The Value and Process of Authoring a “Research Techniques Made Simple” Article

The “Research Techniques Made Simple” (RTMS) series has covered nearly 75 research topics in the past 6 years to help readers build a foundation from which to understand the vast array of basic science and clinical research tools used in the field of dermatology. The early RTMS articles published in late 2012 through 2014 covered fundamental techniques including flow cytometry (Jahan-Tigh et al., 2012), PCR (Garibyan and Avashia, 2013), how a transgenic mouse is made (Scharfenberger et al., 2014), and basics of systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Abuabara et al., 2012). Since then, many author teams have built on those early articles to teach the field about emerging methods including single-cell mass cytometry (Matos et al., 2017), single-cell RNA sequencing (Wu et al., 2018), specific mouse models of diseases such as psoriasis (Hawkes et al., 2018), and how to assess and reduce risk of bias in systematic reviews (Drucker et al., 2016; Le Cleach et al., 2016).

With all these wonderful, educational articles already written, aspiring RTMS authors may wonder if any topics remain. As an RTMS editorial team, we contend that just as there is no end to the questions remaining to be addressed in our field, there is also no end to the need to innovatively teach the research techniques being constantly developed to address these questions.

How does an RTMS article unfold? Having been Coordinating Editor of the RTMS series since April 2015, I have had the privilege to work with 42 different author teams to develop their articles. Often, a trainee approaches us with an idea for a topic, which could be something he or she is already using in research or something he or she needs to study in depth and learn about. If the topic has not already been covered, we request the following: (i) select an appropriate expert in the topic to mentor and guide you through this authorship, (ii) prepare an outline including pertinent current references you intend to use, and (iii) provide a reasonable timeline for completion of the article.

We encourage authors to construct their ideal team for their writing process by reaching out to invite team members. Some of our author teams have worked across universities or continents, collaborating with topic specialists they would not otherwise have the opportunity to publish with. Of course, that means we also encourage topic experts to be approachable and agree to serve as mentors in this valuable writing process.

Upon submission of a manuscript to the RTMS editorial team, we aim to provide a friendly and educational editorial process. I truly enjoy working with author teams to improve their work and to learn about scientific writing and publishing during the process. We have been able to provide a full professional edit of all RTMS manuscripts for the last several years. We have helped authors navigate through the peer review process, often allowing more than one opportunity for resubmission to season and improve the manuscript as a teaching tool. Furthermore, each author team can use the services of a medical illustrator for one figure to make that figure really shine. We hope to provide a unique experience even as we guide authors through the editorial and review process toward publication.

There are many demands on the time of all dermatology researchers, and the task of tackling yet another writing project may seem prohibitive. However, each RTMS article has the power to leave a lasting educational legacy on the field of dermatology and other fields, to light fires and spur conversations that may lead to new discoveries, and even to highlight how emerging methods may be newly used to drive the field forward. We look forward to working with author teams to help develop the next 75 RTMS topics and beyond.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The author states no conflict of interest.

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