

How to get published: What editors and reviewers are looking for

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Aim

- To provide insights on how to maximise the chances of publication

Overview

- Understanding what editors and peer reviewers are looking for
- Providing a working appreciation of the editorial and peer review process
- Sharing experiences and tips on how to maximize the chances of acceptance of a manuscript

First, a bit about me...

- Clinical academic with almost 20 years of experience of undertaking and reporting research
- Editorial positions with numerous journals e.g.
 - BMJ: GP Editorial adviser
 - PLOS Medicine: Methodology adviser
 - JRSM: Research Editor
 - npj: Primary Care Respiratory Medicine: Joint Editor-in-Chief, etc
- Over 700 publications – so plenty of experience as an author!

**WHAT ARE EDITORS AND PEER
REVIEWERS LOOKING FOR?**

What are editors looking for?

- Papers that:
 - Align with their mission/vision
 - Will be of interest to their readership
 - Are scientifically cutting-edge
 - Present work that they can trust
 - Are carefully presented
 - Are likely to be cited
- In summary, work that will help move the scientific field on and in so doing also raise the standing of their journal

What are peer reviewers looking for?

- Papers that:
 - Are scientifically cutting-edge
 - Present work that they can trust
 - Are carefully presented
 - Are respectful of and build on their work and that of colleagues

THE EDITORIAL AND PEER REVIEW PROCESS

Summary of editorial and peer review process

- Most journals will have some variant of the following:
 - Initial screening by editorial assistant to ensure that the manuscript is in scope and that the ‘Instructions for Authors’ have been followed
 - Initial ‘high level’ review by the Editor or Assistant Editor to establish if it is likely to be of interest and is scientifically robust
 - If of interest, detailed peer-review by 2 or more specialists
 - Anywhere between 1-4 rounds of further review for papers that are considered potentially publishable
 - Final technical and linguistic review prior to moving the paper into the publication queue

MAXIMIZING THE CHANCES OF ACCEPTANCE: 5 KEY TIPS

1. Choose an appropriate journal

- The choice of journal is crucial; ideally:
 - It is known for and has a track record of publishing papers in the field
 - It is known to the prospective authors through:
 - Regularly reading the journal
 - Peer-reviewing
 - Contributing as an author
- ***Tip 1: Have a realistic appreciation of the scientific importance of the paper and choose the target journal accordingly***

2. Spend time on the cover letter

- Write a cover letter that is:
 - Personally addressed to the Editor
 - Highlights why the paper is likely to be of interest to the journal's readership
 - Succinctly summarizes its key contribution(s)
 - Addresses head-on any conflict of interests and how these have been handled so as to minimize the risk of a biased manuscript
- ***Tip 2: Keep the letter short and to the point!***

3. Carefully craft the abstract

- Many papers will be rejected after review of the abstract
- It is therefore important to ensure that the abstract:
 - Tells the ‘story’ of the paper
 - Provides details of the methods, demonstrating that these are robust
 - Highlights the most important findings
 - Summarizes the ‘bottom line’ of the paper
- ***Tip 3: Spend a lot of time on the abstract and, if possible, get it critically reviewed before submission***

4. Key areas to focus on in the paper

- Carefully choose the keywords as these will often be used to identify potential reviewers
- Highlight the importance of the work, but don't over-egg it
- Ensure that study limitations are thoughtfully discussed
- Take time to check that references are accurate and up-to-date, ideally with some that demonstrate that the journal should be interested in the subject
- Be prepared to go through numerous drafts prior to submission
- Carefully proof the paper prior to submission
- ***Tip 4: Follow the instructions for authors and focus on the above often 'make or break' points***

5. Following editorial and peer review

- If invited to resubmit, then consider this a half-open door...
- Be respectful of editors and peer-reviewers when responding to the feedback
- Try and accommodate all the suggestions as far as is appropriate/possible; where this is not the case, respectfully explain why
- Make it as easy as possible for editors/reviewers to quickly see what revisions have been made in response to the feedback
- ***Tip 5: Recognize that editors and peer-reviewers have already invested their time and effort in the paper – therefore never be discourteous in your letter of response***

CONCLUSIONS

Summary

- In order to maximize chances of acceptance:
 1. Take a lot of time in choosing an appropriate target journal
 2. Write a succinct cover letter highlighting why the work matters and why it is of interest to the journal's target readership
 3. Spend a lot of time on crafting the abstract
 4. Avoid key trip-wires in the peer review process when drafting the manuscript
 5. Thoughtfully and courteously respond to the suggestions for improvement
- ***Finally, imagine yourself as the editor and peer-reviewer and prepare your submission accordingly***

Thank you!

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