study design and manuscript planning.
- Assist with authorship conventions and ethics.
- Connect you with other researchers and potential collaborators.
- Nominate you to review manuscripts, an essential skill for understanding peer review.
- Share insight into the publishing landscape and grant processes.

Tip: Reach out to international and national experts whose work you admire. Introduce yourself and your research interests. In most cases, you'll find researchers are open to engagement, especially when approached respectfully and enthusiastically.

3. ANZCA CTN membership program

The ANZCA Clinical Trials Network (CTN) provides a structured mentorship program to support fellows, trainees, and research coordinators who are undertaking, or wishing to undertake, research in anaesthesia, perioperative medicine, and pain medicine.

Individuals seeking mentorship should submit a cover letter to the ANZCA CTN Manager (ctn@anzca.edu.au) outlining:

- Their research background and objectives.
- The specific support they seek from the mentorship program.

The ANZCA CTN Executive (for fellows and trainees) or the ANZCA CTN Office (for research coordinators) will identify a suitable mentor and obtain consent from both parties.

View here to see more details on the ANZCA CTN mentorship program.

4. Academic appointments matter

Academic titles and institutional affiliations can significantly influence how your research is perceived. In Australia, such appointments may be harder to obtain compared to countries like the U.S., but they are worthwhile.

Benefits include:

- Access to academic publishing resources – i.e. library resources, and other resources like EndNote and an institution VPN.
- Increased credibility when submitting to journals and conferences.
- Eligibility for certain grants and awards.

Tip: Explore honorary or adjunct academic positions through your affiliated hospital or university. These often require minimal time commitment but offer substantial professional advantages.

5. What do journal editors want?

Understanding editorial priorities is key. Editors are flooded with submissions and only accept articles that fit their journal's scope and add clear value to their readership.

Editors look for:

- Original research with novel findings.
- High-quality systematic reviews and meta-analyses.
- Guidelines and position statements backed by robust evidence.
- Clear writing, good structure, and ethical rigor.

Low-priority content:

- Basic case reports (unless extremely rare or with significant implications).
- Poorly written, unfocused, or redundant research.

Diversity and credibility matter too. Editors aim to publish work by a range of contributors, from junior to senior, and seek reliability in reviewers and authors.

6. Design your study with the end in mind

A successful publication begins with thoughtful planning.

Before you start your study:

- Define your research question clearly.
- Choose a study design that best answers your question
- Identify your target journal and article type (e.g., Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT), review, audit).
- Draft an a priori statistical analysis plan.
- Establish authorship roles and responsibilities.

Tip: If you're conducting a large RCT, consider publishing your protocol, many journals accept protocol papers which can help establish credibility early. You should also register your trial with a clinical trials registry such as the Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry (ANZCTR) or clinicaltrials.gov, and keep this registration up to date throughout your project. If you are conducting a systematic review or meta-analysis, register your review protocol on the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO).

7. Writing the manuscript

Your paper is your story. It needs to inform, engage, and persuade.

A strong paper is:

- Novel – Offers something new or challenges assumptions.
- Direct – Gets to the point quickly and stays focused.
- Definitive – Draws a clear conclusion or recommendation.
- Readable – Uses plain language and logical structure.
- Succinct – Avoids unnecessary detail or jargon.
- Contemporary – Provides a good, unbiased review of the current literature and cites all relevant work.
- Clean – Free from spelling and grammar errors.

Tip: Reviewers are volunteers. A confusing paper increases their burden and often results in rejection. Note: The level of detail you should provide in your paper depends on the journal. If you have something very technical, for example, there may be an appropriate journal for that level of detail (see section 8 – selecting the right journal).

8. Selecting the right journal

Journal choice is strategic. Submit to a journal that aligns with your topic, audience, and the novelty of your findings.

Considerations:

- Is the journal peer-reviewed and indexed?
- Have they published similar work recently?
- Is it open access? What are the fees?
- Does your study meet the journal's scope and quality threshold?

