

Writing Case Reports for the Clinical Literature: Practical Approach for the Novice Author

As medical education is moving toward translational agendas, physicians are encouraged to publish their clinical experiences. The stepwise approach briefly described below can be used as a tool by the novice author for successful publication of case reports and by senior faculty to mentor and enhance multiple competencies.

Before 2005, I authored about a dozen publications during a 19-year period. After recruiting the participation of novice authors (3 medical students and approximately 30 residents and/or junior faculty), we authored about 50 publications during a 6-year period by following these 7 practical steps:

1. Choose a Topic

Rare disorders¹ or unusual presentations of common disorders² are good topic choices for case reports. Case reports accompanied by vibrant images in the form of photographs³ and radiologic studies⁴ are particularly marketable.

2. Choose a Publication Venue

Choosing a venue or journal is an early step because the journal's submission criteria will guide the writing process. Peer-reviewed publications that are cited on PubMed are ideal; however, works not cited there may still reach numerous readers, propagate other opportunities, and still allow for honing of writing skills.

3. Set and Keep Deadlines

4. Research

Seek previously published case reports, reviews, or original research online that is related to the chosen topic. The use of out-dated textbooks or unreliable websites is discouraged.

5. Write and Edit

There are 2 main parts to a case report: the patient details (history and course) and the discussion (brief review of the diagnosis). The journal's submission instructions will outline the format. Experienced authors should read and critique the novice author's writing, and further writing and editing between novice author and experienced author should occur. The inclusion of proper citations and avoiding plagiarism are crucial during this step.

6. Finalize

Numbering the references occurs after the writing has been finalized. The journal's submission instructions will list its preferred method of referencing.

7. Submit

The novice author ideally should be the "corresponding author," the author responsible for submission. Listed coauthors should only be individuals who have truly contributed a substantial amount of work toward the project. After submission, the author awaits the decision of rejection, outright acceptance (rarely), or acceptance with the need of some revisions. If rejected, the author starts again at step 2 and modifies the work to fulfill the new venue's submission criteria.

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References

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- 2 Nield LS: Milk intolerance presenting solely as periorbital edema. *Clin Pediatr (Phila)*. 1995;34(5):265.
- 3 Pawlowski EJ, Nield LS. Gynecomastia and hypogonadism. *Clin Pediatr (Phila)*. 2008;47(3):313-315.
- 4 Someshwar J, Lutfi R, Nield LS. The missing "Bratz" doll: a case of vaginal foreign body. *Pediatr Emerg Care*. 2007;23(12):897-898.