



Aspects of the submission of articles to scientific journals

Martín Becerril-Ángel¹, José Juan Castillo-Pérez², Álvaro José Montiel-Jarquín³, Alejandro Villatoro-Martínez², Eugenio García-Cano³

ABSTRACT

The final step for an investigation to be completed is its communication in the international scientific forum. The aim of this paper is to *highlight* the general aspects of the submission of a scientific manuscript, those that are often faced by young and experienced researchers.

It is true that a formal training for a scientific career does not exist, the courses taught in the graduate programs are not sufficient to know the process to publish scientific papers.

A manuscript evaluation by an editor is based on the recommendations from reviewers, therefore we consider important the knowledge for preparation of a letter of submission, how to respond to publishers and/or reviewers and all the additional knowledge necessary to register a paper to a scientific journal.

Keywords: submission, manuscript, peer review, response to reviewers

INTRODUCTION

Submission of a Manuscript to a Medical Journal

Submitting a manuscript to a scientific journal is a necessary step in the process of scientific communication, an investigation is not finished until its results are published or communicated in the international scientific forum.

Properly choosing a scientific journal is difficult for young researchers, is the reason why many editors reject the papers submitted before sending it to the reviewers.

When an author decides to submit a manuscript for publication, the journal must match its topic, making it most likely to be accepted.

A publication may have greater visibility if published in English, the universal language of science. The journals with highest impact factor are published in English.

Before deciding in which journal to publish, it is convenient for the author to know: in which database is indexed, who integrate the editorial committee, the rejection rate, the impact factor, if it is part of the Open Access journals, if it belongs to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), cost of publication, among other aspects.

Practical fact: Using the platform of the big publishers such as Elsevier, Springer and Wiley, to choose the adequate journal reduces the reject rate.

When submitting an article to a scientific journal, the authors must consider that criteria for acceptance or rejection are mainly based on its originality, appropriate methodology, applicability of results and correct writing and style. But also, it is important to assure that the manuscript meets the recommendations of conduct and publication of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), as well as the specific recommendations of the journal chosen (1).

The material submitted and published in the journals are a collective responsibility of the authors (2).

Among medical journals, a frequent ethical deviation is the redundant or duplicate publication; hence some journals ask

the authors to declare that the manuscript submitted has not been published. Another unacceptable behavior is submitting simultaneously the manuscript to more than one journal.

Authors associated with manufactured articles, altered results, plagiarism or other unethical behavior, have been reprimanded and sanctioned in different manners and in many cases there have been recantation of these manuscripts. The fraudulent medical publications directly affect patient care and scientific credibility (3).

Every medical journal provides instructions for authors about the specific requirements according to the type of article you want to publish both electronically and in print.

Learn about the requirements of the journal, type of readers, type of articles; besides of reading several articles published in the journal. Prepare the manuscript according to these specifications to avoid rejection for reasons beyond the content of your article, as well as, changes in style which could be prevented.

An important aspect to consider is that the communication of scientific results as all process involves a cost, there is no free science.

Most printed journals help you cover publication costs, but if you want your results to be visible in the short term and not lose its originality, you will pay on US\$2,289 average in Open Access journals (4).

As last advice, before submitting a manuscript to a journal make sure to have followed the instructions for authors that the associated files are under the required format, resolution or appropriate size. The style is correct in English and in the native language of the authors. If written in a second language it is recommended that the paper be reviewed by a professional. All the authors information must be placed, the online registration process for the review of your selected journal must be completed and a persuasive letter to the editor should be written.

Once the registration of your work is completed, back up the information of the registration process.

¹ Allergy and Clinical Immunology Department, Highly Specialized Medical Unit "La Raza" Mexican Social Security Institute, México

² Division of Research Evaluation From Mexican Social Security Institute, México

³ Health Research Division, Highly Specialized Medical Unit of Orthopaedics and Traumatology in Puebla from Mexican Social Security Institute and National Academy of Medical Education, México

Correspondence: José Juan Castillo-Pérez
Av. Cuauhtémoc 1117 Int. 202. Letrán Valle, Benito Juárez, 03650. Ciudad de México.
Phone: +52 1 5547898963.

