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Effective Editorial Review System for Improving Impact Factor of Orthopedic Journals

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Abstract

The impact factor (IF) for peer-reviewed orthopaedic journals has increased in the recent years, so has the number of journals. The publication of high-level research in orthopaedics has considerable importance of citing good quality evidence for impact on day-to-day practice. Transparency and rigorous engagement of reviewers and authors in the peer review process may improve the quality of publication which may help developing practice guidelines. This article seeks to suggest simple ways to have effective peer review process which can maximize publication success and improve the IF.

Keywords: Editorial review system, impact factor, orthopedic journals

INTRODUCTION

The last two decades has witnessed a sea change in scientific peer-reviewed publishing because of the possibilities offered by the Internet. Approximately 55 journals worldwide publish orthopedic topics according to the Journal Citation Reports website.^[1] In general, journals are divided into the following three categories: subscription model, open access, and hybrid (i.e., open access by choice). One measure of an article's impact is citation numbers it receives after publication.^[2] The impact factor (IF) of a journal is a measure used for evaluation of the journal's quality.^[3]

Electronic publishing has been used by most journals, which has increased the number of open-access journals. The ratio of number of open-access journals to subscription journals is similar, and their IF is also similar.^[4] The failure of the traditional ways of journal publishing and peer review to provide efficient scientific exchange and quality assurance has led to the increase of open-access journals. The potential benefits of open-access publishing must be recognized by orthopedic researchers.^[5] However, it has its own drawbacks. Many papers reflect a mentality of publishing faster, rather than participation in scientific exchange and discussion. Therefore, most journals are

torn between rapid publication and dissemination versus thorough review and discussion of novel ideas and results.

Nevertheless, in order to maximize publication success in a high-IF journal, one has to ensure that the manuscript complies with the author guidelines and is submitted without basic errors. Experienced reviewers will usually reject an article in the first read. Therefore, a good understanding of the peer-review process is required by all authors of an article before submission is made to the respective journal. The manuscript proof should be read by all authors before submission. The authors need to understand the aims, key data, and conclusions of the manuscript. Ideally, the proofread should be done by someone who is not involved in the work directly.

When an article is rejected by a journal, the authors or researchers should be optimistic in improving their learning and gain familiarity with the journal's peer review

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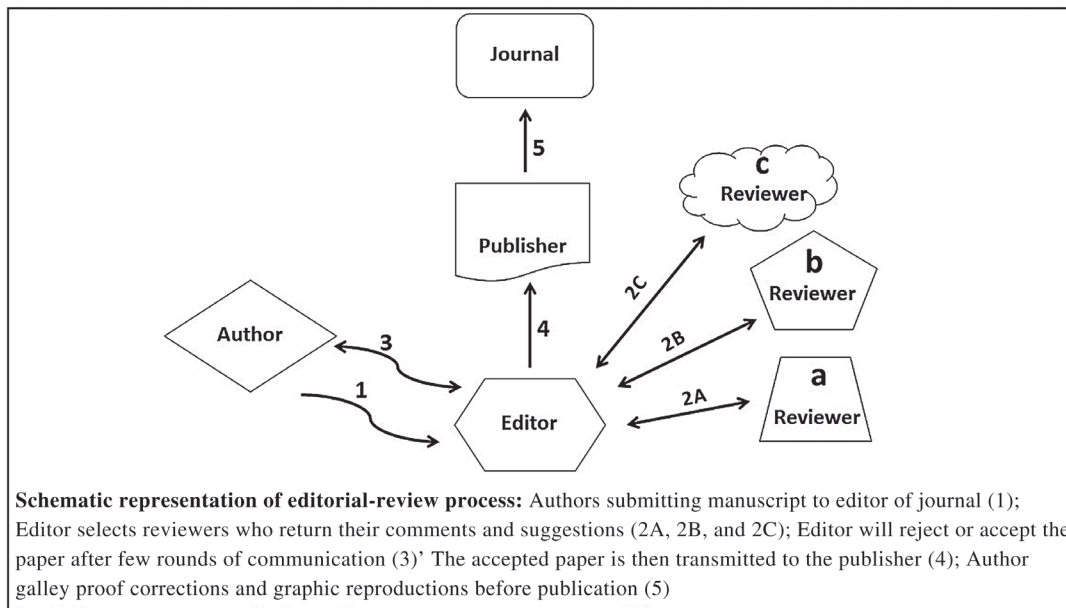


Figure 1: Schematic representation of editorial-review process

system. This improves the ability to write their manuscript more critically and crisply.

