

# Reading Medical Journals: A Beginners guide for Medical Students

Ahmad Ayaz Sabri

**Affiliation:** Graduate of Punjab Medical College, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

**Address for correspondence:** 32-D, Peoples Colony # 1 Faisalabad, Pakistan. Phone: 92-321-7605869,  
E-mail: [ahmadasabri@gmail.com](mailto:ahmadasabri@gmail.com)

**Published:** December 02, 2007

**Copyright:** © 2007 Ahmed Ayaz Sabri. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

**Abbreviations:**

**Citation:** Sabri AA. Reading Medical Journals: A beginners guide for Medical Students. 10/90 Student J 2007. 1 (1): e2.

## Summary:

*Research is a vast field and it will be very difficult for a beginner (student/doctor) to start effectively without proper guidance. It is very important to know about the medical journals and their effective use before starting research work. Selection, understanding and proper utilization of medical journals is as important as the practical research work. The following article would be a useful guide for beginners in the field of research, especially medical students.*

## **Importance of Reading Journals:**.....

Why should one read Medical Journals? There are multiple reasons for it.

Medical journals are a way for doctors and medical students to keep themselves abreast of the most recent and relevant developments in their field. This is essential for long term medical practice, as medicine is a constantly changing field. The diagnosis, pathophysiology, and the first line treatment of a particular disease yesterday might well have changed today, and any textbook will be out of date by a couple of years, if not months.

Regular journal reading will subconsciously make you more observant and vigilant towards the patients. It will ultimately help you in providing better health care. [1]

It is also a way of keeping yourself up to date to the developments not just in your field, but other related fields as well. Day by day the word 'inter-disciplinary' is stressed upon as many diseases now need an integrated approach amongst various related disciplines to accomplish the desired results. Journals are the only way of achieving these goals.

## **How to read journals:**.....

Approach to medical journals by beginners should be different from that of regular readers. For a novice, it is firstly important to know what the types of articles published in medical journals are.

*Types of articles published in Medical Journals:*

In brief, the types of articles usually published by standard medical journals include:

(1) Original articles (*the results of a research study conducted by an author or group of authors trying to answer a new, original hypothesis*);

(2) Review Articles (*that is a like a book chapter acting as a latest review to all the developments that have taken place over the past few years regarding a particular topic. They thus provide comprehensive, scholarly overviews of important clinical subjects*);

(3) Editorials (*written by the editorial board of the particular journal, they provide analysis and focus on a particular article published in a medical journal. Often an issue of a journal has a particular theme. The editorial is often a way of conveying to the readers why the particular theme/topic was chosen and its importance*);

(4) Case Reports (*report unusual/rare presentations of common diseases or presentations of rare or 'new' diseases*).

(5) Letters to the editor (*is a forum for readers to comment about a particular article published in the particular journal. These usually are sent within 2 weeks of publication of the particular article that the readers want to comment upon*).

(5) Other Articles: *Some journals have other sections such as interviews of important people related to the medical field,*

*articles on health policy, human rights, health law etc. (2)*

## **Which journals to Read**.....

*Certain rules:*

In order to become a consistent reader of journals, you need to follow certain rules in the beginning. Start with student medical journals (see Appendix A) to get acquainted with the nature and content of medical journals, and then proceed to other general medical journals (see Appendix B). Journals of repute in Pakistan are shown in Appendix C.

Keep it simple; do not worry about understanding everything that you read. A good thing to do is to always keep a medical and/or an English dictionary with you, and when in doubt, never hesitate to ask a senior.

Always start reading the journal from the article that attracts you most and then proceed to reading other articles. Level of interest can be judged by going through the summaries/ abstract or the first paragraph of an article. If you don't find any article of your interest, then read relatively simple articles like review articles before you go for original research papers. Do not try to read whole journal in one sitting. Make it a habit to visit different sites of various medical journals at least twice a week.

**Editor's Note**.....

At present there are thousands of journals and someone new to the field might find it difficult to decide about which journals to read.

Here the **Impact Factor** of the journals can act as a rough guide.

“The Impact factor, often abbreviated IF, is a measure of the citations to science and social science journals. It is frequently used as a proxy for the importance of a journal to its field.” (3)

“A journal's impact factor is calculated from this equation:

*Journal X's 2005 impact factor =*

*Citations in 2005 (in journals indexed by Thomson Scientific [formerly known as Thomson ISI]) to all articles published by Journal X in 2003–2004*

divided by

*Number of articles deemed to be “citable” by Thomson Scientific that were published in Journal X in 2003–2004.” (4)*

Roughly, the higher the number of citations the articles of a particular journal get, the higher the impact factor. Although controversial, it is still a rough guide to the quality of the particular journal.

