

Author guidelines

Writing an article for AFP

Australian Family Physician (AFP) is a peer reviewed journal published monthly by The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP). Our readership includes grassroots general practitioners, general practice registrars, international medical graduates, primary care academics, specialist physicians and medical students.

Advantages of publishing in *AFP* include:

- *AFP* has a circulation of over 40 000 and is widely read by Australian GPs, primary care researchers and physicians
- All articles are available in full text and searchable on the website at www.racgp.org.au/afp thereby increasing exposure for authors
- *AFP* is MEDLINE listed
- *AFP* is included in Thomson's Scientific Citation Index Expanded (SCIE)
- *AFP* has an impact factor
- *AFP* has an ERA (Excellence in Research for Australia) rating of B.

AFP adheres to the 'Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals: writing and editing for biomedical publication', available at www.icmje.org and the 'Guidelines on good publication practice' and the 'Code of ethics for editors of biomedical journals' published by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), available at www.publicationethics.org.uk.

Authors wishing to submit an article to *AFP* should refer to the following.

Things to consider before submitting your article to AFP

How to format an article for AFP

How to submit an article to AFP

Article types

- Research articles that are relevant to Australian general practice
- Clinical articles that relate directly to patient care
- Professional articles on non-clinical general practice topics
- Viewpoint articles on an important general practice issue
- Letters to the editor

Author resources

Things to consider before submitting your article to AFP

Relevance

Authors should present their work in such a way that it engages and informs a GP readership. The paper should be pitched at the level where a competent practising GP would read it and say 'Yes, that was useful, I'll change my practice accordingly'.

Authorship

Authors need to meet all of the following criteria as outlined in the ICMJE requirements:

- substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data
- drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content, and
- final approval of the version to be published.

Contributors who do not meet authorship requirements can be included in an acknowledgment section. Permission is required from all people who are acknowledged.

Peer review

Articles submitted to *AFP* are subject to double blind peer review. The Editors reserve the right to reject any manuscript without review, particularly if it is not relevant to Australian general practice or unsuitable for publication in *AFP*.

Disclosure of funds/interests

Any potential conflicts of interest must be stated. Authors of research papers are required to disclose any sponsorship or funding arrangements relating to their research. If a commercial organisation has initiated or significantly contributed to the writing of the article, the organisation must be identified. The Editors reserve the right to investigate or confirm any disclosure of funds/interests.

Permissions

Authors are responsible for obtaining permission to reproduce published (or otherwise copyright) material (eg. figures and tables).

Editing and production

All accepted manuscripts are subject to editing for length, clarity and conformity with *AFP* style. Tables, images, figures or illustrations, are valuable but their use should supplement the text without duplicating and are subject to editorial judgment.

How to format an article for AFP

Main text

Submit the main text of the article as a word document, double spaced throughout and include a title page, word count (excluding abstract, references and figures), text, a list of figure legends, a list of tables, and references. Submit the abstract as a separate word document. Use automatic page numbering but no footnotes, headers or footers. Do not include author details (including contact details) in the text or on the title page. Refer to drugs generically. Use acronyms and abbreviations sparingly and spell them out in full the first time they are mentioned. Indicate headings and subheadings, but avoid using all capitals in headings. Include a copy of written consent from any person who can be identified in the text or illustrations.

Tables, illustrations, figures and images

Submit these as separate files, numbered and including a legend for each that is no more than 25 words. The preferred format for images is eps or jpeg, all at 300 dpi. Graphs must be supplied in their native form, eg. Microsoft Excel. If native files cannot be supplied, please provide numeric data for graphs in case they need to be redrawn. A copy of written permission(s) (if required) must be provided.

References

AFP uses a modified Vancouver style for referencing. *AFP* variations to Vancouver style include:

- For standard journals, *AFP* lists all authors (include all initials) when there are six or fewer; when seven or more, list the first three and add 'et al'. The title of the paper should be given in full and the title of the journal abbreviated according to Index Medicus (if not listed by Index Medicus spell out in full). Include the year; the volume number and the first and last page numbers of the article, eg.
1. Paige G, Cooke MA, Fielding AJ, et al. Childhood development: the role of the general practitioner. *Arch Pediatr* 2005;12:863–5.
- For websites, *AFP* lists the author, the title of the site, where it is available and the URL, with the date accessed in square brackets, eg.
1. Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. Hepatitis C in Australia. Available at www6.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-hepc-index [Accessed 10 June 2008].

Further information about the Vancouver style of referencing is available at www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/uniform_requirements.html. References must be limited to the work cited in the paper and should not be a bibliography of the subject. They should be numbered consecutively in the order in which they are first mentioned in the text. Identify references in the text and captions by Arabic numerals. Personal communications and unpublished material are NOT acceptable for references.

How to submit an article to AFP

Authors must provide final copy in electronic form via the *AFP* manuscript submission portal at: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/afp>. After logging on to the site, click on 'Author centre' and then follow the prompts to submit a manuscript.

