

OPINION / COMMENTARY

Major reasons involved in rejection of scientific research papers –an issue faced by the authors

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Abstract

In health sector, the academics require the faculty members to publish their scientific or scholarly work to contribute to the ever-evolving knowledge and understanding. It also develops connections with people of same field to promote learning and knowledge as a part of continuing education. Due to lack of formal coaching and instruction at the undergraduate level, regarding research methodology, including hypothesis development, sample size calculation, data collection and ethical approvals, the poorly constructed articles are often rejected by the reviewers. Thorough understanding of manuscript writing makes it potentially strong to be accepted by the editorial team. A quality article is a positive addition to the vast field of scientific research. Thus, to ensure the accuracy of scientific knowledge, the manuscripts have to be evaluated intricately. By addressing the issues responsible for rejections, one can maximize the rate at acceptance.

Key words: Authors; Health Sciences; Rejection; Reasons; Publications; Research papers; Solutions

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1. Introduction

Authors of research papers work hard to conduct a research and present their work in the form of a journal paper or at a national or international conference. A well-constructed paper based upon genuine and useful hypothesis and sound research methodology is appreciated by the target audience, otherwise it would fail to impress the reviewers/editors. Paper rejection is really a disheartening situation for the authors.¹ Balyakina stated that 20% rejection rate was seen among 1653 submissions and reported ethical problems, design errors, lack of novelty and the paper being out of scope of the receiving journal were the main reasons. but among them the major reason was weak reporting of the research.² Out of 41 submissions, Oyebanji A stated that 63.4% of the papers had poor preparation of manuscript, and 17.1% papers were rejected because the manuscript was out of the scope of the journal.³ The editorial priority is always linked to

publish high quality of scholarly work justified by an appropriate study design. Lack of technical language,⁴ reporting of conflicting results, statistical issues,⁵ and lack of a logical frame work of manuscript can be the reasons.¹

2. Reasons of article rejection

A search for the main reasons of rejection of scientific papers by the reviewers and the editors of scientific journals yielded the following list;

1. Inappropriate Study Design/ Methodology: Deficiencies in study design and methodology section is the main cause of the rejection of articles.⁶
2. Breach of Ethics: Ethical considerations of the research methods, medical ethics including protection of the identity of the research subjects and the data disclosure must be ensured.

3. Mismatch with the journals scope: The paper is out of scope of the targeted journal.
4. Weak reporting of results: Reporting of research work with weak evidence or poorly presented results.
5. Lack of Novelty: The paper lacks novelty, unable to add new knowledge in the existing literature or lacks originality.²
6. Research Methodology: Ambiguous introduction, error in methodology, poor data presentation and poor discussion of the research hypothesis and the results in the light of existing knowledge.³
7. Poor Hypothesis: The manuscript lacks adequate justification of the study hypothesis.⁷
8. Incomplete data: Small sample size, short follow up and retrospective design have more chances of rejection.⁸
9. Incomprehensible language: Language lacks structure, correct use of comprehension and has multiple spelling and grammatical errors; must use eloquent language.⁴
10. Flaws in conclusion: Conclusions drawn are inconclusive, illogical, invalid and not structured as per requirements according to the study title and the laid down objectives or the results.¹
11. Improper reporting of references: References must be mentioned as per the instructions for the authors by the journal.⁸ There is an optimum number of references for every type of paper, which needs to be adhered to as much as possible.
12. Incomplete statistics: Data is incomplete, inappropriate statistical analysis. Proper statistical work ensures accuracy.⁵

3. Solutions

The study design and methodology are the integral parts of a research paper. Both of these depend upon your study hypothesis and the objectives. Work on developing the accurate hypothesis as a poor hypothesis does not answer all the questions asked, and the results are a precise report of your findings and conclusions drawn, so this part must be well-organized as it determines the overall quality of the study.^{9,10} Proof reading a research paper for a few times enables you to recheck for any significant issues, language problems and sentence structuring.^{12,13} Ask your peers and seniors to help you out to correct any errors that might not have drawn your attention.¹⁵ Ensure that the sample size is calculated through correct formula and represents target population. The short follow-up must be at least 3-4 months in duration. Avoid retrospective study design as it has more chances of errors found in

the data. Instead, opt for prospective design.¹⁴ Ask an expert statistician to look out for any incomplete stat work to warrant accuracy.¹⁵ Always target the correct domain of the journal to avoid the rejection of your paper.¹³ For ethical considerations, follow Helsinki Declaration 2008.^{16,17}

The authors should understand the policy, scope and domain and “author guidelines” before the submission. A senior colleague, expert in the field, and who has already published few papers, should be consulted before the submission. The most important is to select a proper methodology and take help from an expert statistician.

Involvement of senior colleagues, statistical expert and the reviewers comments during the conception phase will help to select an appropriate study design and methods.⁸

The submission should be purely in the scope of the journal because it will be rejected even without peer review.⁹ If in doubt, just send the title and abstract to the editor of the journal and seek their opinion.

There have been some tools for the help of the authors. ‘JANE’ (Journal/Author Name Estimator) helps in comparing with PubMed manuscripts and can find the best matched journal for your article.¹⁰ There are different reporting guidelines / check lists, including CONSORT, PRISMA, STROBE, SPIRIT, STARD, CARE, AGREE, SRQR, ARRIVE, SQUIRE and CHEERS. These guidelines can help to better presentation of scholarly work. (<https://www.equator-network.org/>)

4. Conflict of interest

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6. Authors’ contribution

AI: Concept, search of the data, preparation of the manuscript.

TM: Critical analysis of the paper; intellectual input and editing the manuscript.

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