E-mail: jose.castillope@imss.gob.mx

Table 1. Basic principles to be observed by peer reviewers (9)

Peer reviewers should
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To review only manuscripts area of their experience, to make an appropriate and timely assessment• Respect confidentiality as a reviewer and not disclose details of the manuscript during or after the review, beyond disseminated by the magazine• Do not use revision information to gain an advantage or to third parties, or to discredit others• Declare potential conflicts of interest, and clarify doubts with the magazine about• Do not allow influence on their review: the provenance of the manuscript, nationality, religion, politics, gender or commercial aspects• Review must be objective and constructive, and avoid hostile and personal comments• Recognize that peer review is a process of reciprocal effort, which helps to conclude a collective work honestly and shared• Provide to professional magazines, the exact information that accurately reflects their knowledge of the theme• Knowing that impersonation of another person is a behavior deviation

Regularly monitor the status of your document or contact the editor if the response time has been too long (2-3 months) or the decision about your manuscript is not clear.

LETTER OF CONSENT

It is a window of opportunity to try to persuade the editor to “buy” the idea and publish your manuscript, must contain title, the relevance of the manuscript, objective, main results and why it is important for the prestige of the journal (5).

Mention the previously submitted articles which may be considered as duplicate or very similar to the current manuscript; the financial relations and conflict of interest (if not appears in the manuscript); that the manuscript has been read and approved by all authors (if not appears in the manuscript); contact information of the responsible author to communicate with the other authors for review and final approval of the manuscript; if it has undergone institutional research, or disciplinary action in ethical aspects related to the manuscript; and if the manuscript has been sent prior to other journals and the recommendations made.

Thank the time spent by the editor, for considering your manuscript, provide contact details, including e-mail, address and phone number. Keep a diplomatic and precise style.

Check list for submit a manuscript

- Verify that your manuscript follows the guideline for authors that the journal requires
- Write a convincing letter with the following information:
 - Title
 - The main results of the issue
 - Relevance to the audience of the journal
 - Information required by the journal
- Follow the steps of the Platform Web Journal for the registration of a manuscript
- Support all relevant data of the manuscript
- Monitor the status of your manuscript, respecting the times and schedule of the magazine.

SENDING AND REGISTRATION OF A MANUSCRIPT

Currently the manuscripts are sent electronically to the journals portals. Some publishers have electronic publishing systems that optimize the entire process, with access and interaction with the authors, reviewers and editors, automatic sending of reminders, etc.

When a manuscript is received in a journal, the data of the authors and their manuscripts are recorded, the authors are informed that the manuscript has been received. A code to the manuscript is given, which is used for its tracking. Initially, the manuscripts are reviewed by the editors for compliance with the guidelines of the journal. In a period of time of 2 to 4 weeks, the editors inform the author if the document fulfil the publishing rules or requires modifications and forwarded. In this first phase most of the manuscripts are rejected, almost 80 to

85 % due to its lack of originality⁶. In this scenario the editors may suggest submission of their manuscripts to other journals. The rejection rate may reach up to 90% in medical journals of highest impact factor (7).

PEER REVIEW PROCESS

A fundamental aspect in the quality assessment of a medical journal and also a requirement to obtain and ratify their impact factor is the peer review of the submitted manuscripts. The altruistic work of these experts around the world is invaluable; this united effort increases the credibility and strengthens the scientific progress. When a manuscript follows the topic and the publishing standards of the magazine, the publishers usually choose two knowledgeable reviewers on the topic.

The editors send an invitation to the reviewers, accompanied by a summary or the complete manuscript and request an acceptance response within the first 48 hours.

If not answered a reminder is sent. If the lack of response persists or any reviewer rejects the invitation, other reviewers are invited to collaborate with the journal. The journals have a group of expert’s reviewers in different specialties that are periodically renewed, according to the quality of their work or their voluntary retirement. Once the reviewers accept, a declaration of conflict of interest is requested, which is related to the manuscript to review and delivery of its report within the next 4 weeks. Some journals aid the work of their reviewers with anti-plagiarism software, which is helpful for early detection of this improper behavior.

Even though the average delivery reports from the reviewers is 24 days, the delay in the report of the reviewers is frequent which hinders the work of the editors and extends the editorial times (8).

It is estimated that an experienced reviewer occupies an average of 2.4 hours in a review, while a novice reviewer may take between 8 and 10 hours (9).

