The Relationship and Distinctions Between Editors and Reviewers

Serdar Oztora¹, Hamdi Nezih Dagdeviren²

¹Managing Editor, Eurasian Journal of Family Medicine; Department of Family Medicine, Trakya University School of Medicine, Edirne, Türkiye. ORCID iD: 0000-0001-9336-6009. droztora@yahoo.com (Corresponding Author)
²Editor in Chief, Eurasian Journal of Family Medicine; Department of Family Medicine, Trakya University School of Medicine, Edirne, Türkiye. ORCID iD: 0000-0001-5428-4377

ABSTRACT

In today’s world, scientific publications play a more distinctive role than ever. Even people with no academic background, or even media, are following the medical journals and publications with a growing interest and as a source to keep up with the current knowledge and outcomes. Therefore, the integrity and accountability of scientific publications, especially in medical journals, have been of utmost interest for scientific publishers. This leads to a more vigorous and objective evaluation process for the journals.

The main role seems to be on the Editors’ shoulders, however a peer review by independent reviewers is the key to an objective evaluation for a trustworthy scientific publication. This article is aiming to highlight some important key features of the editorial process and define an outline of the roles of the actors in this practice.

Keywords: peer review, editorial policies, publishing

The workflow of a medical journal

At the end of a long and possibly exhausting work of the researchers, there is a new excitement for them after the initial submission of the article. They expect their work to be evaluated and expected as soon as possible. What is going on after this stage is the main topic of this chapter.

The fundamental prerequisite of a submission is originality. This means that this article cannot be previously published or under review in any other scientific publication.

Once the manuscript is submitted to the journal, it will undergo an initial evaluation by the Editor-in-Chief to ensure that the article is in accordance with the aims and scope of the journal and to decide to accept or reject this submission. After that, the Editor-in-Chief assigns one of the Editors to be responsible of the reviewing process of this manuscript.

The assigned Editor evaluates the manuscript in order to be accepted for the peer review process. At this stage the Editor can make a decision of rejecting or accepting the manuscript based on scientific quality and/or the journals publication rules (1).

Date of submission: 25.05.2022 / Date of acceptance: 08.06.2022


Conflict of interest: No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

Financial disclosure: No financial disclosure was declared by the authors.
Every journal has its unique requirements that has to be fulfilled by the authors. However common documents that will be requested from the authors are the Copyright Transfer Form signed by all the authors and the Ethical Approval form of the research (2). Once these required documents have been evaluated and their validity is approved, the manuscript will be accepted for the peer review.

To perform the peer review process, the article will be sent to at least two independent reviewers with no conflict of interest with the authors. They will be asked to evaluate the manuscript thoroughly. In case of rejecting to evaluate the manuscript due to any reason, new reviewers will be asked. Also, in case of opposed decisions of the reviewers, new reviewer(s) will be assigned. Once the decision of the reviewers is established, the Editor will proceed to the next stage.

The Editor will decide for the article to be accepted or rejected based on the reviewers’ suggestions and the editorial evaluation. At this stage, it is also common to request revisions on the manuscript based on these evaluations.

After the Editorial decision and the approval of the Editorial Board, the manuscript will be accepted or rejected to be published in the journal. The authors will be notified about this final decision with the comments of the Editor. Once the article is accepted, it will undergo a new stage of Copy Editing, and it will be evaluated and corrected in terms of technical requirements. The authors may be asked for further contributions to this process in this stage as well.

**What is peer review?**

Peer review can be simply defined as the evaluation of a scientific content by other experienced researchers with similar qualifications. The peer review process acts basically as a filter to eliminate unreliable, unethical and unoriginal content for the journal.

Peer review can be done in various fashions, with their unique advantages and disadvantages (3). The most common way to review is double-blind peer review. This ensures that the reviewers are not affected by the authors characteristics. Furthermore, they can freely express their opinions about the journal without being recognized by the authors as well.

This method of peer review provides more accountability on the article’s evaluation and therefore widely preferred by most journals (4). However, the roles of the Editors and the Reviewers should be well established to avoid interfering each other or making unnecessary effort to perform the same tasks.

So, we will try to set some outlines in order to ensure that in the next chapter.

**The responsibilities of Editors**

Despite the fact that the peer reviewers play a crucial role on publishing, it is actually still debatable in some aspects. Some suggest that the Editor plays the main role to accept or reject the manuscript, whether it is peer reviewed or not, and the reviewers make only suggestions to help them in this decision (5).

