



Medical Writing and Publication *Winter School*

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Writing a Case Report

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دکتر کوثر قادری

دکتری تخصصی بهداشت باروری از دانشگاه علوم پزشکی تهران

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استادیار گروه آموزش مامایی



Learning Objectives

- 1) Determine **what types of cases** are worth reporting and **why**
- 2) Learn what **audience** to reach and what journals to publish in
- 3) Understand how to **structure** a Case Report
- 4) Understand the **Ethics** of Publishing

Definition:

- ❑ In medicine, a case report is a detailed report of the symptoms, signs, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up of an individual patient.



- Case report is a particular variety of manuscript that showcases the **unusual** features and management of a patient.

❖ The words of William Osler (Father of modern medicine) “*Always note and record the **unusual**...publish it. Place it on permanent record as a **short, concise note**. Such communications are always of **value**,*” still hold relevance in today’s era.

Das A, Singh I. How to write a case report? Indian Dermatol Online J 2021;12:683-6.

The Case Report

description and discussion of a **clinical case**

- “The standard medical article”
- Popular with readers
- Perhaps the **easiest** type of journal article for clinicians to write

what types of cases are worth reporting

❖ Presenting newly found:

– **Conditions**

– **Manifestations**

– **Disease mechanisms**

– **Effects of drugs**

- ❑ A good case report will be clear about the importance of the observation being reported.
- ❑ If multiple case reports show something similar, the next step might be a **case-control study** to determine if there is a relationship between the relevant variables.

Evidence-based
medicine pyramid

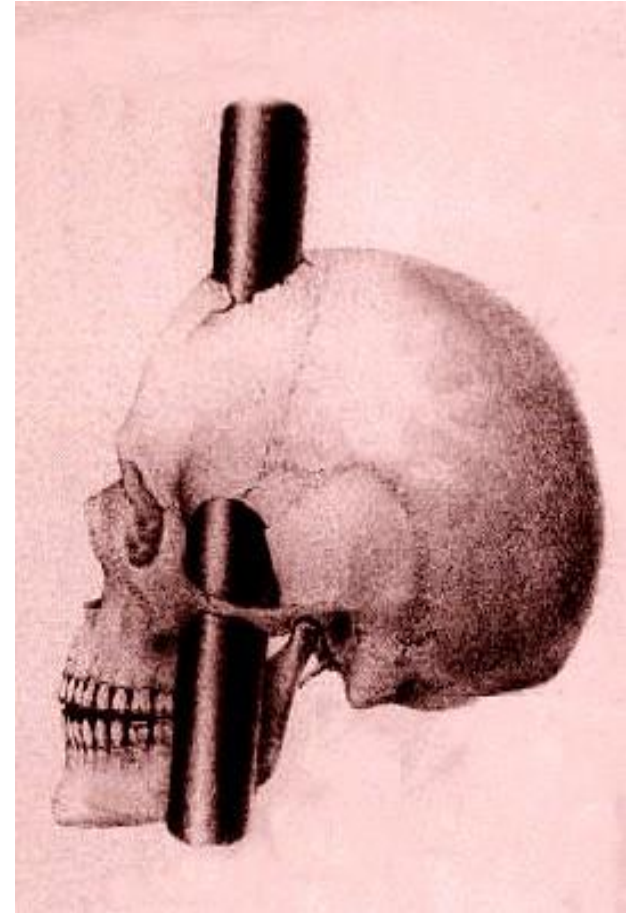


Case report

- Case report is like **story telling** in medicine
- Should be clear, short and useful for its purpose
- Is the **written form of the verbal** presentation of a case history
- Case reports are the **lowest cadre** in the world of evidence-based medicine
- **Can be** powerful and instructional

Case Reports

- a striking story
- the case of Phineas Gage, the man who had a 4-ft iron bar blown through his **frontal lobes** and whose **memorable** remains are now in the **Harvard Museum**...
- had it been realized that one could interfere with...the cerebral hemispheres without killing the patient and...cause no obvious intellectual defect,
- neurosurgery might have been conceived **40** years earlier.”
- **A case in *American Journal of Dermatopathology* was one of the first published reports on what later became known as **AIDS**.**



Nathan. *Lancet*. 1967;2:607.

McCarthy and Reilly. *Fam Med*. 2000;32:190-5.

Possible Reasons For a Case Report

- Very rare disease
- Association of diseases
- Rare presentations of more common diseases
- Outcome of a novel treatment
- Reporting a particular outcome of a case management
- Mistakes, complications and lessons learned
- A new disease entity

Candidate Cases

1. The unique case that appears to represent a newly **described syndrome or disease**.
2. The case with an unexpected **association** of 2 diseases that may represent a **causal relation**.
3. The “**outlier**” case representing a **variation** from the expected pattern.
4. The case with a surprising evolution that suggests a **therapeutic** or **adverse drug effect**.

A common case with an uncommon presentation or an uncommon case with a common presentation.

Target Audience

- Physicians in active clinical practice
- Faculty seeking to review their knowledge on Case Report publishing
- Fellows
- Residents
- Research Assistants
- Learners

Teaching

- Students
- Health professionals

What do journals look for?

