Planning your paper: strategies for authors writing an article for the New Zealand Veterinary Journal

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The following are brief guidelines for authors to consider when writing an article, before submission. More detailed instructions regarding preparation of manuscripts are given in the *Journal's* Instructions for authors.

It is important to note that there are a number of responsibilities that authors need to meet before their article can be considered for publication, including originality of the work, acknowledgment of financial or other conflicts of interest and addressing any ethical requirements. Authors should ensure that any study involving animals or humans has ethical approval unless specifically excluded by the relevant legislation.

Before starting, first decide what class of article is to be written. The following are the common types of article:

- *General Scientific Articles*. These generally report the findings of a scientific study. The results should be based on a carefully designed investigation including appropriate statistical analysis. The final article will contain between 5,000 and 10,000 words.

- *Short Communications* are similar to Scientific Articles, but present either preliminary or limited results that are of value to the veterinary profession. The final article should usually contain <3,500 words.

- *Clinical Communications* are case reports or case series that describe new findings from clinical practice; either a new disease or a new method of treating an existing condition. They may also describe an investigation of an apparently novel disease. The format is specific for this type of article. The final article should usually be <4,500 words in length.

- *Review Articles* should present a critical assessment of the published literature on a particular topic. They should not just be a review of the literature. The final article should usually be <10,000 words in length.

Secondly, think about the different parts of the article. The guidelines below generally apply to Scientific Articles, but some are applicable to all types of articles.
It is also recommended that you refer to the relevant Reporting Guidelines for different types of articles (see the Meridian website).

1. For all types of article it is most important to have a **clearly defined aim**, objective or hypothesis. For a scientific article a clear hypothesis should be able to be tested using the data you have collected, in a clinical communication the objective should be to report some novel information, similarly the objective of a review should be to summarise recent information and present new ideas. The aim should be the focus and reference point for everything else in the manuscript.

2. The Introduction should briefly and succinctly provide the background to the study and the rationale for conducting the work. It should end with the **clearly stated aim or hypothesis**.

3. The Methods **describe the way that you addressed your aim**. It should provide sufficient information so that another scientist can repeat the work that you have conducted. It should also present the details of any analysis carried out under a separate sub-heading "Statistical analysis".
Different study designs have different methods; if these are well described in the literature then the relevant papers only need to be referenced, however new and unusual techniques require more detail.
For most studies you need to provide evidence that sufficient number of cases were used to test your stated hypothesis. Survey data is commonly used in cross-sectional studies. For such studies you need to clearly define the target population as stated in your aims, provide evidence that the sample population is representative of the target population, describe how the response rate was maximised and that the number of respondents were appropriate for the number of questions and provide a copy of the questionnaire.

4. The Results should clearly present the findings of your study **as they address the stated aim**. It should not contain any discussion or interpretation of the results. Ensure that for all results presented the methods for obtaining them have been included in the previous section, including the appropriate statistical analysis. Be consistent in the presentation of results; they should be in the same order as the materials and methods.

5. The Discussion should examine the important findings from your Results **in relation to the aim of the study** and in the context of the published literature. It may contain some speculation, but this should be justified by your findings or those of others. It should end with a brief conclusion. It should not include new results or extensively repeat results. Any statements made should be supported by the data or analysis presented in the Results section, or by previously published findings.

6. The Abstract should be able to be read in isolation from the rest of the article. It should contain all the important information, including the methods used, the main results, with appropriate data, and the conclusions that are based on the results obtained. The aim should be the same as that presented at the end of the Introduction.

7. The title should reflect the aims of the study. It should be brief and specific and, where possible, include some of the key words presented at the end of your Abstract.

When starting to write your article build it from a simple outline to a first draft, and then refine this in a systematic way, until you have your article ready for submission. The following steps can be followed:

1. Write an outline with headings and sub-headings.

2. Define the aim or objective, then note down the important points to be included under each sub-heading.

3. Fill in the detail, but do not worry about spelling, grammar or formatting.

4. Review what you have written and correct spelling and grammar as much as possible, then ask a friend or supervisor to read it and provide you with feedback. You may also ask for assistance with the English.

5. During the revision process aim for your article to be **precise, clear and brief.** Check that you have not duplicated material, e.g. in The Introduction and Discussion, or in the Materials and methods, or in the Results and Discussion.

6. Revise your article and repeat stages 4 and 5 as often as necessary.

7. Format your article as described in the *Journal's* Instructions for authors. Try to find a similar type of article and follow the same style.

These guidelines are based extensively on those presented by David Lindsay in his book *A guide to scientific writing*. Longman Cheshire Pty. Ltd, Melbourne, Australia.1984.

This book has been recently updated and a new edition is available: Lindsay D. *Scientific Writing = Thinking in Words*. CSIRO, Collingwood, Victoria, Australia. 2011.

See also the Taylor & Francis Author Services website
http://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/