



EDUCATION FOR HEALTH

EDITORIAL

Upcoming Changes in the Format and Allowable Length of Articles in *Education for Health*

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Styles change, even formatting styles for papers published in medical journals. Since 1978, editors of a small number of general medical journals have met periodically, first to create and then to update format standards for research papers submitted to biomedical journals—standard sections headings for abstracts and the body of papers, the expected location of content within these sections, regular formats for references and tables, conventions for use of abbreviations, and the like. For this International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), the reasons for standardizing the formats of submitted articles were to ease the work of authors and journal staff and to strengthen the reporting of studies (ICMJE, 2009). Although these formats were not intended to guide how papers were to look when published, many journals have adopted these same formats for the papers appearing in their issues, so these formats are now familiar to readers as well. Thirty years after the *Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals* was introduced, authors, journal staff and readers share a common expectation for what information is to appear within biomedical articles, where it is to be found, and something about how it is to look. The ICMJE is still a small working group and their experience-derived recommendations are not based on hard evidence for what communicates best. Nevertheless, more than 500 journals currently advertise that they use the *Uniform Requirements* and many others follow these standards in whole or part. The *Uniform Requirements*' "IMRAD" structure for research articles—Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion—are ubiquitous in health sciences reports.

Education for Health (EfH) has been asking authors to submit manuscripts in the style of the Fifth Edition of the American Psychological Association's Publication Manual (APA, 2001), another common style developed initially for the psychological



sciences and often used in the behavioral and social sciences. This style is less common in the biomedical sciences, and becoming increasingly less so as the *Uniform Requirements* have gained popularity.

In the coming months *Education for Health* will transition to the *Uniform Requirements* format. This change will ease the work of authors who submit to *EfH*. Authors who are in the habit of formatting the manuscripts they are writing according to the *Uniform Requirements* will need to make few adjustments when they submit to our journal. And manuscripts submitted to other journals before or after being submitted to *EfH* should not require much reformatting. Adopting these widely-used formats will also help *EfH*'s less experienced authors become familiar with an industry standard.

Education for Health will soon be updating its website instructions for authors, asking that all manuscripts follow the *Uniform Requirements*. The *Uniform Requirements* will also become the general format used for *EfH*'s articles when published, so readers will be seeing the change in the upcoming issues. Referencing within the text will no longer appear as authors' last names and publication year placed within parentheses, but as simple numbers corresponding to citations ordered sequentially within the references section. Formats for references will appear as:

Kristina TN, Majoor GD, Van der Vleuten CPM. Does community-based education come close to what it should be? *Education for Health*. 2006;19:179 – 188.

In addition to format changes, this summer *Education for Health* will extend the maximum allowable length of articles. One of the advantages of the *EfH*'s recent transition to an entirely online journal is that publishing lengthier articles no longer increases printing costs—there are no printing costs now—and longer articles no longer bump other articles from issues for lack of space. Up until now, word limits for research articles, commentaries and several other types of submissions within *EfH* have been lower than those set by some other journals in the fields of health professions education and community medicine: the differences will now be eliminated. Again, our authors win. Authors can say what importantly needs to be said surrounding their work. To be certain that permitting longer articles does not leave readers wading through wordy, repetitive and rambling tomes, *EfH* will continue to push authors to be succinct and clear in their writing. To quote Gracián, “Good things, when short, are twice as good.”

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International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. (2009) *Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication*. Available at <http://www.icmje.org/>. Accessed April 24, 2009.