

Is Length of a Research Paper Mandatory for Publication in Journals?

Chandan S Chanotiya*

Laboratory of Aromatic Plants and Chiral Separation, CSIR-Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, Lucknow - 226 015, India

Inception of web based Open Access tool has opened ways for many new journals in the scientific arena, worldwide. Besides web based Journals, digitalized books, audio version of the research articles and social networking sites are also delivering scientific information to the readers. Open Access directly relates with property of individual's work. The advantages of an Open Access publication is that the authors and copyright holders grant to all users a free research copy worldwide for scientific, as well as the right to make small number of printed copies for their personal use. The Open Access provides rapid review procedure along with rapid publication of research papers, hence, available to everyone in web at any point of time. Now-a-days, the electronic access of Journals has widely been promoted. As a consequence, many renowned publishers like ScienceDirect and Taylor & Francis are now offering Open Access facility to the authors.

On the onset of the release of the first issue of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Journal, I wish to point out an alarming situation of unalterable increase in the length of research articles in various Science Journals. Analytical Chemistry had sniffed this alarming situation way back in 1995 and established a guideline of seven Journal pages. Till 2006, the journal stuck with the guidelines but deviated from it in later years. The year 2008 was marked by an increase in average length of papers (8.0 v/s 7.0). The editorial board felt that an average seven page length already long while average eight pages are alarming [1]. Therefore, the journal has clearly mentioned that absent a convincing justification by the authors, the editor will normally require condensation of longer paper [2].

Since, every Journal has a guideline for publication. But only limited Journals are concern over the length of the research papers. Analytical Chemistry has clearly stated that manuscript length varies with the type of presentation but should not exceed 5000 words including text, figure captions and references [3]. Research papers should not exceed 7,500 words (including allowance for no more than six tables and illustrations) as per the guidelines of Food Chemistry [4]. Similarly, Phytochemistry invites full papers having 6-8 printed pages in length [5]. The research paper occupies not more than 10 printed pages including tables and illustrations for publication in Journal of Ethnopharmacology [6]. Planta Medica has limited the main text in 3,000 words, excluding references, tables, figures and figure legends. Longer manuscripts are only acceptable in cases stating compelling reasons for the length [7].

In contrast, Helvetica Chimica Acta, Industrial Crops and Products and Chemistry and Biodiversity Journals have no length guidelines till date [8,9]. For e.g., in 2011, Chemistry and Biodiversity has published with an average length of 13.23 in first issue [10], 11.07 in sixth issue [11] followed by 10.8 in twelfth issue [12]. In contrast, Industrial Crops and Products, despite of not having length guidelines had published regular articles with an average length of 6.8 in 2011 and the Journal maintained 6.83 till first issue of 2012 [13]. Planta Medica published last issue in 2011 with an average of 6.54 and continued till first issue 2012 with 6.58. One of the reasons behind maintaining the average length could be the exclusive use of online supporting information tool. Interestingly, as per Thomson Reuters Journal Citations Reports 2011, the impact factor for Industrial Crops and Products has increased from

2.103 (IF 2009) to 2.507 (IF 2010) while a decrease in impact factor from 1.926 (IF 2009) to 1.586 (IF 2010) for Chemistry and Biodiversity was observed. In general, both the Journals are covering different aspects of Medicinal and Aromatic plants. Thus, strict editorial decisions and revised author's guidelines seems to be mandatory for publication of concise and focused research papers.

On some specific issues, however, Journals should encourage the authors to publish length articles on the points such as complexity and sophistication of analytical methods and combination of methods, relevant literature on the subject, authors more dependency on windows based programmes (MS Office), which made easy to write longer paper and need of colored photographs, figures and tables, which requires more space in an article etc.

The foremost problem with long research articles is that the valuable scientific information remains lying on the pool of words and fail to impress the audience or to make the reading interesting and perhaps very few readers enjoy reading long papers. Apart from this, long papers require more time to read especially precious time of reviewer, which sometime delays the review process. In order to set uniformity and to avoid unnecessary delays, authors are encouraged to use Templates [14] or Word Templates [15] for presentation of manuscript by some journals.

Therefore, for the benefit of the readers, editorial board should come out with strict guidelines on paper length. However, long research paper is only encouraged on scientific merit and well justified cases. I feel that the use of other alternatives such as Templates enforce the authors to present their work within the limit, which is otherwise difficult to adopt. With the pace, the electronic supporting information tool is being promoted by Journals, it seem beneficial to overcome the paper length issue. Keeping the importance of research work and rapid publication in view, the significance of setting up guidelines in the aegis of Open Access publications for length paper is looking sound.

Best wishes for 2012

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*Corresponding author: Chandan S Chanotiya, Scientist, Laboratory of Aromatic Plants and Chiral Separation, CSIR-Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, Lucknow - 226 015, India, E-mail: chanotiya@gmail.com

Received January 11, 2012; Accepted January 11, 2012; Published January 13, 2012

Citation: Chanotiya CS (2012) Is Length of a Research Paper Mandatory for Publication in Journals? Med Aromat Plants 1:e104. doi:10.4172/2167-0412.1000e104

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