Tip: Avoid aiming solely for high-impact journals unless your work warrants it. Repeated rejections delay dissemination.

9. Avoiding predatory journals

Predatory publishers exploit authors by charging fees without proper peer review or ethical oversight.

Warning signs:

- Vague or excessive publication fees.
- No clear editorial board or peer review process.
- Poorly written website or emails.
- Promises of rapid publication with no quality checks.
- Not indexed in reputable databases (like PubMed or Scopus).

To check journal legitimacy, use tools such as :

- Ulrich's Serials Analysis System.
- Cabell's International.
- Director of Open Access Journals.
- For a publishing checklist Think. Check. Submit.

10. Collaborate on editing

Before submitting:

- Share your draft with colleagues for feedback.
- Ask at least one person unfamiliar with the study to read it.
- Edit for clarity, conciseness, and consistency.
- Cross-check journal submission guidelines.

Tip: Follow instructions for authors meticulously. Journal editors often desk-reject manuscripts that fail basic formatting requirements.

11. Engage with the publishing ecosystem

How to build your publishing presence:

- Review manuscripts – it sharpens your critical thinking and increases your profile (i.e. gets your name known to others in the field).
- Write letters to the editor – respond constructively to recent publications.
- Comment on preprints or published articles – join the scholarly conversation.
- Talk to a journal editor – editors attend meetings and conferences. Seek them out and start a conversation.

Tip: Start small. These activities build your credibility and visibility in your field.

12. Rejection is part of the process

Even exceptional work may be rejected. Don't let it derail your progress.

Common reasons for rejection:

- Misaligned journal scope.
- Study design flaws or statistical issues.
- Poor writing or unclear conclusions.
- Drawing conclusions that are not supported by the data.
- Failure to adhere to journal style guide.

What to do:

- Take reviewer feedback seriously.
- Revise thoughtfully and resubmit elsewhere.
- Keep perspective, publication is a long game.

Remember: Persistence is as important as brilliance.

13. Responding to reviewer feedback

When revising a paper for resubmission, consider the following:

- Acknowledge feedback respectfully, even when you disagree.
- Use a response-to-reviewers table to address each point clearly.
- If rejecting a suggestion, provide a rationale with references or data.
- Follow the author instructions for how to respond to the reviewers' comments as these vary.
- Reiterate your manuscript's contribution in the cover letter for the revised submission.

Tip: This process tests your professionalism and can greatly improve your paper's clarity.

14. Open Access: A strategic decision

Pros:

- Wider reach, especially for global health audiences.
- Increased citation potential.

Cons:

- High fees (often not covered by Australian grants).
- Risk of overlap with predatory publishers.

Tip: If funding is limited, consider hybrid journals with selective open access options. Or inquire about waivers for Low and Middle Income Country (LMIC) researchers.

15. Timeline expectations

Set realistic expectations for publication timelines:

- Submission to first decision: 4–12 weeks.
- Revisions: 1–3 rounds over several months.
- Final acceptance to online publication: 1–3 months (longer if print-only).

16. Visual abstracts and social media promotion

Modern dissemination practices:

- Create visual abstracts or graphical summaries.
- Promote via LinkedIn, X, BlueSky, and ResearchGate.
- Tag journals, co-authors, or institutions to increase visibility.

Tip : "Getting published" doesn't end with acceptance, it continues with strategic dissemination.

17. Summary and final tips

- Plan your publication during study design.
- Confirm authorship roles early.
- Choose the right journal for your audience.
- Avoid predatory and unclear publication offers.
- Seek feedback and revise carefully.
- Write clearly and keep the reader in mind.
- Review others' work to build your skills.
- Be resilient and strategic in the face of rejection.

18. Resources for further support

- International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE).
- Think. Check. Submit.
- COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics).
- Writing support services through ANZCA or your institution.
- Equator Network.
- Colleagues, supervisors, and writing mentors.

Final note: Scientific publishing is not only about visibility, it's about contributing meaningfully to the shared body of knowledge. Aim for excellence, transparency, and impact in all that you write.