

Fact Sheet

Journal Selection for MEDLINE®

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MEDLINE, the principal online bibliographic citation database of NLM's MEDLARS® system, is used internationally to provide access to the world's biomedical journal literature. The decision whether or not to index a journal for this service is an important one and is made by the Director of the National Library of Medicine, based on considerations of both scientific policy and scientific quality. The Board of Regents of the Library sets policy for the Library. The Literature Selection Technical Review Committee (LSTRC) has been established to review journal titles and assess the quality of their contents.

There is a rough analogy to the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) decision-making process, with respect to research grant awards. Namely, the relative scientific merit of individual grant applications is determined by Study Sections in the same way journals are evaluated by LSTRC, while the mixture of types of research grants or types of journals is determined independently by Council or Board according to considerations of program relevance. Consonant with this principle, the LSTRC frequently incorporates the review and advice of outside experts in the subject area. As a result of these reviews, currently indexed titles may be dropped and new titles added.

About 4,800 titles are indexed and included in the MEDLINE database. The LSTRC meets three times a year and considers approximately 140 titles at each meeting. Additional titles are considered in reviews of specialty coverage.

The world-wide users of the MEDLARS indexes are researchers, health care practitioners, educators, administrators, and students whose needs vary considerably. All are important, and the goal of the indexes will not be met by concentrating on one set of users at the expense of another. The content, format, and accepted structure of the journals, designed to meet the needs of these users, also vary greatly. NLM still seeks a practical system to guide our selection of journals that will reflect these different needs and desires. In the meantime, the selection is highly dependent on the judgment of Committee members and the Director. The following critical elements are intended as a general guide so that a consistent set of issues will be considered as the Committee members examine journals in their search for the best and the most appropriate coverage of the biomedical literature.

Critical Elements

Scope and coverage: The journals brought to the Committee for review will contain articles predominantly on core biomedical subjects. Journals whose content is predominantly a subject peripheral or related to biomedicine are occasionally brought to the Committee when they have some biomedical content. In these cases, the Committee's advice is sought not only on the quality of the content but also on the contribution it makes to the coverage of the subjects in question. Generally, such journals will not be indexed if their biomedical content is already adequately covered.

Quality of content: Scientific merit of a journal's content is the primary consideration in selecting journals for indexing. The validity, importance, originality, and contribution to the coverage of the field of the overall contents of each title are the key factors considered in recommending a title for indexing, whatever the intended purpose and audience.

Quality of editorial work: The journal should demonstrate features that contribute to the objectivity, credibility, and quality of its contents. These features may include information about the methods of selecting articles, especially on the explicit process of external peer review; statements indicating adherence to ethical guidelines; evidence that authors have disclosed financial conflicts of interest; timely correction of errata; explicit responsible retractions as appropriate; and opportunity for comments and dissenting opinion. Neither the advertising content nor commercial sponsorship should raise questions about the objectivity of the published material. Sponsorship by national or international professional societies may be considered.

Production quality: Quality of the layout, printing, graphics, and illustrations are all considered in assessing a journal. Though not a requirement for selection, journals of archival importance should be printed on acid-free paper.

Audience: MEDLINE is intended primarily for those in the health professions: researchers, practitioners, educators, administrators, and students. The phrase health professionals includes physicians, nurses, dentists, veterinarians, and the many types of allied health professionals in the research and health care delivery systems.

Types of content: Journals whose contents consist of one or more of the following types of information will be considered for indexing:

1. Reports of original research
2. Original clinical observations accompanied by analysis and discussion
3. Analysis of philosophical, ethical, or social aspects of the health professions or biomedical sciences
4. Critical reviews
5. Statistical compilations
6. Descriptions of evaluation of methods or procedures
7. Case reports with discussions

All of these forms of information should be included in MEDLINE in order to fulfill the needs of users. However, coverage of a field tends to create a priority approximately parallel to the order in which the types are listed. For example, journals reporting original research are more likely to contain unique contributions to the coverage of a field and therefore are selected more often than those that contain only case reports.

Publications that consist primarily of reprinted articles, reports of association activities, abstracts of the literature, news items or book reviews, will not usually be indexed.

Foreign language journals: Criteria for selection are the same as for those written in English. In order to extend the accessibility of the journal's content to a wider potential readership, the majority of published articles in the review issues must contain an English-language abstract before the title will be considered for possible indexing.

Geographic coverage: The highest quality and most useful journals are selected without regard for place of publication. In order to provide broad international coverage, special attention is given to research, public health, epidemiology, standards of health care, and indigenous diseases. Journals will generally not be selected for indexing if the contents are subjects already well represented in MEDLINE or that are being published for a local audience.

Interpretation of these criteria will be influenced by the stated purpose of the journal. For purposes of illustration, four broad categories of journals are suggested.

1. Research journals are predominantly devoted to reporting original investigations in the biomedical and health sciences, including research in the basic sciences; clinical trials of therapeutic agents; effectiveness of diagnostic or therapeutic techniques; or studies relating to the behavioral, epidemiological, or educational aspects of medicine.
2. Clinical or practice journals have as their dominant purpose documenting the state of current practice, providing background for those in training, or the continuing education of practitioners. This is done through the publication of case reports, discussions and illustrations of new techniques, evaluations of current practices, and commentaries.
3. Review journals contain the current state of knowledge or practice, integrating recent advances with accepted principles and practice, or summarizing and analyzing the consensus view of controversial issues in knowledge or practice. Review journals provide background information for practitioners and researchers, students and house officers, and others who wish an overview on the current status of a field.
4. General or all-purpose journals contain elements of all the foregoing and frequently contain commentary and analysis of important social, political, and economic issues. They are usually designed for a broad audience and not limited to a specialty.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) has produced and updated the "Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts (URM) Submitted to Biomedical Journals". Publishers who would like to incorporate the URM into their review and publication process are encouraged to link to www.icmje.org and mention this in their Instructions to Authors section.

The Council of Science Editors (CSE) has produced "Editorial Policy Statements" that cover the responsibilities and rights of editors of peer-reviewed journals. Publishers who would like to incorporate these Statements into their review and publication process are encouraged to link to: http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/services/draft_approved.cfm.

Application Process: Any editors or publishers who would like to have their journal reviewed for possible indexing in MEDLINE should access the new "MEDLINE Review Application Form" at <http://wwwcf.nlm.nih.gov/lstrc/lstrcform/med/index.html>. This form is required for all journals initially reviewed by the LSTRC for inclusion in MEDLINE.

Questions about the journal selection process and LSTRC may be answered in "[Response to Inquiries About Journal Selection for Indexing at NLM](#)" or directed to:

LSTRC Scientific Review Administrator
National Library of Medicine
Building 38A - Room 4N-419
8600 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20894
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For a complete list of NLM Fact Sheets contact:

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