If your article is accepted, a proof pdf of the final manuscript will be sent to the principal author before publication and must be returned by the date requested. No corrections may be made after the pdf has been

returned. A photo of the lead author will be required to accompany the published article and should be emailed to afp@racgp.org.au in jpeg format after acceptance of the article.

Article types

Research articles

AFP strives to publish research that is relevant to the needs of Australian GPs. Submissions from other fields and from non-Australian authors are welcome provided the findings are applicable to Australian general practice. Articles should demonstrate a clear research question, sound method, analysed appropriately for the method and presented in a comprehensible, accurate way. The abstract should accurately and clearly summarise the article. This is extremely important as when searching articles, many readers will go no further than the abstract or will use the abstract as a filter to include or exclude papers from further scrutiny.

At times, research articles will not be accepted based on lack of relevance to Australian general practice when compared to other articles; not only the quality of the submission. Authors should use their covering letter to provide 2–3 reasons to articulate why they believe their research should be published in *AFP*. This is particularly important if the submission relates to a lower priority area for *AFP* (more details follow).

Low priority research articles

In recent years, *AFP* has received approximately twice as many research submissions as it can publish. While *AFP* will consider a wide range of research methodologies, authors should be aware that there are certain types of research that are a lower priority for publication. These include surveys with low response rates, pilot studies and educational interventions.

In most cases, the lower the response rate to a survey, the less the findings can be generalisable to other similar populations. *AFP* acknowledges that less than desired response rates to surveys are a common issue and that the population being surveyed can influence response rate; hence there is no single number that can be seen as an 'acceptable' response rate. Issues that will be considered when considering a response rate include:

- The population being surveyed
- Efforts taken to maximise response
- The overall strength of the method (eg. use of a validated instrument)
- Generalisability
- Interest of the topic

AFP is interested in publishing true pilot studies which demonstrate a new or unusual methodology that requires piloting, innovative research (ie. novel research question) or unexpected or interesting findings that will impact on further research and/or potentially practice. However, in all cases the methodology needs to be sound and well executed. A submission that is a pilot due to lack of funds, lack of recruitment, ad hoc methodology or issues in the execution is unlikely to be published in *AFP*. Exploratory studies in areas where there is a lack of research to identify what the research question should be will be considered, however they are also not a high priority.

AFP is interested in publishing quality articles on educational interventions that:

- Describe new strategies, techniques or approaches in enough detail that the approach can be reproduced (the standard expected in the description is the same as for a behavioural intervention trial)
- Have sound evaluation (ideally using standardised instruments or recognised research methods)
- Articulate the advantages and disadvantages of the approach being considered
- Are able to demonstrate educationally and clinically relevant evaluation strategies.

AFP is unlikely to publish educational interventions where the only evaluation performed relates to participant satisfaction, self-rated knowledge or confidence at the end of the session.

Articles that are of low priority for the research section of *AFP* may at times be considered for publication in the professional section of *AFP*. However, authors should note that these submissions may still require ethics approval if they do not fall into an exemption (see below).

Ethics approval

In keeping with international protocols and NHMRC guidelines, all research papers reporting new research must be able to state that appropriate ethics approval was obtained before undertaking the study. All clinical trials must be registered. Ethics approval details must be described in the manuscript. Further information about ethics approval requirements is available at www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/ethics/human_research/index.htm.

Occasionally, research may be eligible for an exemption to obtaining ethics approval because it is defined as quality assurance rather than research. For guidance see the NHMRC publication 'When does quality assurance in health care require independent ethical review?' which is available at www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/file/health_ethics/human_conduct/guidelines/e46.pdf.

Consensus statements and checklists

When available, *AFP* recommends using consensus statements and checklists as a guide to writing your article, such as:

- For randomised controlled trials: CONSORT www.consort-statement.org
- For diagnostic accuracy studies: STARD www.stard-statement.org
- For observational studies in epidemiology: STROBE www.strobe-statement.org.

For an up-to-date list of such resources, please go to the Equator network website at www.equator-network.org.

Format of submissions

The maximum length for reports of quantitative research is 1500 words, excluding abstract, tables, figures and references. A maximum of four tables and/or figures is recommended. For reports of qualitative research, the maximum length is 2000 words and quotations of interviewees/participants are considered additional to the word count. The number of references should be less than 25. Shorter articles are welcomed.

AFP uses structured abstracts and the IMRAD format for research articles, followed by a short summary of the implications for general practice.

Abstract

The abstract should accurately reflect the contents of the article and include the major 'take home' messages of the article. The abstract should be less than 150 words and structured under the headings: background, methods, results and discussion.

Introduction

This provides a background for the study, outlining the nature of the problem and states the research question. A good research question:

- defines the population studied
- defines the problem or intervention to be studied
- clearly states any comparison group
- clearly defines outcomes of interest, and
- states a timeframe.

Methods

This includes the protocol of the study and should include:

- how and why the participants were selected (include eligibility and exclusion criteria) and details of randomisation if applicable
- a description of the source population
- technical information (method, procedures, drugs or interventions used) in sufficient detail to allow the study to be reproduced
- literature review articles should include search strategies
- analytical methods in enough detail so that a knowledgeable reader with access to the original data could verify the results
- ethics approval or reason for exemption should also be stated at the end of this section.

