

EDITORIAL

Practical tips for getting plastic surgery research published

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Introduction

There are many reasons to participate in plastic and reconstructive surgery research: from sharing new techniques, treatments and technologies to improving health care outcomes by advancing clinical practice. As Editors-in-Chief of the *Australasian Journal of Plastic Surgery*, we asked seven prolific authors, from early career researchers to leading experts, to share their thoughts on why plastic surgeons should publish. We also asked them to provide their top five tips to help emerging researchers produce research suitable for publication. We are pleased to share their tips with you.

Professor Warren Rozen

Divisional Director of Surgical Research, Department of Surgery, Peninsula Health, Victoria; Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, Monash University, Victoria; Section Editor (Technology and Imaging), Australasian Journal of Plastic Surgery

Publishing is the necessary pinnacle of research, and is the means to having your research peer assessed, scrutinised and presented to the field as a way to influence clinical practice. But the process can be a feared endeavour, often leading to junior clinicians avoiding research altogether, despite the fact that it need not be so.

In no particular order, these are some of my tips for successful publishing:

1. **Enjoy the process**—usually achieved by seeing your research come to its meaningful conclusion, being optimised through peer review and feeling the accomplishment of seeing your work in press.
2. **Pick the right journal**—there are often several options in journal type (general journals, specialty specific, topic specific, geographic region specific) and journal quality or impact. Choosing the right journal and impact factor may improve the chances of early acceptance for publication.
3. **Write simply and clearly, and present what is unique early in the text**—readers, and indeed reviewers, will be drawn early to a focused research question and how the paper is unique to the literature and merits publication. This may be that it is a unique idea, or has the newest or largest approach to a previously explored

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idea, but no matter how small the difference is to existing literature, highlighting it early in the piece is important.

4. **Be inclusive with co-authors**—I've always found that involving colleagues for their unique perspectives, or involving other specialties for their different focuses, has always enhanced my publications. In no way do additional authors take away from a piece.
5. **Don't give up**—if your paper gets rejected, don't be discouraged, reviewer feedback and multiple revisions can significantly enhance the paper, and often the fifth or tenth iteration of a paper is substantially better! And so, if rejected, improve the piece and submit to another journal.

Professor Fiona Wood AM

Director of the Burns Service of Western Australia; Director of the Burn Injury Research Unit, University of Western Australia

Publishing is an essential mechanism to add to the body of knowledge. The research process may seem like a bit of an Everest to climb but it is worth all the effort to see an idea, your idea, captured in print as part of that process. The idea, the project design, the work done and the funding and energy expended, never happened without the completion of the peer-reviewed publication. The publication is the culmination of all the work and peer review can be hard, but remember your opinion is valid and research is about providing the supporting data.

So what tips would I like to share?

1. Ensure your idea is novel, do the literature searches with rigour and know the subject.
2. Have clarity with regards to your hypothesis.
3. Match the experimental/clinical trial design with the question you are asking.
4. Be meticulous with data collection and analysis.
5. The data is the data, the challenge or magic comes from the interpretation.

And most of all, ask for help along the way.

Professor Heather Cleland

Honorary Plastic Surgeon, Alfred Hospital, Bayside Health; Adjunct Clinical Professor, Monash University, Victoria

It is important to publish because if it isn't reported, it may as well have not happened. My immediate thoughts for getting published:

1. Pick the right journal and conform to author guidelines.
2. Produce a report that someone else will want to read about something that interests you:

- identify a significant knowledge or therapeutic gap, that is, know the literature
- articulate the aim of the project
- formulate a meaningful question or potential solution
- construct a project that will answer the question or provide a solution.

3. Be realistic about what can be achieved with what you are prepared to commit:
 - have the right timeline—everything takes longer than you expect
 - seek advice
 - collaborate—make friends with academics.
4. Persist.

Associate Professor Nicola Dean

Head of Plastic Surgery Unit, Flinders Medical Centre, Adelaide; Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute, South Australia

Publication of your research work becomes your legacy to the surgical community. Unpublished work is forgotten, however good it was. Publications can result in changes in practice and policy well beyond your immediate sphere and can help others in their work, as well as the patients we serve.

My top five research tips are:

1. **Pick a topic that is meaningful**—don't be the 99th plastic surgery doctor to do a study on radial forearm flap donor site healing! Pick a topic where there is a gap in the literature and that is likely to be impactful for the community you are trying to serve (whether that be relevant patient or doctor groups).
2. **Think about feasibility early**—play to the strengths of the unit or practice you are in. For clinical studies, make sure you have enough of that sort of patient to make a study that is adequately powered.
3. **Collaborate**—getting input from different specialties will make your research richer and stronger.
4. **Socialise and vocalise your research plan**—talking about it will help you clarify in your own mind what you plan to do and what the purpose of the research is. It also helps you understand how to explain the research to others.
5. **Be organised and be persistent**—make sure you file all documents in an organised way with good version control. Remember that the good idea you have at the beginning is only 10 per cent of the research. Around 40 per cent is revision and resubmission of manuscripts at the end, so allow for this and don't give up!