The systematic approach of the peer review, from the best available evidence, it has been called peer review based on evidence (10).

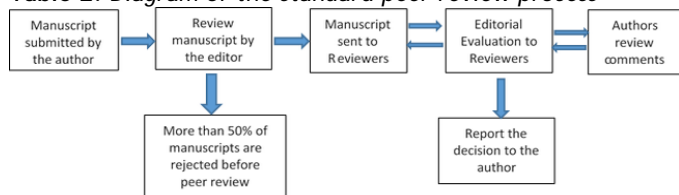
The reviewers must be as objective as possible in evaluating a manuscript, focused on the research question, originality of the theme, strengths and weaknesses (content, methodology, ethics), proper presentation, interpretation of results, future projection and if they consider appropriate its publication.

The correct management of privileged information by the peer review, carries a code of conduct, sponsored permanently by the ICMJE and the journal editors. The report of the reviewers is based on giving a constructive criticism, oriented to the manuscript and not to the authors, maintain confidentiality of the manuscript, review only aspects of their specialty, avoid contact with the author, communicate conflicts of interest with the manuscript, among others (10, 11) (Table 1).

The reviewer’s reports contain general and specific comments, directed separately to editors and authors. It is recommended that comments about grammar and orthography are directed to the editors. Every comment or remark of the editors must specify the page, paragraph and manuscript line. The editors do not decide about the acceptance or rejection of the manuscript, they only recommend about a decision to the journal editor.

The reviewer’s reports may match in accepting or rejecting a manuscript, or that one accepts and the other rejects it. On the last case, the editors analyze the reports of each reviewer and may decide to accept or reject it, or send the manuscript to one or two reviewers more. The reports of a second revision may be enough for the editors to take a final decision to accept or reject the manuscript.

Table 2. Diagram of the standard peer review process



Once the revision of a manuscript is finished, the reviewers must eliminate the files of that article. The journals give certificates to the reviewers, which have curricular value. The reviewer's reports are anonymous, however, journals such as The British Medical Journal (BMJ) do it with the voluntary signing of the reviewers.

There are also magazines that share the reports among reviewers, which help to perceive their performance to improve their reviews (Table 2).

THE ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION OF A MANUSCRIPT

There are three types of editorial decision about a manuscript: accept, reject or review. The vast majority of the published papers are rejected on more of one occasion⁷. Receiving an editorial notice of "review and submit again", means that the editorial is interested in the manuscript and exist possibilities of being accepted if the reviewer's comments are responded satisfactorily (12).

When the journal communicates to the author that has decided not to publish the manuscript, it is done in a clear manner, with objective arguments and the suggestion to send to other journals where it can be of interest. Almost two thirds of the published manuscripts have been rejected at least once (13).

Many articles with a great number of citations were rejected initially by other journals, where they did not appreciate its value. About a quarter part of the authors differ from comments of the reviewers and editors (14).

A rejection editorial decision may be appealed by the authors, without the publishers being forced to change their decision, consider viable alternatives.

Usually the editor and reviewers always find problems in manuscripts and want to see the changes made¹⁵. The reviewer's suggestions are classified in two, minor and major comments, and in some occasions the editor's suggestions (Table 1). It is recommended that a senior researcher responds, as the degree of expertise of the reviewers requires it. When young researchers begin their editorial activities, they do it under direction of qualified researchers, that tell them or guide on how to write a scientific article, but they do not guide them in how to respond to the reviewers, reason why the manuscript is not accepted.

The peer review plays a fundamental role in the investigation and publication process, the contribution of the reviewers determines the originality and applicability to knowledge¹⁶. Knowing how to respond to the reviewers' comments is not an easy task, of course if an adequate visibility and scientific impact is wanted; if done wrong the manuscript is conditioned to be rejected. Therefore, what can you do to increase your chances of success?

THE REVIEWERS' COMMENTS

If is author, often is difficult to read the suggestions from reviewers, after all, blood, sweat and tears have been

dedicated to the manuscript. The author could even have an instinctive reaction to defend his article. The disagreement is part of the review process, it is important to save a copy. The author may not agree with the comments, this is an essential part of the scientific debate.

Read a couple of times the reviewers' comments without panic miss a weak and re-read them. Do not try to respond at first, it is possible to believe the reviewers did not understand the originality or methodology of the study, this would skew the opportunity to respond and thereby improve the quality of your manuscript: "Keep calm and not respond soon".

