

Not for print

Quotes from MJA contributors in 2004

Much that is written for the *Medical Journal of Australia* is never intended for print. Volumes of correspondence, for the editors' eyes only, flow into our in-trays — notably reviewers' forthright opinions and authors' robust rebuttals.

Paradoxically, at times these missives seem better written and more suited to publication than the related manuscript! Straight-forward, simple and clear, concise and precise, they are an editor's delight.

This Christmas, as always, we want to wish our contributors "Happy reading and all the best for your writing in the New Year!". In this vein, we share with you some of the most memorable manuscript-related remarks received this past year. They reinforce general words of advice often given to aspiring writers. Respecting the various authors (and protecting ourselves), these quotes — now in print — have been de-identified.

Make your point

"The act of writing down guidelines always promotes debate and criticism, but it is important to ensure that the debate moves forward rather than in circles."

"On reading this paper, I wondered whether I was losing my mind. This is for you to judge. I cannot see a coherent argument."

Time matters

"The feeling obtained on reading this paper is that a lot of time and effort has been expended and many trees felled for no particular reason."

"I'm sorry that I've been slow with this opinion. I don't think, however, that either science or medicine will be damaged by the delay."

"I happened to have some spare time this afternoon, so I have undertaken the review already (if there is a prize for most rapid review for the Journal, then I want to be considered)."

Declare conflict of interest

"It is tempting to give it [this manuscript] a glowing review, which it indisputably deserves, but some degree of bias might be alleged since, unless the paper's authorship has changed since the last draft I worked on, I am one of its authors!"

Aim high...

...but temper hyperbole

Reviewer: *"The final section of this article is somewhat evangelical..."*

Author: *"The article's 'somewhat evangelical' tone is part of a desire to make people notice the enormity of the task, to stimulate debate and, possibly, more effective action."*

Be scientific

"I do not think a show of hands at a conference is scientific evidence to support an argument."

"The statement that a result can be clinically important but not statistically significant is nothing other than wishful thinking."

Be fearless

"I look forward to drawing swords against your referees."

Be yourself

We like Letters to the Editor to be short — no more than 400 words in length. Sometimes reviewers' well-intentioned suggestions can seem impossible to accommodate. One author responded with individual flair.

Reviewer: *"...Point 8. It would be useful to summarise the current...constraints...in a box so that non-Australian authors will understand what is being discussed."*

Author: *"In 400 words, mate? Your sense of humour is even better than the editor's."*

Ann T Gregory

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