Introduction

Journal Club Guidelines: How To Present An Article

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Medical knowledge is changing fast. The best way for a physician to “keep up” is to keep searching and reading the literature. One must learn to read effectively and critically. This is where the Journal Club comes in: critical presentation of an article to a critical audience.

The idea is to present the substance of a journal article to your colleagues critically and succinctly. It should not take more than fifteen minutes. To get your bearings, after reading the article’s title, read the abstract, especially its punchline, to see what the authors claim to show.

In journals like the *New England Journal of Medicine*, articles are often multi-authored, but in general fall into one of two categories - reports from a single department (e.g. Medicine) on observations based on a limited patient population, or large multi-center studies.

When you describe methods to your fellows, you need not go into great detail, especially in the case of multi-center studies or review articles, which you may have to present in skeleton form.

Present the findings: usually you will find them nicely tabulated.

Present the discussion: here you can afford to be critical. Were the right controls used: are the statistical arguments convincing? Give your opinion, and ask your colleagues for theirs.

It may seem hard, but it is much more effective to make do without consulting notes. The effort to do so forces one to digest the material and discard the dross. If you say it in your “own words,” you will find you understand matters in a new way, and your audience will understand better, too. You can also make effective use of the blackboard in this way; don’t fill it up in advance, but write down salient points “on the fly.”

The audience should be invited to ask questions, and they should do so. Everyone should become involved.

When the club functions this way, all gain, especially in becoming unselfconscious and effective in thinking on their feet, in clarifying their thoughts, and expressing them effectively.

When To Seek Epi/Bio Consultation

Many of the articles will involve quantitative data, often with epidemiological features. It is important that you learn to interpret these; not all published conclusions are necessarily correct. We strongly encourage you to take advantage of the Epi/Bio consultation program, offered by the faculty of the Department of Environmental and Community Medicine to our students. See the schedule for time and location.