PEARLS TO GETTING YOUR MANUSCRIPT DONE AND ACCEPTED

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Why am I giving this talk

- To pay forward the advice others gave me

- To learn from successes AND failures and pass on lessons learned not just through didactics, but also experience
Pearl # 1:

Write down your ideas at ALL times (in the lab and clinic) and follow up when you have more time
Pre-project

- Decide: is this the right project to do?

Has someone already answered the question you are addressing? If so, are there any gaps left?
Pre-paper

Pearl #2:

Do a real literature search on your topic. Take notes as you are doing this since those notes will turn into your intro section.

Decide: How hard will the project be to do? Feasibility? Time? Money? Will it turn into a scholarly product (i.e. a paper)? Get mentors’ advice throughout.
Why write peer-reviewed papers?

- Important that your work be peer reviewed and in the public domain so we can promote knowledge and learn from it and ultimately impact health.

- Satisfying to ask questions and answer them thoroughly

- Along with grants, the “coin of the realm” for academics (appointment, promotion, tenure, grants)

- Yet….

  …not every idea is destined to be a paper AND THAT IS OKAY!
Pearl #3:

Decide if what you are doing may end being published (we’ll talk about this more)!

If so… rest of the talk is for you.

If not, it still may be very worth doing your project and even telling others about it in various ways that we will discuss, but you will save yourself lots of time not writing a paper that was never destined to be a peer-reviewed publication.
Pearl #4:

Write notes as you work on the project.

Make a file for yourself and then add to it (literature you come across for the intro and write the methods as you are deciding on the methods for the project). You will have a shell of those two sections, which will be a great first step for the paper.
Test it out

Pearl #5:

Try to present what will be your paper in other forums and take notes as you go:

- Talk with colleagues and even family members/friends—make sure it’s relevant and understandable
- Works in progress in your Division
- Regional and national presentations (posters or orals), which brings me to…
Pearl #6:

Try to learn what’s most exciting about your paper and what’s most concerning.

- If particular people at conferences ask good questions that you plan to address, write their names down as possible future reviewers who are interested in your work.
Authorship

Pearl #7:

Before you progress too far, talk about possible authorship

- Review criteria for authorship in your journal (the JAMA journals have it nicely laid out)
- Try to determine a preliminary first and senior author- talk over reasons this would change but try to stick to your decisions. With trainees, give deadlines but also talk with them about how if it doesn’t get done in a certain time period, they may have to relinquish authorship.
- Let folks know that “sweat equity” at the end will be an important factor.
Pearl #8:
Use your energy and time wisely and figure out how you work best.

- Do you want to think of it as a sprint and just bang it out at the end? Or as a marathon and work on it slowly and steadily?
- Regardless... write at times you work best. Write when you think of something new—even if it’s just to jot something down
- Jot notes after the shower
- Write after you come back from presenting and your energy is high about your topic
- Write into limitations (discussion section) when someone raises an issue that you can’t/didn’t address
Pearl #9:
Don’t underestimate the importance of the writing process.

- Write MULTIPLE iterative drafts.
- Write with your senior author and have that person apprentice you in the art of writing
- Send around to all authors early and often
- Once you have a solid draft send it to a trusted senior colleague for an “internal” edit. Get permission to acknowledge him/her
- At some point, you are the lead author and you need to help resolve conflict and build consensus
Pearl #10:
Format for the journal appropriately by consulting with the journal’s authorship guidelines

- Seems like a small issue but editors and reviewers notice when something isn’t formatted correctly for the journal specifications.
Abstract: do this LAST

Background/intro: Map the swamp for the reader (pertinent literature and gaps). What were your aims? Hypotheses?

Methods: Don’t get creative. Use validated measures. Address why you are doing things the way you are. Reference others’ prior similar work when you can and non-typical statistical techniques.
Pearl #11 (continued)

- Results: Sample description—main findings. Make these clear—funnel toward your goal
- Discussion: Make it fun. What did you find? How is it similar/different to what others found? How does it advance the field—implications (i.e. on clinical practice)? What were your limitations? Help the reader understand why they aren’t a big deal but do provide things to be done in future research. Tell them what’s next!
Pearl #11 (cont’d)

- Tables and Figures: label so they stand alone. Read instructions to the authors.

- All sections: Active vs. Passive tense
How to choose a journal Pearl #12

- Aim high at first
  - It may get in
  - You will get a good and usually fast review

- Talk to mentors

- Look at your list of references. What journals are those works in? Also, make sure you cite people who might review.
What happens?

- Usual choices
  - accept as is (very rare!)
  - accept with revisions—GREAT NEWS
  - reject, resubmit—GOOD NEWS
  - reject (please don’t resubmit here)—can happen right away or after a review

- Rates of acceptance (5 - 50%)
Pearl #13:

If it’s a flat out rejection but you get a review: still try to fix the issues for the next submission. You may get the same reviewer and, even if you don’t, a new reviewer may have the same concern.
Rewriting

**Pearl #14:**

If it’s a revise and resubmit:

- Address (doesn’t mean “do”) everything the reviewers are telling you to do.
- If you are not doing something that is suggested, give a courteous rationale.
- Be orderly and number your responses, giving reviewer comment (italics) and then your answer (regular type).
Perseverance

Pearl #15:

Perseverance is the name of the game

- Get back on your feet quickly after a rejection. Read the reviews and try to see the reviewers as helping you out for the next submission.
- Read the reviews with a senior colleague who will have a less biased lens and be able to assess the future possibilities for the manuscript
- I have been told everything has a home…
Resources

- Your mentor panel and senior members in your Division
- Sue Tolleson Rinehart, PhD; suetr@unc.edu
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Remember when you are done—celebrate!
And relax!!