Respond to reviewers is a wrong point or forgotten by most people who teach or provide professional training on the publication. This would make the work of the editors and reviewers more effective.

HOW TO RESPOND TO THE COMMENTS OF THE EDITORS AND/OR REVIEWERS?

Try to identify key points in the reviewers' comments and/or editor, i.e. form of content, if they are content in clinical, methodological or statistical aspects. If they focus on the results or discussion section. Once you have done that, begins to respond with clear and consistent arguments, point by point to each reviewer's comments.

If the comments are relative to the length of a paragraph, divide it or re-write it, so the manuscript is not over loaded and most importantly that is understandable; remember that both editors and reviewers seek clarity in scientific communications.

Meet with colleagues to run in a properly, respectful and political manner the response to each of the authors and/or editors.

If additional references are required or data to clarify some point, include them in the updated version of your document and re-send it.

Some reviewers' comments do not require to be adjusted to the manuscript, particularly in minor comments, if so, argue clearly and re-send the manuscript to the editor; it is likely if you do this that the manuscript could be accepted.

In the case of major revisions, when there is more than one page of comments, take the necessary time together with your collaborators to respond, do not underestimate this task, it may require specialized help; respond as soon as possible, no more than two months of difference. It is advisable to resubmit the manuscript to the same journal once the corrections have been made (17).

CONCLUSION

The most important aspect of a manuscript submission to a refereed journal, is the editorial letter. Remember that often the editor decides whether the manuscript is rejected or accepted. The comments of the editors and reviewers are not destructive criticism of your work, but an excellent window of opportunity to improve the quality of your manuscript as it reflects their experience.

The appropriate response to the comments will increase the chances of being accepted in the first chosen journal or else in an alternate journal, the final decision is that of the author.

Congratulate yourself when you receive an e-mail with publishing notification, your manuscript has been accepted. This will be part of your career, will gestate new ideas and will be reflected in scientific articles.

