



Editorial

Manuscript rejection: The whys and wherefores

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1. Introduction

For researchers, academicians and clinicians in healthcare a key motivating factor is to publish in scholarly scientific peer reviewed journals.¹ These publications could be in the form of research articles, review papers, thematic clinical case series, case reports or short communications. These publications serve as beacons for future research, aid in refining clinical protocols or adopting new techniques to improve patient care.² “Research” and “Review” articles constitute the bulk of scientific publishing.

A group of authors put in countless hours to pen their thoughts, develop a methodology, review pertinent literature, assimilate and analyze their results and conclude their findings in the light of contemporary evidence, thereby creating a manuscript for consideration for publication. Once the manuscript is ready, author(s) must carefully select journals whose focus areas match with the content of the manuscript. For this, authors must clearly understand the scope of the journal. Case in point, as the editor of an orthodontic journal, we sometimes receive manuscripts relating to orthopedic surgery when the corresponding author did not read the journal guidelines properly.

2. The Editorial Process

Once the manuscript is submitted for consideration, it first passes an editorial review, where the manuscript is checked for its completeness, viz., is it within the prescribed word limit, are the minimum number of references cited, are the citations in sequence, plagiarism check, etc. Once the manuscript crosses this phase, it lands on the desk or nowadays the dashboard of the Editor-in-Chief (EiC). The EiC along with editorial board members then peruse the manuscript to see if the content of the manuscript is of interest to the journal’s readership and should be sent for a blinded peer review.

The next step is a blinded peer review. The reviewers then methodically assess the worthiness of the manuscript, its quality, relevance and novelty, and then arrive a decision to either accept or reject it, or suggest improvements^{3,4} This feedback is communicated to the EiC, who in turn while maintaining the confidentiality of the reviewers, communicates their observations to the author.

2.1. Why are manuscripts rejected?

The common reasons for scientific manuscript rejection enumerated below are collected and collated from relevant papers published in other scientific journals;^{5–13}

1. Presentation of old and/or obsolete research methods
2. Lack of novelty or newness

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3. Improper rationale forming the premise of said research
4. Inconsequential or irrelevant subject matter
5. Methodological failings
6. Lack of suitable interpretation or inappropriate conclusions drawn thence
7. Inappropriate or incomplete statistical analysis
8. Inaptness for the journal
9. Unsuitable packaging of the manuscript and
10. Narrative reviews which either lack critical appraisal or are unsolicited
11. Lack of up-to-date references or references containing a high proportion of self-citations
12. Violation of publication ethics or research ethics
13. Case reports that are not well documented or show only a normal level of care

2.2. What should the author(s) do if their manuscript gets rejected?

Receiving a communication stating that the manuscript has been rejected is certainly an unhappy moment, but it should not temper down the morale of the authors. A rejection should not be taken personally, and authors must not base their self-esteem on the outcome of the manuscript. They must read the decision letter carefully and analyze the reviewer's comments, this feedback can be used for improving the manuscript and plan future research in a direction that would be relevant to contemporary science. Authors can refine their publications keeping in mind the scope of their intended journal, improving language and grammar, amongst other points.¹⁴ Authors can request help from peers and mentors to improve current and future manuscripts. Authors must focus on the main text as well as the abstract, the abstract must not be treated as an after-thought. It should succinctly convey to the editor and reviewers the message of the manuscript. The goal should be to take rejections in your stride while developing techniques to increase acceptance. The only way to achieve this is to write on a regular basis.

Wishing you a very fruitful journey in scientific writing!


3. Conflict of Interest

None.

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