And for a novice researcher to the field, it would be a good idea to start from journals that have high impact factors. However, to rightly understand the true purpose, the meaning, the use, abuse and the

limitations of the impact factor, the following readings are advised:

(1) **Impact Factor.** From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact\\_factor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_factor)

(2) **The Thomsan Scientific Impact Factor.** <http://scientific.thomson.com/free/essays/journalcitationreports/impactfactor/>

(3) The PLoS Medicine Editors. **The Impact Factor Game** *PLoS Medicine* Vol. 3, No. 6, e291 doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0030291 <http://medicine.plosjournals.org/perlerv/?request=get-document&doi=10.1371/journal.pmed.0030291>

(4) Porta M. **Quality of impact factors of general medical journals.** *BMJ* 2003;326:931 <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/326/7395/931>

(5) Garfield E. **Journal Impact Factors: A brief overview.** *CMAJ.* 1999 Oct 19;161(8):979-80. <http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/full/161/8/979>

**Appendix A:  
List of Student Medical Journals**

<u>Student Medical Journals</u>
The PLoS Medicine Student <a href="http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/studentforum.php">http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/studentforum.php</a>
Student BMJ <a href="http://www.studentbmj.com/">http://www.studentbmj.com/</a>
McGill Journal of Medicine <a href="http://www.medicine.mcgill.ca/mjm/index.htm">http://www.medicine.mcgill.ca/mjm/index.htm</a>
Medscape Med Students <a href="http://www.medscape.com/medicalstudents">http://www.medscape.com/medicalstudents</a>
The New Physician <a href="http://www.amsa.org/tnp/">http://www.amsa.org/tnp/</a>
Global Medicine <a href="http://www.globalmedicine.nl/">http://www.globalmedicine.nl/</a>
Global Pulse <a href="http://www.amsa.org/globalpulse/">http://www.amsa.org/globalpulse/</a>
The Lancet Student <a href="http://www.thelancetstudent.com/">http://www.thelancetstudent.com/</a>
Student JAMA <a href="http://jama.ama-assn.org/ms_current_dtl">http://jama.ama-assn.org/ms_current_dtl</a>

**Appendix B:  
List of Good General Medical  
journals**

<u>General Medical Journals</u>
New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)
<a href="http://content.nejm.org/">http://content.nejm.org/</a>
Journal of the American Medical Association
<a href="http://jama.ama-assn.org/">http://jama.ama-assn.org/</a>
Lancet
<a href="http://www.thelancet.com/">http://www.thelancet.com/</a>
British Medical Journal (BMJ)
<a href="http://bmj.bmjournals.com/">http://bmj.bmjournals.com/</a>
Annals of Internal Medicine

<a href="http://www.annals.org/">http://www.annals.org/</a>
PLoS Medicine
<a href="http://www.plosmedicine.com/">www.plosmedicine.com/</a>

**Appendix C:  
Journals of repute in Pakistan**

<u>Pakistani Medical Journals</u>
JPMA
<a href="http://www.jpma.org.pk/">http://www.jpma.org.pk/</a>
JCPSP
<a href="http://www.cpsp.edu.pk/jcpsp/">http://www.cpsp.edu.pk/jcpsp/</a>
JAMC
<a href="http://www.ayubmed.edu.pk/JAMC/">http://www.ayubmed.edu.pk/JAMC/</a>

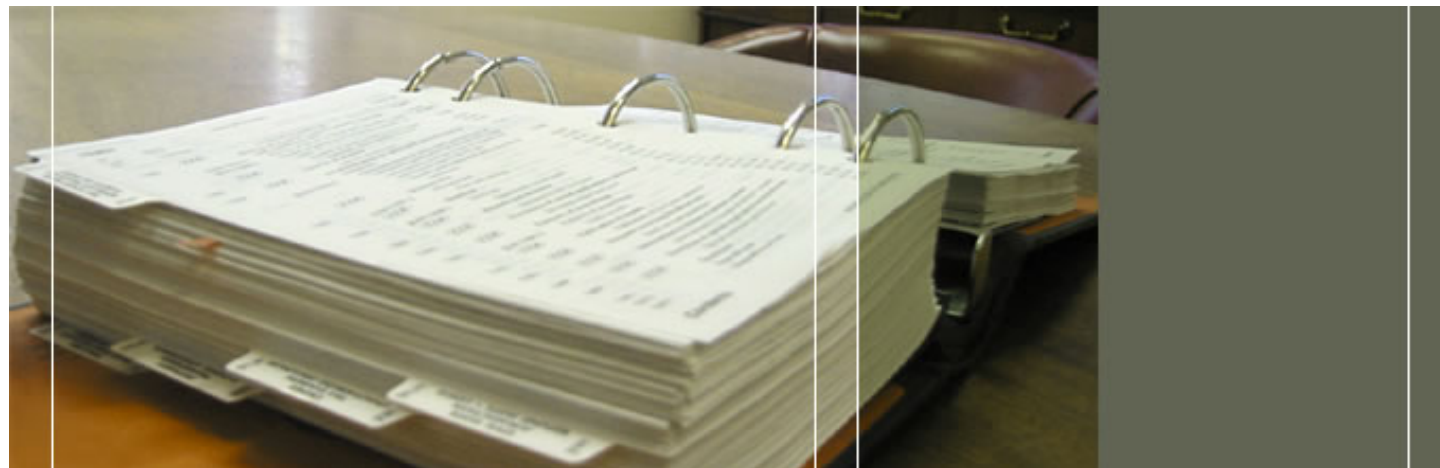
**References**.....

(1) Villanueva T, Ravichandran B. **Digesting Journals.** StudentBMJ 2006;14:265-308 July.

(2) Guidelines for authors. The New England Journal of Medicine. <http://www.nejm.org>

(3) Impact Factor. **From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact\\_factor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_factor)

(4) The PLoS Medicine Editors. The Impact Factor Game *PLoS Medicine* Vol. 3, No. 6, e291 doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0030291



PromotingResearch.com

“  
A unique platform for educating young scientists/researchers  
about important aspects of research  
”