However, a well-organized journal should use this interaction on its behalf. Therefore, the Editors and Reviewers should act as a team with defined tasks.

The Editors should verify that the article is original, meaning not published elsewhere and not derived or plagiarized from other works. They are responsible for choosing the appropriate reviewers for the article and provide them the necessary materials for the process. The Editors should also provide anonymity of the article to be reviewed, by blinding the information of the reviewers before sending to the reviewers.

After the initial peer review, the editor decides the path to go for the manuscript. If the reviewers accept it as it is, it can be accepted, or if they reject the manuscript, it can be rejected. In case of any opposed decisions of the reviewers, the Editor can assign new reviewers for the article. The article can also be sent to the Language Editor or the Statistics Editor when needed. However, the main decision in these processes is within the responsibilities of the Editor.

Once the decision is established, the Editor should also take part in the copy-editing phase. The main objective behind that is, that the Editor is responsible from the manuscript from the initial evaluation to the publishing of the manuscript (6).
Expectations from Reviewers

Despite the fact that the Editors play the main role in a manuscript’s publishing journey, the Reviewers have an undeniable impact of this process (7). The majority of respected scientific journals follow the suggestions of the reviewers to ensure the objectivity.

The reviewers are expected to review the content in terms of scientific integrity and ethical validity using critical assessment. In order to do that, they should carefully evaluate and comment on all the sections. Table 1 summarizes the checklist available to the reviewers of Eurasian Journal of Family Medicine.

Table 1. Reviewers’ checklist for evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the research compatible with ethical guidelines?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the title concordant with the aim and scope of the journal?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the abstract summarize the article adequately?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the construction of the abstract compatible with the journal rules?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the keywords sufficient to specify the study?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the research and statistical methods appropriate to investigate the subject?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the references sufficient and relevant with the subject?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the references compatible with the journal’s publication rules?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the language appropriate?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reviewers should decide that the methods or analysis of the data is appropriate and well explained. They should concentrate on the scientific value of the manuscript and where the research and its outcomes stand in the literature. Whether it provides any contribution or not, is the main focus of this evaluation. Critical evaluation also involves the references and their use within the discussion to evaluate the manuscript thoroughly.

The reviewers are not expected to correct grammar or spelling mistakes, as this will be performed by the Copy Editors later, before the publication. They should not spend time to this kind of corrections. However, a general opinion on the language of the manuscript is asked from the reviewers.

The reviewers should eventually decide whether this manuscript is suitable for publishing. They can ask for revisions, with explanations of their suggestions to be a guide for both the authors and the editor. Their acceptance or rejection decision will guide the editor in this review process of the manuscript.

Publisher’s point of view on peer review

Publishers are responsible for the deliverance of scientific material to the journal’s readers and scientific area. Their main concern is to bring scientific content to publishing as soon as possible. However, this timing pressure does not let them to overlook critical scientific evaluation of the articles.

Therefore, the time spent for the evaluation of the reviewers is vital. The publishers appreciate a maximum evaluation within minimum time. The reviewers should consider their timetable before accepting or rejecting to evaluate the manuscript.

The publishers also aim to index their journal in respected indexing services. This task requires clear documentation of the entire manuscript evaluation process. The indexing services request the evaluation process documents of the published articles of the journals from start to finish, with every detail including the reviewers’ identity along with their suggestions and opinions. Thus, the quality and clarity of the reviewer reports are also an important focal point for the indexed scientific journals.

Conclusion

The manuscript evaluation process requires a complex interaction between the authors, reviewers, editors and publishers. Even if the editorial independence is stressed by editor organizations, a thorough peer review is vital for a manuscript to be published. Although it is a volunteer task, being a reviewer is still one important aspects of academicians. A clear, concise and constructive peer review will push the quality of the articles and the journals forward, leading to a better scientific knowledge.
References
1. Eurasian Journal of Family Medicine [Internet]. Instructions for authors [cited 2022 May 23]. Available from: http://ejfm.trakya.edu.tr/instructions-for-authors
4. The European Association of Science Editors [Internet]. What is peer review? [cited 2022 May 23]. Available from: https://ease.org.uk/communities/peer-review-committee/peer-review-toolkit/What-is-peer-review