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Cueto, Marcos

Nuevas instrucciones a los autores y el futuro del artículo científico en ciencias humanas

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EDITOR'S NOTE

New instructions to authors and the future of the scientific article in the human sciences

Some years ago, a senior staff member at SciELO gave me a piece of good advice: it is healthy and necessary for journals to make regular updates to their author guidelines. Over the last few months, the editorial team of *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, along with our associate and section editors, have attempted to follow this advice by creating a new set of guidelines that we present in this issue. They are now clearer and more up to date, seeking to respond to the open science movement; this involves much more than just open access to documents, which most Brazilian journals have provided for some years now (Santos, Guanaes, 2018).

Writing a scientific article is often considered the successful endpoint of a good research project and authors often submit articles to a journal without having studied the specific guidelines of that periodical. This is a mistake. There is a penultimate phase that should be rigorously observed: preparing the text for publication (the final phase involves responding carefully to the comments of the reviewers – who almost never approve the first version of a piece – and sending off the definitive version). In the penultimate phase, authors should not only correct grammatical errors, polish the style, complete statistical charts and bibliographical references, and make sure the images are of the required quality. The goal is to create a piece of writing that is relatively short but clear, orderly and deep in its approach to and interpretation of the problem (generally one or two per article); it should explain the methodology used, avoid repetition in presenting evidence, and establish a dialogue with other researchers (Cueto, 2011). Attention to these matters means that the text will have the virtues of good historical articles, which present discoveries in a way that transcends mere description, trace connections between context, institutions and personalities, and skillfully weigh processes of change and continuity.

A phrase from the preceding paragraph should be stressed: “relatively short,” because some submitters make the common mistake of assuming that an article is just a chapter from a thesis they have just defended or a book they are about to write. It is not. It is something different. Not just because a chapter is longer and contains more references than an article, but because an article is in some sense “self-contained.” In other words, it should form a coherent whole out of all the elements that are distributed throughout a thesis or a book. In those formats, the chapters form a sequential narrative, contain various references and citations and serve to advance various arguments or prove one or more hypotheses. And they do not generally have a maximum word limit. In order to make sense, the chapters should not be read in isolation, since that would lead to a fragmented understanding of the work as a whole. An article, on the other hand, has a concise format and features of

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its own, in which the author demonstrates economy and clarity of exposition of the facts, uses literal citations only when absolutely necessary, and contributes an argument to a specialized field. Removing a chapter from a longer work and sending it to a journal as an article is frequently an act of violence that sometimes leads to a mutilated text. This not to deny that sections of a thesis chapter can become the basis for an excellent article after being thoughtfully reformulated. Thus, these new guidelines, in line with those of various international journals, slightly reduce the word limits for some sections in order to encourage the submission of succinct works with a coherent argument. We invite authors to peruse the guidelines we present here (www.scielo.br/revistas/hcsm/iinstruc.htm) before sending us their valuable work.

The new guidelines are also important because they adapt a human sciences journal to the open science principles of transparency and dialogue. There are three main changes. Firstly, works submitted may have appeared previously in one of the prestigious academic preprint servers such as SciELO (<https://preprints.scielo.org/index.php/scielo>). These are designed to make immediately available a preliminary version of a research (unlike a journal, in which peer review, approval and corrections take at least several months) (Spinak, 22 nov. 2016). Another feature of these preprint servers is their ability to publish comments by colleagues (unlike journals, which use double blind peer reviewing, meaning that neither the author nor the reviewer know each other's identity). According to the principles of open science, it is vital to facilitate rapid access to research results and avoid possible prejudices and biases that might emerge in a confidential evaluation. However, we would like to clarify that it is not necessary to have sent an article to a preprint server in order to submit to *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*. We also want to note that any works from these servers that are submitted to our journal will be sent out to reviewers (in this case, obviously, the author's identity will have to be revealed). A second change stemming from the first is that we will ask reviewers and authors whether they wish to reveal their identity voluntarily in the review process and/or whether they wish their reviews to be published under their names. By doing so, we seek to promote responsible dialogue and constructive criticism. We would like to stress that this is not mandatory. Approval or rejection of an article does not depend on the author's willingness to reveal his or her identity to the reviewer. We will also respect reviewers who do not wish their identity to be made public. A third important change is that we are going to suggest that various materials from the research process be sent to an institutional repository that stores data and information gathered during research – such as those maintained by the libraries of many universities.

These open science adaptations to the human sciences (history is considered part of the human sciences in Brazil) indicate important differences between the works we publish and those in the exact or life sciences. While it is important for scientists in those areas to provide rapid access to their ideas, evidence and experiments – to establish the priority of their discoveries and to allow that interested researchers can reliably corroborate their conclusions – in our case, the priority or replicability of the research work is not so important. However, it is important to list the materials used over the course of the research process that might be useful to other researchers; many times these

remain neglected and forgotten in a drawer. What might those materials be? In our case: a description of the archival collections used (which can be furnished in a paragraph or a reference in the articles), statistical tables and images that could not be used in the final version of the work (because there is usually a limit on what can be published), complete transcriptions of manuscript and print sources and of oral interviews that have been excerpted and cited, and even the original research project description and reports showing how the research evolved before arriving at final publication. An after-the-fact overview by the authors of the whole process of their research is just as important to enriching the knowledge base of the human sciences as the final publication itself.

We know that adapting to open science principles in the human sciences and history is a process that cannot be imposed immediately and that achieving consensus will take a long while. We hope, however, to move in that direction. We anticipate a process of transition of indeterminate length, during which, initially, few articles will come from preprint servers and a minority of authors and reviewers will agree to reveal their identity and to send materials associated with articles to an institutional repository. Once again, I stress that this must be done voluntarily. We trust that in this process the journal will be instrumental in promoting discussion and persuading people of the advantages of open science, and that this will improve our research.

Another important piece of content in this issue is that we present, in a new section named “Covid-19 testimonies,” expanded versions of the texts about the coronavirus that appeared on our social media sites. Almost all of them were written by historians of health. These pieces have undergone one or more rounds of review, receiving critiques and commentaries that allowed them to be developed into fuller, up-to-date versions with references.

We cannot end without mentioning Doctor Nísia Trindade Lima, a professor at the Casa Oswaldo Cruz, and expressing our satisfaction at her well-deserved nomination to a second term as President of Fiocruz. This fills us with hope in these times of uncertainty and hardship for science and society in Brazil.

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Marcos Cuetoⁱ

ⁱ Science editor, Researcher, Casa de Oswaldo Cruz/Fiocruz.
Rio de Janeiro – RJ – Brasil
orcid.org/0000-0002-9291-7232