

## Common reasons for rejecting a research paper: An editor's perspective

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Medical fraternity now have a recent obligation to publish. The purpose of this editorial is to elucidate the endeavors involved in assuring the high caliber of published articles and the typical grounds for rejecting a paper. Upon manuscript rejection, the editorial board empathizes with the author's disappointment. The process of preparing a manuscript for publication requires significant effort from the editorial team, reviewers, and technical editors who work closely with the writers. The editorial board members work diligently to ensure that all papers meet the standards required for publication.

The identical message is conveyed to the reviewers. They are instructed to provide constructive feedback, even if they believe a specific paper is unsuitable for publishing, in order to facilitate the creation of a revised version for further evaluation. We only make the decision to reject a work if it is completely beyond

any possibility of improvement, and we do it with reluctance.

The decision to decline such articles is made in order to guarantee that all papers published by us meet a high standard of quality. Disseminating inaccurate information and drawing conclusions from flawed research methods do not provide any advantages to the scientific community or society. Moreover, they have the capacity to misguide both experts and the general public, resulting to detrimental consequences for patients and individuals. This action constitutes a breach of the ethical norms of beneficence and nonmaleficence.

In addition to ethical considerations, the publication of high-quality research and ideas will enhance the reputation of the journal. Boosting our reputation will benefit all stakeholders, especially the authors who publish their work through our platform. The availability of published articles online ensures their quick accessibility to readers and researchers worldwide. Papers that have significant

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errors not only harm the reputation of the journal but also do not serve the best professional interests of their authors.<sup>1,2</sup>

Given the current state of academia in the country, it is reasonable that authors would feel disappointed and desperate once their work is rejected. The current focus is primarily on quantity rather than quality. If there is an improvement in the academic climate in our country (a hopeful notion), the emphasis will shift towards prioritizing the quality of papers rather than their quantity. Authors will face repercussions and damage their reputation when poorly written papers, even those published years ago, are discovered. Young faculty members who aspire to work overseas can enhance their prospects by focusing on improving the quality of their research publications. Our academics may be surprised to learn that in the United States, a country that prioritizes quality, only about one fifth of scientists have a peer-reviewed work attributed to their name.<sup>3,4</sup>

The media across the globe have effectively exposed the fraudulent practices of predatory publishing. Predatory journals primarily prioritize profit over the quality of the papers they publish. They operate within a market where academics in certain nations need to publish in order to advance their careers. The majority of writers willingly submit their papers to predatory journals, fully aware of their questionable reputation, in the hope that evaluators of their credentials will not verify the journal's legitimacy. We strongly condemn this unethical activity. Our academic community must take decisive measures to halt the deterioration.

Unlike predatory publications, legitimate journals adhere to rigorous protocols to assure the quality of published papers. In

order to ensure impartiality and fairness, the decision on a certain article is not made by an individual in a random manner. The decisions on the articles are mostly affected by the feedback provided by subject matter experts who serve as reviewers. The majority of publications, including our publication, adhere to a double-blind peer review process. Below, we provide a concise summary of frequently encountered grounds for manuscript rejection, drawing from our own expertise, feedback from our reviewers, and relevant published literature.<sup>5,6</sup>

The predominant issue faced by editors is the submission of papers that do not adhere to the instructions provided by the publication. Comprehensive guidelines for various article kinds can be found on the journal's website. However, we continue to receive papers that do not adhere to these requirements. Typically, we do not first decline the submission solely based on this rationale. We return the article to the authors along with comments and directions to resubmit it, often within a week, as per the guidelines of the journal.

At this juncture, we encounter several author reactions. About one fifth of portion of individuals fail to answer despite multiple reminders. Further same portion of individuals resubmit their work, but make few modifications. Majority of writers adhere to the journal's criteria by resubmitting the updated work. We unequivocally decline the manuscripts of individuals who fail to react or submit their revised manuscript. Following the submission, the author actively participates in all subsequent steps, which include making repeated edits based on feedback from reviewers, addressing inquiries from technical editors after provisional acceptance, and thoroughly reviewing and approving the proofs before publication. We anticipate

that writers who have diligently conducted authentic research will promptly address any inquiries and requests from the editorial team. If they do not succeed in doing so, the authenticity of their work is likewise called into question. Due to the lack of dependable techniques for determining research integrity, we must depend on these screening approaches.

Following the preliminary evaluation conducted by the editorial team, the manuscript is subsequently forwarded to external reviewers for peer review. Typical grounds for rejection by reviewers include: lack of clarity in the research question or problem being addressed, uninteresting topic with extensive prior research, inadequate presentation of the paper's background and justification, insufficient sample size, subpar readability, carelessness with spelling and grammatical errors, and conclusions that are not supported by the paper's results.

When examining the several sections of the document individually, we observe the following pattern. The opening part, which is intended to establish the necessity of the study, occasionally lacks the necessary impact. The introduction should encompass four main themes, as suggested. The initial paragraph should provide the contextual foundation for the current research, specifically addressing the clinical or public health issue with pertinent references. The subsequent paragraph should offer a concise overview of the existing literature, summarizing previous studies that have tackled the same research question as the present paper. The third paragraph should highlight any limitations or controversies that have arisen from these studies. Lastly, the fourth paragraph should outline the enhancements or additional aspects introduced in the present paper. Any information that does not align with

these topics is superfluous and should be eliminated.