- Clinical **significance** of key point/s
- **Originality/uniqueness** of case
- Quality, clarity, and conciseness of **writing**
- Ask yourself:
 - “What would this article **add** to existing **knowledge**?”
 - “How **significant** are the **take-home messages**?”
 - “How would this information **change patient care**?”

Step-by-step Guide

1. Look for a good case.
2. Read, read and read some more.
3. Obtain **informed consent** (*required by some journals*).
-- Make your intentions to publish known.
4. Complete the appropriate work-up to **confirm the diagnosis**.
-- An autopsy may be necessary **sometimes**.
5. Involve advisors/ mentors/ consultants **early**.
6. Identify **potential journals** (note word count!).
7. Begin writing!

Potential Publication Sites

- **Research-oriented** medical journals
 - General medical journals
 - Specialty and subspecialty journals
 - (Note: sometimes include cases as letters)
- **Teaching-oriented** publications
 - Journals
 - Textbooks etc
- Journals **specializing in case reports**

Choice of Journal:

Select a number of journals

- ④ Review the various formats of the journals
- ④ Make a decision which format may fit your Case Report best
- ④ Review published case reports in the journal of choice
- ④ Follow the guidelines and instructions precisely, especially regarding word count, figures and tables

Examples of Case-Report Journals

- BMJ Case Reports
(<http://casereports.bmj.com/>)
- Journal of Medical Case Reports
(<http://www.jmedicalcasereports.com/>)
- Case Reports in Gastroenterology
(<http://content.karger.com/ProdukteDB/produkte.asp?Aktion=JournalHome&ProduktNr=232833>)

Case Reports: Some Structures

- 1) **Usual** structure: **introduction**, case description, **discussion**/conclusions, references
- 2) **Modified IMRAD** structure: (Mainly) **introduction**, methods, results, **discussion**
- 3) **Clinico-pathological conference (CPC)**
- 4) **“Case presentation”** (case description followed by topic **discussion**)

Structure Your Case Report

- Abstract
- Introduction
- The Case Report
- Discussion
- Conclusion; Lessons Learned
- References
- Acknowledgement

Developing the Manuscript

1. Prepare an **outline**.
2. **Draft** the case description.
3. **Search** pertinent literature.
4. Draft the **discussion and conclusion**.
5. Write the **introduction**.
6. Write the **abstract**.
7. List **references**.
8. Review, edit, revise.
9. Repeat #7 as **many times** as needed.
10. Prepare **title** page and **cover letter**.

Outline

- **Abstract**
- **Introduction**
- **Case Description**
- **Discussion**
 - Literature review
- **Conclusion**
 - Summary/ Recommendations

Section-by-Section Advice

Abstract

- Introduction and objective/s
- Case report
- Discussion
- Conclusion

Abstract

Three subsections: background, case presentation, conclusion.

- The background should clarify the importance of reporting
- Afterward, a brief description of the clinical scenario of the patient listing only the important details.
- Finally, the conclusion should be brief with lesson learned and impact on the interested group.

Alsaywid BS, Abdulhaq NM. Guideline on writing a case report. Urol Ann 2019;11:126-31.

Abstract

The **most important** part of your article as it will be **freely accessible** from any medical databases during the search.

However, **it is the last part written in your article**. It should include a brief summary that gives a **general idea** of the content of the case report.

It should not include any **references or abbreviations** should not exceed 350 words, preferably **<250** words.

Check journal instructions for a guideline

Review of Contents

- **Abstract:** Brief summary (not required by all journals)
- **Introduction:** Background information and why the case is being reported

Introduction:

- Provide **background** to help readers appreciate the case.
- Note **why** the case is being reported.

Introduction

- Describe the **subject** matter
- State the **purpose** of the case report
- Provide **background information** and pertinent definitions
- Describe the **strategy of the literature review and search terms**
- **Introduce** the patient case to the reader
- Make the introduction **brief** and less than **three paragraphs**

Review of Contents

Case Report

History

- * Presenting features
- * Past Medical History
- * Social and Family History
- * Drug History

Physical Examination

Investigations

Differential Diagnosis

Treatment

Outcome

Case description:

- **Focus** on aspects relating to why the case is being reported.
- Therefore include mainly relevant positives and negatives.
- **Relate** the **discussion** section directly to the **reason** the case is being reported.

Discussion:

- Summarize the **noticeable** features of the case report
- **Compare and contrast** the case report with the existing literature
- Justify the **uniqueness** of the case
- List the **limitations** of the case report and describe their relevance
- **Confirm** the **accuracy** of the descriptive patient case report
- Draw recommendations and conclusions

Conclusions:

- Provide a justified conclusion
- **Avoid** over-reaching statements
- Provide **evidence-based** recommendations
- Describe how the information learned **applies** to one's own **practice**
- List opportunities for **research**
- Ensure that this section is **brief** and does not exceed **one** paragraph

Discussion

- Clarify key issues
- Refer to other cases in the literature
- A short review of the literature is appropriate
- Include the methodology used for literature search
- Message or lesson(s) learned

Discussion/conclusions:

- Again, focus on items relating to **why** the case is being reported.
- Note **evidence** supporting the **conclusions** being drawn.
- Discuss **uncertainties** and **alternative interpretations**, if any.
- Relate content to previously published material.
- Discuss **implications** for **clinical care** and, if applicable, for **research**.