Peer-review process improves quality

Peer review plays an important role in disseminating knowledge generated by new research findings. Evidence-based medicine relies on the journal review process to provide an unbiased representation of high-quality studies.^[6] Publishers can influence the speed of publication of a manuscript according to the system of review.

The introduction of online systems for peer review is seen as advantageous by authors and editors rather than reviewers.^[7] A single- or double-blinded review system is used by most orthopedic journals.^[8] This process provides less biased and better quality reviews.^[9] On the contrary, many of the publishable manuscripts are criticized harshly by the reviewers only because they know their identity is held anonymous by the journals. Further, anonymizing the authors in a given manuscript prevents the reviewer's to have a biased opinion. To avoid these drawbacks, the review process needs to remain transparent. Each journal has its own pool of reviewers in order to remain up-to-date and effective.

Editor's role

The editor's decision is final for all manuscripts based on all the available comments and his/her manuscript evaluation. Editors may provide their own review comments as well (particularly if they have knowledge of the research field represented by the paper) or they may provide only an overview based on reviewers' materials (which may or may not be in agreement with one another). Every journal has a guide explaining the steps involved in the decision-making process. In reality, editors may not have sufficient information to find the ideal reviewers, or the ideal reviewers may decline to do a review.

In the real world, therefore, some reviewers may not be as objective, expert, or constructive, as they should be. The most successful journals are those that are supported and promoted by their editorial boards. In general, there are two types of editorial boards: active and ceremonial. The active board members review papers and make recommendations to editors.

Many journals covering wide range of topics rely on associate editors who provide additional advice to the editors. The associate editor selects reviewers for manuscript reviews and, once the reviews are returned, gives his/her own report and review summary to help the editor make the final decision. Based on a survey among orthopedic journal editors, the following were found to be the most important factors required for acceptance of a manuscript:

1. Conclusions are justified,
2. Statistical analysis is appropriate,
3. Conclusions may change practice,
4. Level of evidence,
5. Study designs, for example, randomized controlled trials (RCTs),
6. Current burning topics,
7. Complies with journal's aim, etc.^[10]

Editors should implement standardized tools to improve the areas of review process and make the process more effective for the success of the journal.

Reviewers: the Achilles heel

Journal editors seek the wisest reviewers on the basis of their past performance and for their scientific reputation as scientists. Many reviewers are sought after due to their expertise and in great demand by many journals. These special reviewers are under high pressure due to their own

clinical, research and other commitments. Therefore, very few of these scholars provide dedicated service to the journals. However, many of these special reviewers are under high pressure due to their clinical, research, and other commitments.

Most important issues faced by journals are increased reviewer refusals. To accommodate these refusals, every journal introduces new reviewers in their board. The journals should provide the reviewers with specific training as well as academic incentives for good reviewers. This is essential for maintaining the quality of the review process.

The major problem faced by journals is delayed reviews by reviewers. Delays in receipt of reviews with useful critical judgment may in turn delay the decision-making, which in turn affects the journal's aggregate reputation. The guidelines for reviewers should be more comprehensive and available publicly. This will enable the reviewers to do a constructive criticism of ideas and interpretations within a stipulated time. Reviewers should be able to comment on the overall aspects of the manuscript as well as individual headings. They may comment on the length, organization, and clarity of the article. However, it is not the reviewer's domain to correct the technical errors in writing, although editors may greatly appreciate such corrections.

It is the duty of the reviewer to avoid negative criticism unless the paper is unreadable. This will encourage more authors to directly involve in the process of resubmission. As an author, I would like to get comments on whether my results and ideas are believable and understandable. The reviewer must look for accuracy and adequacy of referencing. One should evaluate the article for balanced references without looking up at every reference. A feedback to the editor is required regarding any similar research published elsewhere by the same authors. The reviewers should be able to check for plagiarism and finalize their reviews.

An open-access review system further improves the transparency of the review process. All-in-all, prompt, high-quality reviewing is the essential element of the scientific manuscript review process, and the one most vulnerable to the vagaries of journal editor-reviewer-author interactions [Figure 1]. Reviewers in general serve only in anonymity, with the gratitude of all. The main rewards of being a good reviewer are that one gains

respect of his/her fellow academics and one has a more significant impact on the literature in the field.

CONCLUSION

The overall success of the journal depends on the editorial efficiency with robust reviewers' comments, the publication of clinically relevant articles, and publishing special issues on current topics.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

UKD contributed through the idea and research as well as wrote the article's perspective and prepared the manuscript. SK edited the manuscript according to the journal's guidelines.

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