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Spot the seven errors. Playing the game in the submission of scientific papers (Part 1): the horse and the carrot

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ABSTRACT

This editorial does not intend to be a methodological textbook, nor a manual of best practice in health publication. The aim, however, is to briefly discuss my experience as the chief editor of the Online Brazilian Journal of Nursing, a position that I have occupied since 2011, and its intersection with international guidelines regarding the optimization of the process of scientific publication on health. The idea is to divide the subject into two editorial classes: the “Spot the Seven Errors” game, and to consider figures of speech in the submission of scientific articles. So, opening the first of the seven editorials in terms of the Spot the Seven Errors game, it is important to make clear that the following comments are not organized according to their relevance or chronological link. However, they retain relative similarities with the second error, since the anachronism of observations does not compromise the product, as long as it is not neglected.

Descriptors: Publication Formats; Access to Information; Evidence-Based Nursing.

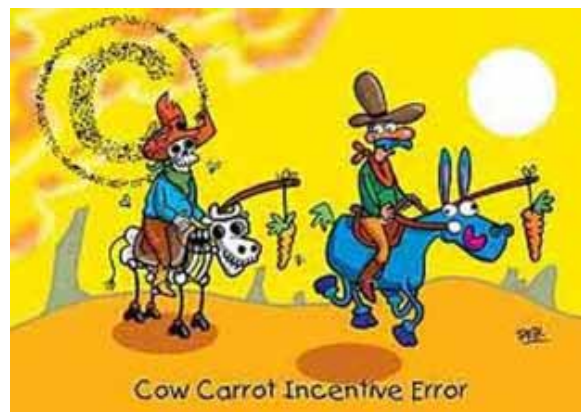
This editorial does not intend to be a methodological textbook, nor a manual of best practice in health publication. Regarding the discretionary aspects explored, the *Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals*⁽¹⁾, authored by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, makes good conceptual reading. The aim, however, is to briefly discuss my experience as the chief editor of the *Online Brazilian Journal of Nursing*, a position that I have occupied since 2011, and its intersection with international guidelines regarding the optimization of the process of scientific publication on health. Thus, as well put by exponents of Brazilian popular music: "... may the words I speak not be heard as a prayer nor repeated fervently, but just respected..."⁽²⁾ "or not ..." ⁽³⁾.

The idea is to divide the subject into two editorial classes: the "Spot the Seven Errors" game, and to consider figures of speech in the submission of scientific articles.

So, opening the first of the seven editorials in terms of the Spot the Seven Errors game, it is important to make clear that the following comments are not organized according to their relevance or chronological link. However, they retain relative similarities with the second error, since the anachronism of observations does not compromise the product, as long as it is not neglected. Moreover, the emphasis on the cabalistic number seven (7) is due less to the limited number of sources of error and more to not wanting to lose the point of the joke. Following this introduction, here we go:

The old adage of the first President of Petrobras, said during his time in Washington as Brazil's ambassador to the United States of America at the beginning of the Brazilian military dictatorship period, expresses unequivocally the first error: "... what is good for the United States is good for Brazil"⁽⁴⁾. The concept is wrong in

that what is good for one may be very bad for the other, depending on what it is. The error is to address the submission/publication from a descending hierarchy related to Qualis⁽⁵⁾, Impact Factor⁽⁶⁾ or H Index⁽⁷⁾. In this absurd logic, every effort to ensure format targeting and editorial listing follows descending hierarchical levels, in which one first tries for acceptance by the highest ranked journal, passing successively to increasingly lower levels, until the publication is accepted or not.



The discussion about the heterogeneity of frameworks of scientific journals in health has already been addressed in an editorial⁽⁹⁾ of this journal and will not be reiterated here. Furthermore, the process of systematic rejection of material submitted by an author determines minimally two immediate (a, b) and a late (c) consequence:

Payment of financial costs related to submission rates which typically are high and are often not institutionally subsidized, meaning that this financial burden falls on the author;

Increasing obsolescence of the collected data as the submission process continues, which further complicates the dynamics of acceptance of submitted material. In this area two other aspects stand out:

Research Ethics Committees, by law⁽¹⁰⁾, are increasingly judicious when it comes to

approving research projects involving human subjects, especially with regard to intervention studies. The responsibility for the way in which the data were obtained extends even to academic journals, which then feel the need to create more elaborate mechanisms to safeguard those ethical aspects, given the existence of joint liability. The OBJN, for example, only accepts articles whose data have been collected within three years from the date of submission retrospectively. In addition, since 2013, it has adopted the Ethical Aspects Single Document (DUDE), which, through the digital signature of all authors, include: statement of authorship responsibility and exclusive content; conflict of interests; image usage authorization; copyright transfer; use of software responsibility; statement of ethical use of animals (if applicable).

With the innovation of fast access to health information, arising mainly due to the development of electronic databases, the footstool of Evidence-Based Practice⁽¹⁰⁾, the journals tend to favor intervention researchers whose data is more recent.

In the short-term, the consequences of this logic of the horse running *ad infinitum* behind the unattainable carrot are: a financial issue for the author and the loss of fresh data, since a long time passes between obtaining financial support for paying the article submission rates, formatting it according to the magazine standards, and the review time.

The most nefarious long-term consequence is discouraging the production of scientific papers, due to the possibility of recurrent rejection which leads to feelings of frustration and helplessness that may kill, still in the cradle, a brilliant researcher.

In this scenario, the suggestion to authors is to read the ancient work of Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*⁽¹¹⁾, who professes: "*If you know the others and know yourself, you need not fear the result of*

a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the others, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the others nor yourself, you will be in danger in every battle".

So, for the intrepid author do not run into a great and unnecessary danger in an expedition which promises uncertain victory, he must know the territory to be invaded: the mission, vision, values, profile, regularity, attendance, punctuality, number of articles per issue, review average time, the most accepted types of study, thematic interest, costs of submission, editing, publishing etc... The way to get answers to these questions is by dedicating a preliminary portion of the article elaboration time to: (1) preparing a spreadsheet presenting all items of interest to be collated; (2) considering the journal's potential target; (3) exploring the websites of each journal to fill in all fields in the spreadsheet, plus fields for the names and email addresses of the editors, (4) perform a detailed evaluation of the journals that might be likely to accept the article; (5) send a query letter (a maximum of three paragraphs) to the editor with the following information: (a) Details of the author, including his education and training, membership, research group and country of origin; (b) Details of what the research is about in terms of its design, population, explored problem, but without however sending results (p-value, frequency or inferences); (c) A justification of the author's interest in publishing in that journal and asking if the article is of timely interest to the journal so that the author can go ahead with a formal submission.

The query letter is still not a common feature in Brazil. However, it is a very positive initiative and is likely to spread in popularity. The possible responses may be: (1) generic and predictable answers: the rules of submission are available on site; (2) a positive answer; (3) a positive but late answer. In this sense, it is highly recommended that the author checks to see whether or not the

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journal is currently accepting any type of design such as review studies, for example; (4) a negative statement, but with the suggestion that the author submit the article to another suggested (or not) journal; (5) No answer. Anyway, some direction will appear, depending on the time all this will happen. The Open Journal Systems (OJS), the platform on which OBJN is based, provides to the reader, in ALL publications, the "ADD COMMENT" tool, located below the references and the *Digital Object Identifier* (DOI) number. It is important that the readers use this tool more, as feedback on the published contents. It's a good time to start!

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