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UCSF & American Neurological Association

How to Get Published

TWO TOP JOURNAL EDITORS OFFER TIPS AND TRICKS FOR YOUNG RESEARCHERS

BOSTON—At the 2012 American Neurological Association Annual meeting, the Editors-in-Chief of two preeminent neurology journals offered advice on how to get your research published in quality medical journals and increase your visibility in the field. While both editors agree that good science is key to publication, they offered some guidance that can help you find the best fit for your research papers.

So You Want to Publish in *Brain*

Alastair Compston, MD, the editor of *Brain* and Professor and Head of Clinical Neuroscience at the University of Cambridge, started his talk by stressing the importance of having quality, original research published in respected journals on your CV. While not all of the supplemental information on your CV will be noticed in a quick review, “the area where people undoubtedly look to see how a particular candidate is doing is in your

publications,” he said. “And, what people are searching for are original publications in peer-reviewed journals.”

Brain was one of the first neurological journals to be published online, and its usage is mostly electronic. The journal gets about a quarter of a million hits each month, about 41% of which come from North America. *Brain*'s mission, Compston said, is, “to be the repository of knowledge on the scientific basis of clinical neurology.” They are interested in publishing quality research on rare diseases as well as more common conditions, not just the papers that will draw citations and increase impact factor. The journal publishes primarily original research articles, although it does publish some review articles, commentaries, letters to the editor, and other

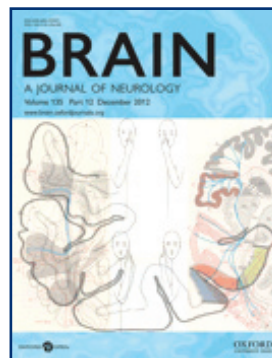
papers each year.

There are several types of articles that the journal rarely publishes:

- Case reports or single pedigree studies;
- Papers based on normal individuals or animal physiology;
- Incremental or confirmatory studies;
- Opinion pieces or medical hypotheses;
- Experimental work devoid of clinical orientation;
- Systematic reviews and meta-analyses;
- Descriptive papers versus mechanistic studies; and
- “One-step” and preliminary experimental studies.

About half of submissions are rejected upon submission, and another 35% are rejected after being considered by two to four reviewers.

Regarding rejection, Compston said it “is not a tactic, it is a decision.” A rejection letter is not meant to invite resubmission of the same material or a challenge to the reasoning in the letter. Appeals of rejections are becoming more common, he said, although the success rate of appeals is “very, very, very low.” When he receives an appeal, he reviews the material again, but almost always confirms the original decision.



So You Want to Publish in *Annals*

Stephen L. Hauser, MD, Editor-in-Chief of *Annals of Neurology* and Professor and Chair of Neurology at the University of California, San Francisco, echoed the importance of creative, original work to one's CV. "You can't massage work that is fundamentally uninteresting," he pointed out.

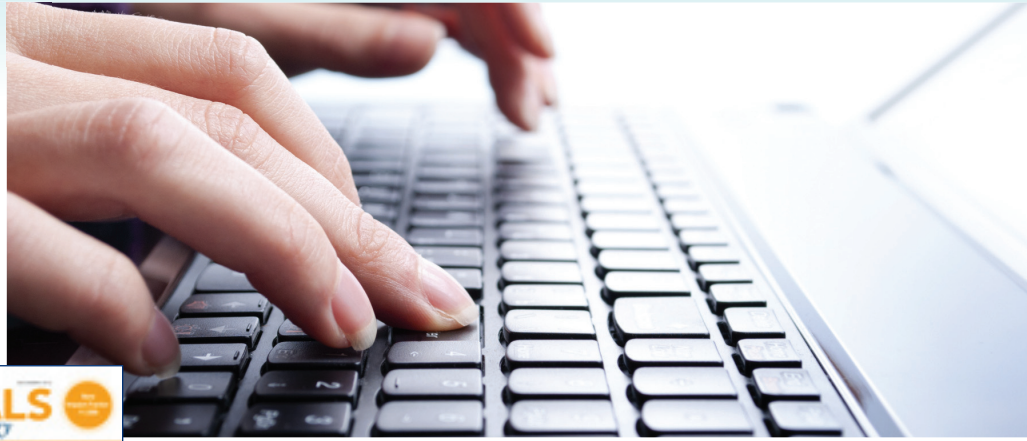
"When I was in your shoes," he said to the audience of junior faculty members, "one of the best pieces of advice that I received is that you want your life's work to be able to be described in a sentence or less." He noted, however, that scientists are "often trapped by the consistent focus of our work."

