The Roman Article: Read It Again—in the Same Journal

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Read It Again: It's Good for You

Germaine Roman

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Most of you believe that a scientific article should be published *only once, in one journal*. You are, in fact, the self-righteous majority who tries to stifle repetitive publication. The free-thinking individuals who reject such arbitrary rules and manage to break them, in valiant defiance of the copyright law, are a small, scattered, and unorganized group, until now too weak to defend their position publicly. In all fairness, repetitive publication deserves a hearing. Here are my arguments in favor of it.

Wider Dissemination of Information. This is a fairly obvious advantage. An article appearing in multiple journals aimed at the same audience is less likely to be missed by those cursory readers and hasty scanners out there. The author of a multiply published article will be able to have the following dialogue with his or her colleagues: "Have you read my article?" "No, where?" "Everywhere! Don't you read *anything*?"

Repetition Is the Mother of Learning. How true! Let's say your article appeared in only one journal once. Will it be remembered as well as it would if it had been published over and over again? Of course not. But it is important to make each version just a little bit different in order to trick people into rereading at least part of the article again before they realize it's not new. Rearrange the order of authors' names, or superficially change the title; it doesn't take much time or intelligence. Education by repetition is a difficult pedagogical task, but someone has to do it.

Practice Makes Perfect. Experienced authors know that despite the most diligent efforts on their part, or on the part of the publishing staff, errors still creep into the final printed version. How nice to have another chance to do it better the second or third time around! In the meantime, your observations may have increased and you can add one more case and yet another to those described in your initial report. Repetitive publication thus provides a continuum that closely parallels your own learning curve, your accruing knowledge. What am I saying—it actually mirrors the progress of science itself!

Shorter Publication Time at Less Cost. Republishing an article that has been through the copy editing and production process is as easy as working with a prefab piece. Since most major journals adhere to the same style requirements, a previously published article practically zips through the publication process.

Strengthening of the Peer-Review System. Once repetitive publication becomes widely accepted and the same articles are published over and over again, very little editorial space will be squandered on so-called new articles. Reviewers' jobs will be easier, and they'll be able to devote more time to the few and familiar articles referred to them occasionally. The task of periodical reapproval of the same material will hone the reviewers' skills and yield veritable exegeses of those topics.

Higher Literary Quality of Manuscripts. In order to produce multiple variants of one article, the authors will have to be highly proficient in English, adept in synonymy, and quite versatile in all genres of scientific literature, from the lyricism of a letter to the editor to the dramatism of a panel discussion or the epic power of an original report. Less experienced authors will have difficulty maintaining the contents intact from one superficial mutation of the article to the other, but that's what separates the pros from the amateurs.

Getting duplicative articles published is not easy, particularly now, while it is still only an avant-garde movement and repressive editors are on the prowl. But the advantages are plain for anyone to see. If you haven't memorized them yet, it's all right. I am trying to republish this elsewhere.

Commentary by Catherine D. DeAngelis, MD, MPH

The article[1] by Roman is germaine to a problem that haunts editors: duplicate publication. For innocents or novices to this realm (just in case there are any left in the world), duplicate publication "is the simultaneous or subsequent reporting of essentially the same information, article, or major components of an article 2 or more times in 1 or more forms of media (either print or electronic format)."[2]

A study by von Elm et al[3] revealed that there are 6 distinct patterns of duplication and that authorship was an unreliable criterion for discovery. Also, duplicates were published in similar-type journals, and citations to the duplicates were as frequent as the main articles.[3] That practice might be considered by some as a variation on the time-honored academic model of team effort

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toward promotion in rank by using various studies to answer one scientific question. However, duplicate publication is dishonorable—in whatever way it is couched.

Duplicate publication can occur in meta-analyses of randomized trials, providing the illusion of a higher number of trials,[4,5] which can lead to overestimation of the efficacy of an intervention.[4] Wider dissemination of information via duplicate publication is not only dishonest, it can be dangerous to patients[4] and can induce problems for authors.[6] No one wants to be forced to make a public apology for misbehavior.

As a member of "the self-righteous majority" (probably the only such majority group of which I am a member), stifling repetitive publication, thereby preserving honesty in science and upholding copyright law, has become one of my favorite pastimes. I truly believe that "repetition is the mother of learning." So, don't publish papers in more than one place[100]. No, that number is not meant to denote reference number 100, rather it denotes the 100th power, ie, repeat the statement 100 times. That is a method of learning my teachers from the "Sisters-of-No-Mercy" order used. Actually that was the mildest form of "teaching" they used, the other form now being illegal.

I agree with Roman[1] that practice makes perfect, but only if it is perfect practice. Since that is virtually impossible in medical science as practiced by mere humans, investigations and authors must toil along one publication at a time—that's what is good for authors, for patients, other investigators, reviewers, and (oh happy day) editors.

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