The majority of errors occur in the methods sections, with significant ones including the omission or incorrect description of study designs, lack of explicit description of predictors, outcomes, and confounders, and difficulty in deciphering them. Additionally, the methods of measuring these variables are either not described or described vaguely. The methods for mitigating measurement errors, whether caused by the instrument or the observer, often go unnoticed. Authors may exclude the description of the methodology used to choose study participants, including the control group. The case definition may lack precision or may not be provided at all. Occasionally, the statistical tests may be unsuitable. As statistical packages become more accessible, there is a growing inclination to engage in data dredging and excessive use of statistical methods. The study includes intricate statistical results, which are occasionally used correctly but frequently used incorrectly. Obtaining the permission of a statistician alone may not be enough, as statisticians may not possess the clinical expertise required to accurately interpret statistical findings within the broader therapeutic context. Occasionally, when questioned about the use of improper statistical tests, the authors simply state that a biostatistician reviewed the results. In order to achieve optimal utilization of statistical methods, it is crucial to establish effective communication between the investigator and the statistician.

Common errors in the results section encompass the subsequent aspects. Locating the primary findings pertaining to the study question might be challenging at times. The effect size, which refers to the discrepancy in result between two compared groups, is not

specified. This disparity, although acknowledged, is occasionally insignificant from a therapeutic standpoint. Complex statistical outputs, often with clinically insignificant effect sizes, are extensively discussed without acknowledging this distinction or providing practical application of P values. Confidence intervals provide discriminating readers with more information than just the revered P value. When confidence intervals are provided (and many journals now require confidence intervals instead of or in addition to P values), a significant amount of information is communicated. Firstly, a confidence interval serves as an indicator of the adequacy of the sample size (a wider confidence interval suggests a smaller sample size). Furthermore, the confidence interval's upper and lower bounds enable the reader to assess the clinical or public health significance based on the most favorable and unfavorable assessments of the findings. Furthermore, the inclusion of either 1 (representing relative risk or odds ratio for categorical data) or 0 (representing mean difference for quantitative data) in the confidence interval allows for the inference of statistical significance, rendering the revered P value unnecessary. In the future, editors and reviewers will likely refuse to accept publications that fail to provide confidence intervals in the statistical analysis where necessary.<sup>7</sup>

Strategic utilization of tables and figures, accompanied by suitable titles, in the results section improves understanding. These items should be inherently understandable, with the meaning of each item being evident without the need to resort to any accompanying text. It is necessary to reference all the tables and figures in the text, ensuring that they are arranged in a sequential manner based on time. Tables and figures that are poorly

organized and contain obvious mistakes might challenge the patience of editors and reviewers, hence raising the probability of rejection.

Errors in the discussion section encompass redundancies in presenting the findings, overlooking alternative explanations for the results, neglecting to contextualize the findings in relation to previous studies due to insufficient literature review, inadequately discussing the implications and significance of the results, and failing to outline future directions. Occasionally, more data emerge in the discussion section without being initially mentioned in the results. This is not permissible. The primary emphasis should be placed on the findings of the current study during the debate, rather than engaging in an essay-like discourse on the issue that may be formulated without access to the study's conclusions. If any such content infiltrates, it is superfluous and should be eliminated.

An issue frequently seen in the references section is the prevalence of obsolete sources. This is a frequent occurrence in articles that are based on postgraduate dissertations conducted in the past. Authors may exhibit a lack of diligence in updating the references. Additional issues regarding references include failure to adhere to the Vancouver system for citing and listing references, despite multiple requests to do so. This also encompasses citing references from "predatory journals" and extracting references without thoroughly reading the entire paper, resulting in a misinterpretation of the referenced message. It is important to mention that when quoting information from references, authors should rephrase the text using their own words to prevent plagiarism, which is a significant mistake explained further.

Plagiarism is the most severe offense that requires instant rejection and possibly some form of deterrence. We strictly enforce a policy of zero tolerance for this behavior. After conducting a comprehensive investigation, it is our ethical obligation to inform the institution of the authors about these errors. In the event that we identify plagiarism prior to publication, we immediately decline the paper and provide the authors with a warning, emphasizing the extremely immoral character of such misconduct. If plagiarism is discovered after the publishing, we will promptly retract the plagiarized works without any hesitation.

The resolution of ethical dilemmas stemming from instances of plagiarism might be challenging at times. The field of ethics is inherently complex and nuanced, and this complexity extends to the realm of publication ethics and misbehaviour. The outcome of such activities is heavily influenced by the social and intellectual context in which they occur. Currently, our academic community primarily focuses on quantifying the number of publications and does not extend beyond that.

In order to discourage and penalize instances of plagiarism, it is necessary to establish a highly resilient academic setting that prioritizes quality and integrity over mere quantity. North American Universities have implemented disciplinary measures to discredit individuals who engage in plagiarism. Deterrence is typically a fundamental component of university honor codes. The

"honor codes" have a lengthy historical background and are regarded with great seriousness by the authorities. In such a setting, the likelihood of being discovered and penalized for plagiarism is significantly elevated. Deceptive behavior, dishonesty, and misappropriation (plagiarism is a form of misappropriation) are strictly prohibited, and individuals who are proven to engage in such misconduct may face expulsion from the university.

Unfortunately, we are far from meeting their requirements, resulting in widespread instances of plagiarism. The minimum action we can do is to refuse such papers.

Based on our experience, we have observed that when we thoroughly explain the publication process and our commitment to maintaining high standards for our journal, even authors who initially express hostility towards their rejected papers are persuaded of our genuine intentions and subsequently collaborate with us to enhance the quality and content of future submissions. Given the impracticality of individually contacting every author, we aim to educate them of our mission and procedures through this editorial. We expect authors to evaluate their rejected articles in light of the prevalent causes for rejection highlighted in this editorial. We want to persuade them to adopt our perspective and enhance the caliber of their submissions, so elevating the standards of our publication.

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