Associate Professor Alexander Varey

Staff Specialist/Clinical Associate Professor and Director of Surgical Research, University of Sydney; Faculty Member of Melanoma Institute Australia; Department of Surgical Oncology, Westmead Hospital, New South Wales

There is a myriad of topics that need more information in the public domain to provide evidence-based guidance to patients and clinicians. As clinicians, we are well placed to see these important questions and go about answering them. This should be done in a well-structured way that will then be of interest to other clinicians and hence be suitable for publication. Collaboration with experienced colleagues from the outset often helps to ensure success.

My five research tips are:

1. Have an answer to an interesting question and a title that clearly states that.
2. Make the paper about a single question—avoid expanding to related ones.
3. Target a journal that has a history of publishing similar articles—draft the manuscript to that format.
4. Ensure the abstract clearly states the problem, the most important methods, key results and what impact that has—better to have fewer clearer details, ie ‘elevator pitch’ style.
5. Write a covering letter that explains to the editor why this paper is of interest to their readers.

Dr Jevan Cevik

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Publishing research is a skill that can be learned and developed. These days, we are inundated with information about how to get our work published and why this is important. Before adding to this plethora of information, I think it's worth prefacing these tips with the statement that publication alone does not guarantee quality and reliability of information. Yet, publishing research, in reputable peer-reviewed sources, remains the fundamental way to expose your ideas to scrutiny and disagreement. Ultimately, publication allows your work to expand our collective knowledge base, and inform and improve clinical practice. Therefore, despite its flaws, it remains an important aspect of scientific endeavours.

These are my top five tips for getting published:

1. **Start with a clear question**—I think it is important to begin with a focused question you desire to answer. A clear research question will keep you on track throughout your project and makes writing the paper more straightforward.

2. **Keep things simple**—a simple but strong study design is much more effective than a complicated design that doesn't answer your study question. Reviewers and readers both appreciate research that's straightforward and logical. Additionally, I would avoid trying to say too much or answer too many questions within a single paper.
3. **Use electronic reference management software**—programs like EndNote or Mendeley can save you hours of frustration when it comes to managing your references and formatting your manuscript. I would strongly recommend you familiarise yourself with one and start using it early, you'll appreciate it when you're juggling multiple drafts and journal formatting requirements.
4. **Select the right journal**—spend a little time researching where your work fits best. Look at recent publications, check the journal's scope, and see what kind of research they publish. A well-matched submission stands a much better chance of making it through peer review.
5. **Get input from co-authors**—after you spend a long time with your own research, it can be hard to see where areas of improvement are required. Regularly checking in with your co-authors for feedback, edits and different perspectives improves the outcome of your manuscript.

Dr Ishith Seth

Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, St Vincent's Health, Victoria; Peninsula Clinical School, Faculty of Medicine, Monash University, Victoria

Publishing in plastic surgery is more than a professional milestone. It is a contribution to the collective knowledge that shapes how we practise, educate and innovate. For early-career researchers, the path to publication can be unclear, and common advice about study design and clear writing, while valuable, does not always address the finer challenges of getting a paper accepted.

The following five practical tips are less often discussed, but frequently make the difference between rejection and acceptance:

1. **Do a reverse citation search to find current gaps**—instead of relying only on recent reviews or keyword searches, identify a few key articles in your area and examine who has cited them in the preceding one to two years. This allows you to trace the most recent developments, identify emerging gaps and ensure your paper contributes meaningfully to an active academic conversation.
2. **Choose your journal early and tailor your manuscript accordingly**—selecting your target journal at the outset allows you to shape your research presentation, tone and structure to match that journal's expectations. Read a few recent publications from the journal to understand what kind of articles they favour.

This not only improves the alignment of your submission but also reduces the risk of desk rejection.

3. **Ask a colleague outside your project to review your draft**—feedback from a co-author is important, but equally valuable is input from someone unfamiliar with your project. A colleague from another team or subspecialty can point out unclear logic, missing assumptions or unexplained results. If they can follow your argument easily, your reviewers probably will too.
4. **Include a simple diagram or flowchart to support your key message**—plastic surgery is a visual discipline, and a precise, well-labelled figure can help convey the essence of your study more effectively than paragraphs of text. Consider using a diagram to summarise your workflow, outcomes or patient pathway. Reviewers appreciate visual clarity, especially when assessing complex or multi-step interventions.
5. **Anticipate reviewer concerns and address them in your discussion**—before submitting, reflect on what a critical reviewer might question about your study. Is the sample size modest? Could selection bias be present? Rather than hoping these are overlooked, acknowledge them directly in your discussion. This shows maturity in scientific writing and increases reviewer confidence in your manuscript.

Conclusion

Whether you are just getting started in plastic surgery or are an experienced surgeon looking to move more into research, we hope you find these tips helpful in producing original research that adds to the existing literature and advances the field of plastic and reconstructive surgery.

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