

Submission to Publication Demystified: A Guide for Authors

The previous two issues of the Indian Journal of Orthopaedics (IJO) were focused symposium issues; one on total hip arthroplasty¹ and the other on sports injuries,² so their editorials also addressed the same topics. With this issue, we restart our series of editorials³⁻⁵ designed to help authors to improve their writing skills and understand the review and editorial process better. The current editorial explains what happens to a manuscript from the time it is submitted till it is finally published. The aim is to demystify the editorial process and help authors understand what goes into polishing a raw manuscript to publication quality.

At the IJO, every submitted manuscript, at the very onset, is checked for plagiarism. They are also screened to assess if they follow the various suggestions given in the instructions to authors such as structure, content, and number of authors. Such manuscripts (about 20%) are sent back to the authors for technical modification. A screening of all manuscripts is done at this stage to assess their suitability to be sent for external review. About 30% of all manuscripts, which fail the initial scrutiny, are rejected at this stage. The common reasons for rejection at this stage are; topic out of scope of the journal, gross errors in the methodology, low evidence of research; excessive plagiarism etc. Usually editorial team tries not to reject manuscripts only on the basis of poor language or structure if the scientific content of the manuscript is good.

All manuscripts which pass the initial screening are sent for a formal external peer review. The peer review is double blinded. Neither author nor the reviewers know about each other. The usual practice is to send each manuscript to 4-5 reviewers. Reviewers include a mix of subject experts whose names are already included in the reviewer's database. Other reviewers include experts identified from the references cited by the author. Some IJO assistant editors and member editorial board act as internal reviewers. If the manuscript involves the use of complicated statistics, then it is also sent for statistical review. External review is the most important part of the whole submission to publication process.⁶⁻⁷ Without the help and cooperation of the reviewers, it is impossible to publish any good journal and IJO is always indebted to these unsung heroes who continue to do their task tirelessly.

Reviewers are requested to send their comments within a period of 3 weeks. However, this is most important part of the whole editorial process, is also the most tedious and time-consuming because it is difficult to get sufficient comments for each manuscript, which would help the editorial team to take a decision and improve it at the first instance. Sometimes, manuscripts need to be sent multiple times for external review till adequate comments are received. Prolongation of the review process not only

frustrates the authors but also exponentially increases the work load of the editorial team. Most of the times stagnation occurs at this stage of editorial processing.

One of the senior editorial team members keeps a check on the movement of the manuscripts. Once adequate comments are received from the reviewers, a decision is taken regarding whether to send the manuscript for revision or to reject it. To avoid any bias, this is a combined decision of 2-3 editorial team members which includes the editor. Extreme care is taken before any manuscript is rejected. Reviewers comments are sent with the decision of rejection so that authors can improve their manuscripts before submitting it to IJO again or to other journals. When the manuscript is sent for revision, authors are requested to respond to each query raised by the reviewers in a point-wise manner and in a tabular format. They are also advised to make suitable corrections in the manuscript and highlight those changes so that the editorial team can pick them up quickly.

Based on the author's response to reviewer's comments, the manuscript is either preaccepted or sent for re-revision for unanswered/left-over comments or rejected. Like the review process, this cycle may have to be repeated a number of times till a final decision is taken. A major cause of delay at this stage is late or inadequate/incomplete response from the authors which is something that should be avoided.

Once a manuscript is preaccepted, it goes through a number of steps before it is finally ready for print publication. The first step in the process is an English-language check done by the publishers to improve the grammar, construct, and language of the manuscript. At this stage, the publisher also does the technical/copyediting to format the manuscript as per IJO style, checks references, etc. Thereafter, scientific editing is done either by the editor himself or the associate editors. The main aim is to improve the scientific contents of manuscript and identify mistakes or raise queries which might have been missed by the reviewers. Author queries are raised at this time, which authors are expected to answer adequately and in a timely manner. Editorial team members also go through all the supplementary material such as figures, tables, and graphs etc. so that their quality becomes printable. Scientific editing improves the scientific contents without changing its meaning, so that readers can understand it in an easy simple way. Once there is no query left, the manuscript is finally accepted. At this stage, galley proofs are sent to the authors so that they can check and make corrections in the manuscript, if needed or reply to the queries, if any, raised by the publisher. A total of three proof readings of each manuscript are carried out to remove any minor mistakes till it is hoisted on the web. The fourth and final proof reading of the manuscript is done before it goes for print.

The whole submission to publication process is a prolonged and tedious procedure. The authors, reviewers, editorial team, and the publishers have to work closely as a team. Like in any endeavors which involve multiple stakeholders, a number of issues may arise during this process. Authors can be of great help if they understand that

1. The main aim of the submission to publication process is to improve the overall quality of the work of the authors. Once an article is published, it stays till posterity for futures readers to access. The editorial team helps the authors to achieve this goal
2. Authors at their end must ensure that, whenever they are asked to respond to any queries regarding their article raised by either the reviewers or the editorial team, they must answer them promptly and adequately. They must also highlight the changes in the revised manuscript
3. Manuscripts must be prepared strictly in accordance with the instruction to authors
4. Authors must understand that all submitted articles cannot be published. Rejection is a part of the publication process. They must take it positively and use the reviewer's comments to improve their manuscript before submitting it again to IJO or to another journal
5. Finally, authors must understand that the editorial team and reviewers work tirelessly without any tangible benefits only to help the authors to improve their work. In case of any misunderstanding which may arise due to reasons such as rejection of manuscript, delay in decision, and miscommunication, it should be resolved amicably with the editorial team rather than raising it at other public forums.

The editorial team along with all its reviewers of IJO is committed to publish the best research being conducted nationally and internationally. We are also committed to each author to help improve their work. We hope this editorial would help authors understand the submission to publication process better so that we can work more closely with them in the future.

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