DO NOT include results in the methods section.

Results

Results should be presented in a logical sequence with the main or most important findings first. Avoid repeating in the text data and information included in the tables, but rather use the text to emphasise or summarise.

Discussion

Use this section to emphasise new or important aspects of the study. Summarise the main findings, discuss possible explanations, compare with other relevant studies, discuss the limitations of the study, and only make conclusions that are supported by the data.

Implications for general practice

Include a short summary (eg. 2–4 dot points) of the implications of your study to general practice.

Clinical articles

Articles in the clinical section of *AFP* relate directly to patient care. They are evidence based reviews relating to the assessment and/or management of specific symptoms or conditions. Articles must be general practice focused and authors are asked to pitch their article at the level where a competent practising GP would read it and say: 'Yes, that was useful, I'll change my practice accordingly'. The word limit for the text is 1500 words, excluding abstract and references. Any appropriate case

studies, clinical photographs, diagrams, figures and tables are most welcome and are not included in the word limit of the text. All articles should be appropriately referenced to the best available evidence. Articles need to include a semi-structured abstract of no more than 150 words and a short summary of important points. A number of clinical articles are commissioned each month for inclusion in a theme or ongoing series.

Case based articles in the clinical section of *AFP* should be presented in a question and answer format, starting with a short clinical case history and usually accompanied by clinical photograph. The case history should be followed by a series of questions to bring out the salient points regarding diagnosis or management of the condition described. Cases should focus on an unusual problem or an unusual presentation of a condition that is of interest to practising GPs. The word limit for the text of case based articles is 750 words excluding references. Appropriate diagrams, figures and tables are welcome and are not included in the word limit of the text. All articles should be appropriately referenced to the best available evidence.

Professional articles

The professional section of *AFP* includes articles on non-clinical topics such as practice management, medicolegal issues, patient safety, healthcare systems, primary care workforce, service delivery and undergraduate or postgraduate medical education.

Reports of audits, including those completed according to the QI&CPD and PDSA frameworks may occasionally be appropriate for publication in this section. However, while the RACGP recognises the importance of these activities to the professional development of GPs and practice staff, reports of these activities are often of limited interest to GPs outside the practice where the study was carried out. For this reason, these reports are a low priority for publication in *AFP*. Only reports of activities that have the potential to make our GP readership consider implementing a change to their current practice will be considered for publication. In some cases these activities will require ethics approval according to the NHMRC's 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research'. Please see the section in research on ethics approval. Professional submissions may be low risk, see: www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/file/guidelines/ethics/human_research/NS_low_risk_flow_chart.pdf.

Reports of educational interventions may also occasionally be considered for publication in the professional section if they have the potential to make GP or undergraduate educators consider implementing a change to their current practice. In addition, the educational intervention must be described in enough detail for it to be reproducible by our readership.

The word limit for professional articles is 1500 words, excluding abstract and references. Any appropriate case studies, clinical photographs, diagrams, figures and tables are most welcome and are not included in the word limit of the text. All articles should be appropriately referenced to the best available evidence. The articles need to include a semi-structured abstract of no more than 150 words and a short summary of important points.

Viewpoint articles

Viewpoint articles are opinion pieces relating to any topic of primary care including health policy, education, clinical practice, practice management or service delivery. The authors point of view should be clearly argued and supported by appropriate references. Priority will be given to

topics that reflect current and critical issues faced by our GP readership and their patients. The word limit is 750 words with up to 5 references.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor should be a maximum of 350 words, excluding references (up to three references). Letters can be addressed to:

The Editor
Australian Family Physician
1 Palmerston Crescent
South Melbourne Victoria 3205 Australia

and submitted online via <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/afp> or emailed to afp@racgp.org.au.

Not all letters will be published. Preference will be given to letters related to *AFP* articles. Authors of any article a letter pertains to may be given the opportunity to reply. Letters may be edited.

Author resources Books and articles

- Albert T. Winning the publications game (3rd edn). How to write a scientific paper without neglecting your patients. Oxford: Radclyffe, 2009
- Taylor R. Clinician's guide to medical writing. New York: Springer, 2004
- Sterk PJ, Rabe KF. The joy of writing a paper. *Breathe* 2008;4:224–32. Available at www.ers-education.org/media/2008/pdf/40206.pdf
- Albert E, Hansen E, Cook C. Grassroots research: How to have a stab at your first project and succeed. *Australian Family Physician* 2005;32:564–7.

Links

- Advice on writing for publication is available at www.timbert.co.uk
- Simple fact sheets about research are available at www.phcris.org.au/phcred/resources.php#researchbites
- A free research methods manual is available at www.dundee.ac.uk/generalpractice/tayren
- Information about formulating a research question is available at www.cebm.net/index.aspx?o=1036 and www.theresearchassistant.com/tutorial/2.asp
- Pearson Education Inc. Research checklists are available at http://wps.prenhall.com/chet_leedy_practical_8/23/6131/1569572.cw/index.html.