

# **Setting up a Journal Club: Top tips for trainees**

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Journal Club (JC) provides medical profession an opportunity to stay updated in the constantly evolving field of medicine and health care. Establishing a journal club for postgraduate training can provide tangible improvement to learning environment providing a platform for discussion and debate and an opportunity to root clinical practice in evidence based medicine.

## **How to start and run a journal club**

### **Aims for Journal Clubs:**

- To highlight important changes in evidence from scientific literature
- To improve reading habits and understanding the strength of scientific evidence
- To encourage collaborative learning and debate
- To help develop presenting, leadership and mentoring skills
- To guide evidence based clinical practice

**Fig 1**

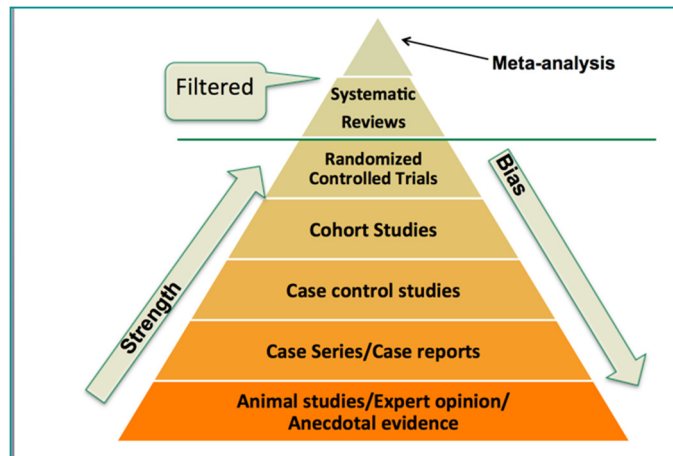
### ***Appoint a designated Leader***

A nominated lead, ideally with an interest in research and enthusiasm for shared learning must assume the responsibility of facilitating collaborative learning by presenting ideas and moderating debates. While the leader needs to provide appropriate guidance, sharing the workload with trainees improves participation and engagement and enhances effectiveness.

### ***Themes and Selection of article***

As mentioned earlier, journal clubs are a way to champion evidence based medicine. This makes it vital for a successful club to choose the right articles to discuss and learn from. If we consider **figure 2** it would suggest that the best articles to discuss would be systemic reviews and meta-analysis, but these have the evidence filtered and leave little for the group to critique. They do, however, provide good foundation knowledge on a topic. Thus, if the aim of a particular

week's theme is more one of teaching than debating this may be a good choice . Randomized control trials are usually the most appropriate choice if more of a focused discussion on one topic is wanted. Case reports, although they are sometimes intriguing, have higher levels of bias and therefore may not be as good a basis for clinical practice. Given that one of our aims for journal club is to keep up to date with recent research, these articles also need to be less than 12 months old.



**Fig 2**

### ***Make it a regular fixture and keep to time***

A routine is critical for keeping attendance up. This quite simply involves agreeing a time that most people will be available and then sticking with the same time and same place such that it become part of the groups schedule <sup>(3)</sup>. A good example of this is a regular lunchtime meeting; this can include the added inducement of refreshments that undeniably lead to increased attendance.

A trap that some clubs can fall into is having a meeting run over its allotted time, or just being too long in the first place. Most of us have busy schedules and time is a limited resource. Ideally meetings should be around 30 to 60 minutes long <sup>(2)</sup>. This allows time for presentation and debate but is also concise enough to keep people engaged throughout.

### ***Keeping up attendance***

As with starting any regular learning activity, every effort must be made to keep attendance rates high. This can pose quite a challenge especially given training rotations. Before starting your club, setting out some ground rules for presenters is likely to be helpful. Encourage them to keep attendees engaged with concise, interesting presentations. Try to divide the time in two, allowing half for the presentation and the remainder for discussion. Creating a stimulating and relaxed environment for all, using a variety of speakers with different experience levels and perhaps inviting external guest speakers where possible can all help keep attendance levels up.

## ***Meeting platform***

Remote learning and online meetings have become vital in the last year as many of us have learnt and adapted our presenting skills for a variety of platforms. Choosing whether to have a traditional in person journal club or an online forum should be dependent on the purpose or objective. In person meetings allow presenters to better connect with their audience and enjoy live feedback and so encouraging debate. On the other hand online platforms allow wider reach and inclusivity allowing members can join from all locations .

	Traditional face to face format	Online format
Advantages	Easier debate and discussion  Engages all members	Better accessibility less restricted by location  Discussion among multiple centers
Disadvantages	Takes more preparation and organisation	Limited interaction due to online format

## ***Collect feedback and adapt***

By taking feedback and adapting the way a journal club is run, members will feel a greater level of inclusion. In this way it is possible to create a community with shared learning goals where everyone can feel comfortable participating and will therefore, stay engaged

## **Summary**

Journal clubs are a wonderful resource when used in an effective way with enthusiastic leadership. We hope we have helped encourage and inform those interested in starting a journal club to do so.

## **References**

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