He delineated some similarities and differences between *Annals* and *Brain*. "Part of understanding your environment, and particularly the publishing process," he said, "is understanding the nuances, the differences, the biases of individual journals so you are sending your work to a journal that's likely to be receptive to your work."

Annals aims to capture the interest of a broad audience. For example, a paper about neuromuscular disease should be interesting to a neuroendocrinologist as well. "It is not solely work that will be of interest largely to subspecialists," Hauser said. The journal publishes review articles, but unlike *Brain*, it also solicits review articles. *Annals* rarely publishes case reports, brief communications, book reviews, and obituaries. Also, unlike *Brain*, *Annals* will entertain thoughtful rebuttals.

The 2012 acceptance rate at *Annals* was around 6%, lower than it has been in the past. About 70% of manuscripts are rejected within about 24 hours after an initial review. "I think it's a wonderful thing to get papers back to authors if they aren't in our area of interest," Hauser said, "so that authors can expeditiously resubmit somewhere else." The remaining 30% of papers are sent for external review to two or three reviewers and technical experts, when necessary. After a thorough review, a revision of the paper will be requested, or it will be rejected. Almost no papers are accepted to *Annals* without a revision. Approximately one-third of papers sent for external review are ultimately published.

Annals almost always requires confirmation for genetic and biomarker studies. For



epidemiology and some genetic studies, authors are asked to guarantee that data are not selectively reported. The journal generally doesn't publish research on a novel allele of a known gene that causes a phenotype unless the variant has a unique functional consequence. "We also welcome data that fail to confirm papers published in the *Annals*," Hauser said. "We've had entire half-issues devoted to attempts to replicate work that was controversial."

The journal will expedite review of particularly exciting research—generally reviewing it within 48 hours—but the acceptance

rate for expedited review is about the same as for other submissions. "Clinical trials are particularly attractive to us," said Hauser. The editorial team will pre-review methods sections for clinical trials for which the data are still being analyzed in order to facilitate rapid publication of those papers.

Hauser offered a few closing words of advice for young neuroscience researchers on how to build a successful academic career (see "Tips for Success," below). It does get easier with time, Hauser stressed. The most important thing is to aim high for novelty, impact, and relevance to medicine and health. ●

DAWN ANTOLINE-WANG

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Tips for Success

- Learn the rules of the road at your institution (tracks, tenure, graduate programs, institutional commitments).
- Focus on time management; ensure that you have adequate protected time.
- Periodically assess your progress, trajectory, and focus. A spreadsheet summary of projects, papers, and grants with timelines is helpful, but one needs to be alert to external cues, too.
- Navigate relationships with industry and potential conflicts of interest carefully.
- Assume appropriate clinical responsibilities—connect bench to bedside.
- Keep your eyes open for opportunities, including awards, grants, funding, and potential job opportunities.
- Nurture a support system to help put out fires.
- Avoid being a perfectionist who can't finish anything.
- Practice writing and speaking skills—communication skills can be developed!
 - Begin writing papers early.
 - Be skeptical of offers to write reviews and chapters.
 - Observe others and develop a style that is interesting to read and listen to.
 - Start and end strongly, and remember that you know the area in greater depth than most readers.
 - Ask others to review your drafts.
- Offer to serve as a journal referee/reviewer.
- Optimize your professional environment.
 - Avoid isolation, but seek out "the untraveled path."
 - Tackle the challenging issue of independence.
- Meet senior people in the field; a great mentor is invaluable.