Setting up and running a journal club in practice

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Introduction

This document is a brief guide to setting up and running a journal club in practice.
What is a journal club?

Journal clubs are regularly held meetings where individuals discuss recent articles in the scientific literature. They are seen as a bridge between research and practice as they encourage the application of research in clinical practice.

Why run a journal club?

The benefits of journal clubs include the following. They can:

- Help link research and clinical practice
- Help participants keep abreast of current research and new literature
- Help develop the critical appraisal skills of participants
- Stimulate debate and improved understanding of current topics within a practice
- Assist with generating practice guidelines or protocols
- Encourage evidence based veterinary medicine
- Support quality improvement initiatives
- Provide continuing veterinary education (CPD)
- Encourage teamwork
Setting up a journal club

When setting up a journal club in practice it is important for your practice team as a whole to think about the purpose and for the goals and desired outcomes to be set as a group. This will encourage ‘buy in’ as well as allow you to evaluate the sessions and measure their success within the team.

There is no single ideal format for a journal club as this will be influenced by the goals set and by who will be attending.

Things to consider include:

- Whether it will be held face-to-face or online.
- Frequency and timing.
- Length of the session.
- Who will be attending? Is it the whole team or members who have a common interest eg surgery? Is attendance to be mandatory?
- Who will be leading the sessions? The facilitator should be experienced so if you would like to rotate this role within the team you should make sure that team members asked to do it have the necessary skills (critical appraisal, presentation etc) first.
- How will the article be selected? Is it the leader of the
session or following discussion within the team? Ideally the articles should relate to a real life clinical issue for the practice.

- What tools will be used for the critical appraisal? Using an agreed toolkit such as RCVS Knowledge’s EBVM toolkit will help create a consistent approach.
- How will the agreed outcomes be measured and how frequently? What does success look like?

Managing the sessions

One possible format for the sessions is:

1. Facilitator welcomes participants and gives an introduction to the session
2. Facilitator gives an overview of the article including:
   - Reference.
   - Question/hypothesis it is addressing.
   - Time for the participants to quickly review the relevant sections of the article.
   - Brief appraisal using the agreed method. This
should cover the study design, level of evidence and results.

1. Discussion within the team of the strengths and weaknesses of the study.

2. Discussion on the implications of the study for your practice. Is the evidence robust enough to make a decision? If so what, if anything, should you change?

Notes should be taken of the discussion and key recommendations so that they can be circulated within the team and retained for future use.

**Tips for success**

- Regular set times will help with attendance as participants can schedule their attendance in advance. Early in the week is usually better.
- Have strict start and finish times.
- For face to face meetings always provide refreshments and make sure the room is of an appropriate size and layout.
- Good publicity of times, locations, topics and selected articles will improve attendance.
• Ensure the question the article is addressing is of relevance to everyday work. Ask RCVS Knowledge library for help sourcing relevant articles if necessary.
• Have copies of the article available at the session and set aside a short period of time at the beginning to allow people to scan the article.
• Create a database of the discussions and any recommendations for the practice, this gives the club a tangible product and creates a useful resource for the practice.

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Check the conditions of use on publisher’s websites to see if they permit circulation of articles to journal club members. Each publisher has its own terms and conditions and it is important that you check for each journal title.
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Further reading


Mair, Tim (2016) How to critically appraise a paper & how to run a journal club. *Veterinary Evidence*, 1 (1) [http://dx.doi.org/10.18849/ve.v1i1.22](http://dx.doi.org/10.18849/ve.v1i1.22)


Swift, Geraldine (2004) How to make journal clubs interesting. *Advances in psychiatric treatment* 10 (1) pp 67-72 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1192/apt.10.1.67](http://dx.doi.org/10.1192/apt.10.1.67)
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