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AJNR

How to review and retrieve information from the AJNR; or, how to read the AJNR and still have time to ski.

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How to Review and Retrieve Information from the *AJNR*; or, How to Read the *AJNR* and Still Have Time to Ski

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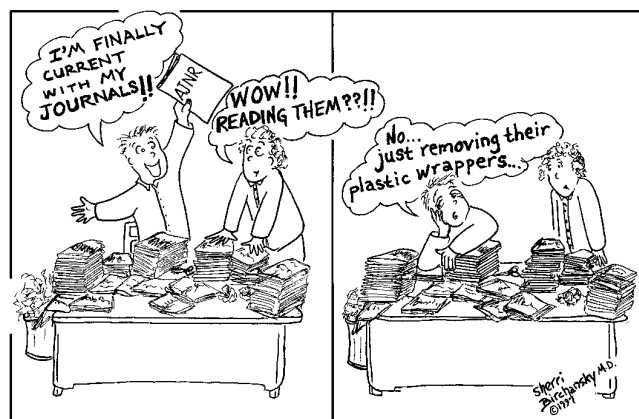
As time becomes more precious and the information explosion continues, keeping up with the current literature is more difficult. The average radiologist spends 2.8 hours per week on all teaching and research activities (1). How much of this time is spent on literature review is not known. Over the past 20 years, I have tried several methods to review and retrieve information in neuroradiology and related topics. As my recent career has included increasing administrative responsibilities, the time available to carry out these activities has progressively decreased.

The Past

I used to have my monthly radiology journals bound at the printing shop. The process involved careful retention of each issue, binding the loose volumes with twine, and sending them to the print shop. This procedure is still carried out by most medical libraries around the world. I abandoned this habit in the late 1970s, because it cost too much and used up a lot of space. Furthermore, when the contents of these volumes became outdated, I had difficulty deciding how to recycle the large bound issues. I rarely went back and reviewed these bound journals because they were cumbersome to carry around and particularly difficult to use for copying a certain reference or group of references.

The Present

On a monthly or quarterly basis, I review peer-reviewed journals by ripping them apart at the bone (why the backbone, of course). There



is an important trick to pulling the glossy sheets away from the glued backbone of a journal properly. If a page or group of pages start to fray as they are pulled off, it is important to extend the packet to a larger number of pages, which will then tear apart cleanly. Or at worst, fray the sheets that are destined to be discarded. A successful project ends up with a clean backbone and no frayed pages.

I then save the references in selected topics such as neuroradiology and related disciplines by stapling the pages of an individual article together. It is worthwhile to include commentaries (when available) with the parent articles. Occasionally there is the problem of an article's starting on the back page of a concluding article. I will then copy the less important page and preserve the "slick" page for the more important reference. Many of the journals in radiology publish articles starting on the right-sided page, then ending on a left or right-sided page. Whenever an article ends on the right side, a "filler" page is placed in between. (The extra page can be filled by a treatise such as this!) Case reports are a notable exception. Most of the time, I do not take the time to copy the "shared" page in case reports. It takes extra time to copy and file these short reports. Their value hardly matches the extra effort.

I keep the stapled articles in a stack and wait 6 to 12 months before filing them by disease

Thanks to Sherri Birchansky for the cartoon.

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topic (eg, stroke) or by technical category (eg, MR). Before filing, I take a quick look at the title, key illustrations, and abstract to refresh my memory. I then file these articles in a series of hanging folders. At the same time, I discard articles more than 8 years old. These older references have often lost their value, unless they describe basic aspects of neurosciences (anatomy, physiology, etc).

As an aside, I don't feel guilty reading the "throw-away" journals that are filled with fast-breaking radiology news. They have a useful role. I use the analogy of reading *Time* magazine or watching CNN rather than reading the *New York Times* or watching PBS. *Diagnostic Imaging* is an example of the former; *Radiology* and other peer-reviewed journals are examples of the latter. I used to rip apart the non-peer-reviewed journals in a manner similar to the peer-reviewed journals, but soon abandoned this practice when it became apparent that it was not worth my time. Their contents are soon superseded by more detailed analysis in peer-reviewed journals. Even coverage of topics on the management or economics of radiology in the news journals sometimes finds its way into the peer-reviewed journals. My current practice is to review these news journals and quickly recycle the whole issue (that's why they are called throw-aways).

The *AJNR* is much too precious to tear up. I try to review the journal from cover to cover when it first arrives. I wait until the end of the year and then read the bibliography of each volume. I can then concentrate on the topics that are of greatest interest to me, or subjects that I need to know more about. I will identify the page numbers and assign someone to copy these articles. These references are then placed

into the files after another quick review. I've been able to review the relevant information of the past year by the second week in January. During the rest of the winter, while enjoying Alpine skiing I reflect on what is new and exciting in our great subspecialty.

The Future

Many journals, including the *AJNR*, are now available on CD-ROM, which establishes a ready file for reference and review. Even though some key articles are available on-line on the Internet, I prefer to review all the illustrations in an article. Since standard phone lines, even with the fastest of modems, are yet too slow to transfer a large number of illustrations, I prefer the CD-ROM format to direct Internet access. The ASNR/*AJNR* Web page (www.rad.rpslmc.edu/~ajnr/) also contains the tables of contents of recent *AJNR* issues as well as titles of articles accepted but not yet published. I find both these sources invaluable. No illustrations are included and review can be accomplished quickly. Future access on the Internet will have to be served by specialized servers for radiologists. This will greatly speed up a search for neuroradiology resources (2). Access will be relevant and timely, resulting in efficient use of one's precious resource of time.

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