General Pointers

- Consult the **journal's instructions** to authors.
- Use **other case reports in the same journal** as models.
- **Review the literature.**
- Cite the literature **selectively**. (Case reports generally have **short reference lists**.)
- Consider including **one or more figures or tables**.
- Provide an **informative title**.
- Write in a style that **clinicians** will find readable.

General Pointers

- Anonymise the patient(s) as much as possible
- Avoid names and initials
- Omit non-essential personal details
- Table of results can be helpful
- Photos of clinical signs and diagnostic studies are invaluable

- Get advice early!
 - Especially regarding: Key Message and Reason for the Case Report
- Get others not involved in the management of the case to proofread the article and consider their comments carefully

General Pointers

- Obtaining data and documentation on potentially publishable cases
- Confidentiality of information and photos
- Sensitivity of wording
- Style Points
 - “Case” versus “patient”
 - Drug names (generic or trade, capitalization)
 - Avoiding excessive capitalization of disease names

Manuscript checklist

Table 2: A suggested checklist for writing case reports (based on advice in existing literature)

Title:

Sorinola, et al. *BMC Medical Education*. 2004;4:4.

- Should facilitate retrieval with electronic searching.
-

Introduction

- Describe whether the case is unique. If not, does the case have an unusual diagnosis, prognosis, therapy or harm?
 - Describe how the case contributes to scientific knowledge.
 - Describe the instructive or teaching points that add value to this case.
-

Methods and Results

- Describe the history, examination and investigations adequately. Is the cause of the patient's illness clear-cut? What are other plausible explanations?
 - Describe the treatments adequately. Have all available therapeutic options been considered? Are outcomes related to treatments?
-

Discussion

- Report a literature review of other similar cases. Describe how is this case different.
 - Explain the rationale for reporting the case. What is unusual about the case? Does it challenge prevailing wisdom?
 - In the future, could things be done differently in a similar case?
-

Ethics of Publishing a Case Report

- Consent
- Consider privacy laws
- Duty of confidentiality persists even if the patient has died, e.g.: Role of Next-of-Kin
- Deliver a copy of published paper to the patient or relative

Criteria for Publication Without Patient's Consent

- Publication should be in the public interest
- Every effort to contact patient or next-of-kin should have failed
- Every effort to anonymise the case report should be made
- Average person unlikely to withhold consent

اخلاق در انتشار گزارش موردی:

معیارهای انتشار بدون رضایت بیمار به انتشار

- باید در جهت منافع عمومی باشد.
- هر تلاشی برای تماس با بیمار یا نزدیکان باید منجر به شکست شده باشد.
- تمام تلاش برای ناشناس ماندن گزارش مورد باید انجام شود.
- یک فرد معمولی بعید است از رضایت خودداری کند.

Criteria for Publication Without Patient's Consent

- Publication should be in the public interest
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Ethics of Publishing a Case Report: **Authorship**

- در نظر گرفتن موافقت برای انتشار از سایر پزشکان درگیر در مراقبت از بیمار.
- داشتن و ارائه اطلاعات فکری توسط نویسندگان
- اجتناب از "تیم فوتبال" نویسندگان
- بسیاری از مجلات ممکن است تعداد نویسندگان را محدود کنند.
- نامه ها و رضایت از نویسندگان نامبرده مختلف ممکن است مورد نیاز باشد

Authorship

- Consider assent to publish from other clinicians involved in the care of the patient
- Authors included need to have intellectual input
- Avoid a “soccer team” of authors
- Many journals may limit the number of authors
- Letters and consent from various named co-authors may be required

Article Submission

- Have all the consents and assents to publish
- Follow all the instructions and guidelines of the journal webpage
- Write and include a cover letter to the editor

After submission...

Understanding the Review Process

- **ACCEPTED**

- Address comments
- Revisions
- Proofread galley proofs

- **Rejected**

- Review comments
- Reflect
- Seek advice
- Revise
- Re-submit

10 April 2007

Julia H. Indik, MD, PhD
Section Editor
ECG Image of the Month
The American Journal of Medicine

Dear Dr. Indik:

We are pleased to submit our contribution, "A Masquerader's New Clothes," for publication in the *ECG Image of the Month* section of *The American Journal of Medicine*.

This case demonstrates a rare ECG manifestation of pulmonary embolism mimicking acute ST-elevation anteroseptal wall myocardial infarction. Our manuscript contains description of the case presentation, evaluation, diagnosis, management and pertinent literature review.

We hereby confirm that this case has not been published and is not under consideration elsewhere. Moreover, we confirm that all authors participated in the preparation of this manuscript and that *The American Journal of Medicine* has the permission to publish the images.

Thank you for your kind consideration. We sincerely hope you find this feature worthwhile and we look forward to your feedback.

Very truly yours,

A Case Report may be the beginning of a glorious and successful career in medical writing!

Persistence. Persistence. Perseverance.

Perseverance

Grit