

Fact Sheet

National Library of Medicine

Index Medicus and its on line counterpart, MEDLINE are used throughout the world to provide access to the world's biomedical journal literature. The decision whether or not to index a journal for these publications is an important one and is made by the Director of the National Library of Medicine based on both scientific policy and scientific quality considerations. 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, with respect to research grant awards-namely, that the relative scientific merit of individual grant applications or journals is determined by Study Section or LSTRC, whereas 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 is asked from time to time to evaluate and advise the Library concerning the adequacy of our coverage of the literature of an individual specialty area. 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. In addition to MEDLINE, the National Library of Medicine's MEDLARS® system contains several databases on specialized topics. Journals on these topics may be considered for inclusion in one of these databases as appropriate.

The world-wide users of these indexes are researchers, health care practitioners, educators and administrators 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, which 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 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 most appropriate coverage of the biomedical literature.

Critical Elements

Scope and coverage: *Index Medicus* and MEDLINE provide access to the biomedical literature. The journals brought to the committee for review will contain articles predominantly on core biomedical subjects. Occasionally journals whose content is predominantly a subject peripheral or related to biomedicine are 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. In general, such journals will not be indexed if their biomedical content is already adequately covered.

Quality of content: The scientific merit of a journal's contents 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 to be 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 the contents. These features may include information about the methods of selecting articles, especially on the explicit process of external peer review; timely correction of errata; explicit responsible reactions, when appropriate; and opportunity for comments and dissenting opinions. 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: The quality of the layout, printing, graphics and illustrations are all considered in assessing a journal. Though not a requirement for selection, journals destined to be of archival importance should be printed on acid-free paper.

Audience: MEDLINE and *Index Medicus* are intended primarily for all 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 bio-medical sciences
4. Critical reviews
5. Statistical compilations
6. Descriptions or evaluations of methods or procedures
7. Case reports with discussion

All of these forms of information should be included in *Index Medicus* and 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 (i.e., 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 The criteria for selecting journals written in a foreign language are the same as for those written in English. Other things being equal, additional consideration will be given to the availability of adequate English-language abstracts that extend the availability of the content to a broader audience.

Geographic coverage The highest quality and most useful journal titles are selected without regard for the 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 *Index Medicus* and MEDLINE or that are being published for a local audience.

The interpretation of these criteria will be influenced by the avowed 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, epidemiologic, 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 or 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.

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