

Rules and Regulations



I recently was driving home from a 4-day meeting. It was a beautiful day, warm and sunny, with no one else on the road. I was anxious to get home, so my right foot took over and I found myself cruising without much regard to the speed limit. I soon came upon a county sheriff approaching from the opposite direction who seemed to be experiencing a little less enthusiasm about the beauty of the day. Indeed as I passed by, he decided it was an appropriate time to visit with me.

I generally follow rules, although I have to admit that the speed limit on many roads seems a bit arbitrary. I didn't think of this as an appropriate time to describe my philosophical beliefs regarding the arbitrary nature of the speed limit and, instead, agreed with the sheriff that I was exceeding the limit. While he walked back to the cruiser, I called my wife to tell her I would be late, thereby accomplishing the opposite of my intended goal. After checking my driver's license and my driving record, he returned to my car and told me that I should slow down and be more careful in my driving habits. Miraculously, I survived this situation without a ticket, even though I was expecting to be cited.

What does this have to do with implant dentistry? Admittedly it has little to do with implant dentistry, but it does have a lot to do with the choices we make and how we communicate the outcome of our decisions to others, as well as the rules we must follow along the way.

For instance, when researchers decide to share their knowledge, they have a few decisions to make. The first is whether they want to publish their results or present them in an open forum, such as a scientific meeting. The first does not preclude the second, as someone may publish an article and still present the information orally; in fact, this is the logical way to establish a broad audience for the material, because the oral presentation may spark interest while the written documentation lives forever.

The novice scholar soon realizes that publishing his or her material may be a more daunting task than anticipated. Most dental journals have rules and regulations that must be followed. Some editors are more generous in the application of these rules while others are more stringent. As long as the guidelines are readily available, the author should use them to create an article that will be judged entirely on merit, rather than face issues related to structure that might obscure the reviewer's ability to judge the true merits of the material.

In scientific writing, a problem comes along when authors disregard guidelines and instead work with the notion that they have identified a better way to present information. This may not matter if the editor of their article does not adhere to the editorial guidelines but could be a big problem if the opposite is the case. If

guidelines are not applied, it becomes difficult for the author to guess what the editor ultimately desires.

In the case of JOMI, concise guidelines are published on the journal webpage. Furthermore, there is a recommended website (www.icmje.org/) that is very prescriptive regarding the publication of scientific studies. Most authors who submit articles to this journal will be directed to both sites and may also be provided with an electronic version of the editor's synopsis of these guidelines.

The other option for presenting one's work is to give a lecture at a scientific meeting. To do this, you need an invitation to speak, which may be difficult to secure, and the ability to communicate your ideas clearly. It doesn't hurt to do this in an entertaining way that keeps your audience alert to the material. The downside is that lecture formats provide little long-term memory of the material presented to the audience. It has been noted that 10% or less of material presented in a lecture is retained by the audience. This is acceptable if 90% of the information presented is window dressing but unacceptable if the speaker is presenting material packed with valuable content.

Most people who publish also speak at professional meetings. The opposite is not always true. The reason is that rules and regulations often get in the way. To be honest, a regimented oral presentation lasting more than 10 minutes tends to be rather boring, while a scientific article that is highly structured provides a concise description of the presented material. The fact that the material appears in very specific sections makes it easier for readers to gather the information pertinent to them. One reader may consider the materials and methods to be the most compelling section of the paper, while another may find a quick path to the conclusions. For some, the discussion may provide insights into the reasons for the observed outcomes that may be more critical to them than the other sections. Indeed, it is the ability to place material in the appropriate sections that allows the reader to gain the maximum amount of knowledge from that individual paper.

So, whether cruising down the highway on a sunny afternoon or working on a labor of love, we must all follow the rules and regulations that govern the activity at hand. Like it or not, there are limits that apply to virtually everything we do. Whether we wish to cruise home without delay or submit a scientific paper, following the guidelines helps us achieve our ultimate goals.

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