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Resource 6A: Working with authors – good practice

Summary: Every journal needs to ensure that they serve this community - not only by publishing their papers, but also by providing them with good service. Equally, this community can provide the journal with opportunities for growth and development.

The list below provides some ideas of ways in which the journal should work with authors.

Before submission

- Clear journal aims and scope

- Useful, succinct author guidelines (perhaps extended guidelines available online)

- Accept pre-submission enquiries ("is my research suitable…?")

On submission

- Easy submission for authors

  ◦ Online submission by email or specialised submission system

- Confirmation that the submission has been received (by email?)

- Clearly request required information (e.g. ethics approval, etc.)

Feedback

- Clear reviewing feedback

- Constructive, polite, helpful

- State when revisions are required from the author (and be prepared to chase them)

Communicating rejection

- Clear reasons for rejection

- Be polite

- Short! (do not write too much)

- Close the door firmly, but kindly

- Suggest alternative journals

Communicating acceptance

- Tell all authors of acceptance

- Send accepted version of article to all authors (if more than one) – so they all know what version has been accepted

- Polite

- Short

- What happens now – what the author can expect, and what publication date is expected

- Ensure all paperwork is received (authorship affirmation, ethics approvals, copyright assignment, etc. as appropriate)

Post-publication

- Tell authors of publication

- If possible, send "birthday" email with download statistics (e.g. "One year after publication, X people have downloaded your article")

- Offprints of published papers (print and/or electronic)

- Free copy of issue in which paper is published

- Prize for best paper or recognition in "Editors' picks"

- Highlight the most-accessed paper (online) – a reward for authors (and useful for readers)

Development and opportunities

- Author questionnaires/surveys

  ◦ What do they think about the journal – are they willing to become more involved (e.g. reviewing)?

  ◦ How was their publishing experience with you?

  ◦ What other journals do they read? (i.e. what is your competition?)

- Workshops – train the authors / reviewers / editors on what is expected of them

- Commissioning articles

  ◦ Why did you select the author?

  ◦ What you want them to write? (topic, number of words, style)

  ◦ When you want them to deliver it?

  ◦ Will it be reviewed? (Might it be rejected?)

- Invited papers / editorials from highly respected authors – or on selected topics – raises the journal profile

- Call for authors

  ◦ Themed issues (are often more highly cited than individual papers)

  ◦ To highlight new sections in the journal

  ◦ Be cautious about sending out too many (it looks like spamming, or as if the journal is in trouble)

Good service for authors

- Good communication – fast responses to submission/queries, etc.

- Easy communication: Email, post, fax or telephone

- Fast production/processing (perhaps online pre-publication of articles after acceptance?)

- Quality copyediting (checking the paper for grammar, reference citations, etc. - see Chapter 7)

Responsibility to authors

- Editors have a responsibility to respect authors' rights. In particular this includes:

- Moral right to be identified as the author of a work: do not delete the author names from an article without their agreement.

- Confidentiality: do not disclose anything about the submission outside the editorial team

- Intellectual property rights: the authors have copyright and other intellectual property rights in their work, which must be respected by the journal (editors, reviewers and publishers)

- Publication: authors submit their work to a journal with certain understanding about the quality and operation of a journal. This includes issues such as timeliness of publication, quality of copyediting, the type of delivery (e.g. online or in print), etc., and the journal should ensure that it delivers what it promises to the author in these respects.

KEY POINTS

Editors must not assume that authors are experienced in publication, and should ensure that they work ethically, honestly, and transparently with them throughout the publication process. It is good for a journal to be transparent about its working methodology, and to ensure that it delivers what it promises.