BOOK REVIEW

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How to Write a Paper

This short book describes all aspects of writing up research for publication or dissemination. In its fifth edition (first edition, 1994), the 20 chapters have been revised and rearranged. The initial chapters cover in sequence each of the core components of a scientific manuscript. Then there are up-to-date chapters on submission and open access, reflecting recent advances in the quickly changing environment of electronic publishing and offering an outlook on how these might affect researchers as well as the peer review process. Whilst the book focuses on peer-reviewed journal publication, there are also chapters on writing letters, reviews, case reports, abstracts for conferences and even book reviews like this one (added in this edition). As an incidental bonus to occupational physicians, there are three chapters with job descriptions of an editorial team. The book concludes with chapters on style and on ethics. Almost all chapters are written by highly experienced former or present editors or publishers of biomedical journals, offering unique insights into the workings of the peer review process. This alone makes the book a useful read for researchers regardless of how relevant it might be for occupational medicine research. Whilst small differences in the approach amongst the team of authors become apparent, the book succeeds in giving the reader a consistent feel for the general basics that should be considered before, during and after publication. Most chapters are clear, succinct, witty and have a good story line, making this a quite enjoyable read. The text is kept sufficiently general to apply to a wide variety of different clinical and research areas whilst giving clear enough direction for researchers to follow. There are two important exceptions: the chapters on Methods and Results can be less readily applied to research in occupational medicine. These two chapters rightly remind researchers of the importance of study planning and statistics. Unfortunately, these are book- (or library-) filling topics in itself, and the authors focus narrowly on technical details relevant to research in their own speciality. As a consequence, these chapters are too detailed and too prescriptive to be generally useful in occupational medicine research.

In summary, this book is recommended when planning a first publication, but the high-level view might also offer additional perspectives to more experienced researchers as well as non-researchers. I would put it in the library.

Rating
★★☆☆☆ (Reference only)

Rüdiger Stilz

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