

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

As the editor who customarily signs the introduction to every issue of *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, lately I've enjoyed closer support from two experienced members of our editorial board: Sergio Goes de Paula, founder of our journal, and Marcos Cueto, one of Latin America's most internationally successful historians. The more constant presence of these advisors at our offices has helped us deal with a growing volume of submissions and improve our efforts to make the journal more international. I would therefore like to use this space to resume a discussion proposed in the Editor's Note to issue 3 of volume 18 (July-September 2011). Transcribed below you will find observations by my distinguished colleague Marcos Cueto, made at an event that addressed the topic of "Publication in scientific journals today," organized by the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz/Fiocruz on August 22, 2011.

*Jaime L. Benchimol*  
Scientific editor

Based on my experience as a writer and as a member of editorial boards for U.S. and European journals, I would like to offer some suggestions to the Latin American historians of medicine and science who plan to take on the problems associated with publishing in English. These problems exist because we still live in an ethnocentric academic world, where the English language is the Latin of science. My suggestions are aimed especially at students and newer historians, and my underlying premise is that in order to get published in a top-ranking foreign journal, you must pay careful attention to matters of style and to the entire preparation of your article. Furthermore, sometimes you have to alter the organization and very content of the paper you originally wrote in your native tongue. With this in mind, I have listed some problems presented by this undertaking and my suggestions on how to make them easier to deal with.

### **First problem: thinking translation will suffice**

Language is part of a culture, a way of thinking, and a style of saying things. To write in academic English, I must use the first person, write clearly, and preferably present only one argument – and by this, I am talking about the way your paper is organized. Native speakers of Spanish or Portuguese usually write in the third person plural. They also make ample use of ambiguity, that is, they offer a number of possibilities, especially when it

comes to their conclusions, and they fail to concern themselves about whether or not their introduction and conclusion are consistent. But you can't give a translator something written in Portuguese or Spanish and simply assume that he or she will transform it into a good academic text in English. You should present the translator with a paper that has been written in the style demanded by English.

**Second problem: writing without an outline**

To avoid this, the very first paragraph of your article should explain how your research contributes to the history of science or to the journal's line of research. It is vital that your title (non-descriptive) and sub-title (descriptive) be precise and that your findings and ideas be well organized. The author's voice and his or her argument are of utmost importance in a scientific journal published in the English language.

**Third problem: not thinking about the difference between a case study and a general study – from the angle of the editor**

For us, a study on Brazil – for example – is a general one, whereas a case study deals with a city or region. But the world is different for an editor: Western medicine is what happened in the United States or Europe, while what happens in Brazil is usually deemed a case study. It is thus essential to establish the relation between your research and the editor's world, right in the article's introduction.

**Fourth problem: weak references**

To be published in English – or in a good journal anywhere in the world – you must achieve a balance between national and international references, demonstrating your knowledge of the existing literature on your research topic.

**Fifth problem: improperly ordered references for national archives and collections**

In developed countries, references to organized archives often follow an established sequence: archive, collection, folder, letter, date. However, many Latin American archives do not do so. You should either establish an order or inform the editor of the problem.

**Sixth problem: thinking it's easy and fast to publish abroad**

In most authors' experience, getting published is a negotiating process, one that is even more challenging for Latin Americans than for Americans or Europeans. An editor will often ask for three or even four reviews, leaving the contributor on hold for a long time. In the best-case scenario, you will receive a letter in a year stating that the article might be published, with changes.

**Seventh problem: thinking that the editor and the reviewers are one and the same thing**

Both reviewers and the editor try to reject a good percentage of submissions in order to maintain the journal's good name. The former generally believe that a different article should have been written, and they ask for multiple changes. The editor, on the other

hand, needs international articles. It's often possible that the editor will accept the author's statement that he or she will make some of the changes requested by the reviewers, and that the article will eventually be accepted.

**Eighth problem: not worrying about the English in the cover letter to your original submission or to your changes**

Your cover letter to the editor as well as your abstract must be written in impeccable English. Any changes made must also be clearly explained.

**Ninth problem: not doing your research on the journal where you'd like to publish**

You must be familiar with the journal's editorial policy and follow any instructions for contributors, including style rules regarding English usage, illustrations, tables, charts, graphs, footnotes, abbreviations, and so on. It's also a good idea to be familiar with the articles the journal has already published on the history of health or on your realm of research, to know how the journal is evaluated by research agencies, and to have more than one place in mind for publishing your article – but *never submit to more than one journal at a time*.

**Tenth problem: getting discouraged**

Or better put: taking the rejection of your article personally. If your article is rejected, go back over it and see if it lacks coherence, if further research is needed, or if another style of writing would be better. Once you've made the necessary changes, send it off to another journal.

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