REFERENCES

1. Halpern SD, Ubel PA, Caplan AL. Solid-organ transplantation in HIV-infected patients. *N Engl J Med*. 2002 Jul 25;347(4):284-7.
2. Halpern SD, Ubel PA, Caplan AL. Solid-organ transplantation in HIV-infected patients. *N Engl J Med*. 2002;347:284-7.
3. Rose ME, Huerbin MB, Melick J, Marion DW, Palmer AM, Schiding JK, et al. Regulation of interstitial excitatory amino acid concentrations after cortical contusion injury. *Brain Res*. 2002;935(1-2):40-6.
4. Halpern SD, Ubel PA, Caplan AL. Solid-organ transplantation in HIV-infected patients. *N Engl J Med*. 2002 Jul 25;347(4):284-7. PubMed PMID: 12140307.
5. Forooghian F, Yeh S, Faia LJ, Nussenblatt RB. Uveitic foveal atrophy: clinical features and associations. *Arch Ophthalmol*. 2009 Feb;127(2):179-86. PubMed PMID: 19204236; PubMed Central PMCID: PMC2653214.
6. Trachtenberg F, Maserejian NN, Soncini JA, Hayes C, Tavares M. Does fluoride in compomers prevent future caries in children? *J Dent Res*. 2009 Mar;88(3):276-9. PubMed PMID: 19329464. ClinicalTrials.gov registration number: NCT00065988.
7. Diabetes Prevention Program Research Group. Hypertension, insulin, and proinsulin in participants with impaired glucose tolerance. *Hypertension*. 2002;40(5):679-86.
8. Vallancien G, Emberton M, Harving N, van Moorselaar RJ; Alf-One Study Group. Sexual dysfunction in 1,274 European men suffering from lower urinary tract symptoms. *J Urol*. 2003;169(6):2257-61.
9. Margulies EH, Blanchette M; NISC Comparative Sequencing Program, Haussler D, Green ED. Identification and characterization of multi-species conserved sequences. *Genome Res*. 2003 Dec;13(12):2507-18.
10. 21st century heart solution may have a sting in the tail. *BMJ*. 2002;325(7357):184.
11. Ellingsen AE, Wilhelmsen I. Sykdomsangst blant medisiner og jusstudenter. *Tidsskr Nor Laegeforen*. 2002;122(8):785-7. Norwegian.
12. Ellingsen AE, Wilhelmsen I. [Disease anxiety among medical students and law students]. *Tidsskr Nor Laegeforen*. 2002 Mar 20;122(8):785-7. Norwegian.
13. Geraud G, Spierings EL, Keywood C. Tolerability and safety of frovatriptan with short- and long-term use for treatment of migraine and in comparison with sumatriptan. *Headache*. 2002;42 Suppl 2:S93-9.
14. Glauser TA. Integrating clinical trial data into clinical practice. *Neurology*. 2002;58(12 Suppl 7):S6-12.
15. Abend SM, Kulish N. The psychoanalytic method from an epistemological viewpoint. *Int J Psychoanal*. 2002;83(Pt 2):491-5.
16. Ahrar K, Madoff DC, Gupta S, Wallace MJ, Price RE, Wright KC. Development of a large animal model for lung tumors. *J Vasc Interv Radiol*. 2002;13(9 Pt 1):923-8.
17. Banit DM, Kaufer H, Hartford JM. Intraoperative frozen section analysis in revision total joint arthroplasty. *Clin Orthop*. 2002;(401):230-8.
18. Outreach: bringing HIV-positive individuals into care. *HRSA Careaction*. 2002 Jun:1-6.
19. Chadwick R, Schuklenk U. The politics of ethical consensus finding. *Bioethics*. 2002;16(2):iii-v.
20. Tor M, Turker H. International approaches to the prescription of long-term oxygen therapy [letter]. *Eur Respir J*. 2002;20(1):242.
21. Lofwall MR, Strain EC, Brooner RK, Kindbom KA, Bigelow GE. Characteristics of older methadone maintenance (MM) patients [abstract]. *Drug Alcohol Depend*. 2002;66 Suppl 1:S105.
22. Feifel D, Moutier CY, Perry W. Safety and tolerability of a rapidly escalating dose-loading regimen for risperidone. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2002;63(2):169. Retraction of: Feifel D, Moutier CY, Perry W. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2000;61(12):909-11.
23. Starkman JS, Wolder CE, Gomelsky A, Scarpero HM, Dmochowski RR. Voiding dysfunction after removal of eroded slings. *J Urol*. 2006 Dec;176(6 Pt 1):2749. Partial retraction of: Starkman JS, Wolter C, Gomelsky A, Scarpero HM, Dmochowski RR. *J Urol*. 2006 Sep;176(3):1040-4.
24. Feifel D, Moutier CY, Perry W. Safety and tolerability of a rapidly escalating dose-loading regimen for risperidone. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2000;61(12):909-11. Retraction in: Feifel D, Moutier CY, Perry W. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2002;63(2):169.
25. Starkman JS, Wolter C, Gomelsky A, Scarpero HM, Dmochowski RR. Voiding dysfunction following removal of eroded synthetic mid urethral slings. *J Urol*. 2006 Sep;176(3):1040-4. Partial retraction in: Starkman JS, Wolder CE, Gomelsky A, Scarpero HM, Dmochowski RR. *J Urol*. 2006 Dec;176(6 Pt 1):2749.
26. Mansharamani M, Chilton BS. The reproductive importance of P-type ATPases. *Mol Cell Endocrinol*. 2002;188(1-2):22-5. Corrected and republished from: *Mol Cell Endocrinol*. 2001;183(1-2):123-6.
27. Malinowski JM, Bolesta S. Rosiglitazone in the treatment of type 2 diabetes mellitus: a critical review. *Clin Ther*. 2000;22(10):1151-68; discussion 1149-50. Erratum in: *Clin Ther*. 2001;23(2):309.
28. Yu WM, Hawley TS, Hawley RG, Qu CK. Immortalization of yolk sac-derived precursor cells. *Blood*. 2002 Nov 15;100(10):3828-31. Epub 2002 Jul 5.
29. Murray PR, Rosenthal KS, Kobayashi GS, Pfaller MA. *Medical microbiology*. 4th ed. St. Louis: Mosby; 2002.
30. Gilstrap LC 3rd, Cunningham FG, VanDorsten JP, editors. *Operative obstetrics*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill; 2002.

<http://www.ejgm.org>

