

M. Ramam

What happens when a manuscript is submitted to the journal? Although the process is essentially similar in all biomedical journals, every editorial team does things slightly different. This article describes the workflow we currently follow at the IJDVL.

TRIAGE

As a first step, all submitted manuscripts are assessed for content and formatting by a group of nine editors who work in three groups of three members each. While they do not undertake detailed, formal reviews, all manuscripts get a fairly thorough vetting. Broadly, comments indicate if the article is good and if the manuscript has been prepared according to journal requirements. We receive slightly more than 100 articles every month making for 3–4 articles every day so that each team has to deal with 1–2 articles a day. Each article takes some time to read and some time to frame a constructive comment. This needs to be done day after day, in sunshine or rain, in illness or pain. For this reason, triage team members need to have the time and discipline to look at articles nearly every day. Of course, every one has other lives, so we have three members in each team; in case one person is unavailable to assess a particular manuscript, it will be examined by two other people. Seven days after submission, new manuscripts are moved out of triage and on to the editor and associate editor(s).

Department of Dermatology and Venereology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, India

Address for correspondence: Dr. M. Ramam,
Department of Dermatology and Venereology, All India
Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi - 110 029, India.
E-mail: mramam@hotmail.com

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PRIMARY SCREENING

The editor/associate editor evaluates these manuscripts and takes a decision on which should move ahead in the editorial process and which fail to make the cut. Triage comments play an important role in decision-making at this stage, although there are times when the editor may disagree. Manuscripts that are judged unsatisfactory are sent back to the authors with these comments and any additional comments that the editor may wish to add. Often, comments are quite substantial and it is likely they will help the authors improve the manuscript before they submit it elsewhere or help them do a better job with their next article. Slightly more than half (55%) of submitted manuscripts fall at this first hurdle. Manuscripts that make it past this point are sent to section editors.

SECTION EDITORS

The journal has about ten section editors with differing and overlapping interests including dermatopathology, photobiology and phototherapy, pigmentary disorders, contact dermatitis, pediatric dermatology, hair and nail disorders, general dermatology, research methodology, infectious diseases, psoriasis, leprosy, sexually transmitted infections, guideline development, narrative reviews, dermatosurgery and cosmetic dermatology, dermoscopy, photography, dermatologic education and training, among others. Manuscripts are allocated to section editors depending on their area of interest, although these overlap to some extent.

Once a section editor receives a manuscript, she makes an independent assessment of the quality of the manuscript. She may decide that the article does not deserve to go further in which case she

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will send it back to the editor/associate editor with a recommendation that it be rejected. These manuscripts are handled similarly to those rejected by the triage team.

If she decides to proceed with the article, the first step is to see if the manuscript requires any modifications before it is peer reviewed. These modifications may include formatting the article according to journal requirements, clarifications about data or statements in the article and better images, both clinical and photomicrographs. She may also suggest a change in article type, for example, case reports are usually converted to letters, but other article types may also be changed depending on the content. More than one round of modification may be necessary to make sure the article is ready for peer review. Occasionally, this process may end in editorial rejection if the author is unable to provide the requested additional information, data or images. Less frequently, authors choose to withdraw their article rather than make these changes and the most common reason is unwillingness to accept the letter format for an article submitted in another category (as an aside, we are disappointed when this happens because we believe letters are just as important and prestigious as other article types).

PEER REVIEW

Once the manuscript is ship-shape, it is sent for peer review. We believe that this is the most important part of the editorial process. Referees must be chosen carefully both for their knowledge of the subject and their willingness to provide constructive comments in a timely manner. These attributes do not always go together! While established experts are sought out for this task, we have discovered that younger people developing expertise in a field or willing to read up about a subject before evaluating the manuscript often turn in reviews of high quality. To avoid fatigue and sustain the quality of reviews, it is important not to overburden referees and we try not to send more than one manuscript every 1–2 months, though we may have to breach this guideline once in a while, especially when there are not many experts in a particular subject area.

Section editors use their professional networks and their knowledge of workers in the field to pick referees. Understandably, referees are more likely to respond to an invitation from someone they know. As every

editor has a different set of colleagues and professional contacts, a larger pool of referees is available to the journal than if only one editor or some associate editors were undertaking this task. In spite of this, an editor may have to turn to PubMed or the reference list of the article to find referees for a manuscript in some instances, such as those about rare diseases. Papers in basic sciences pose special problems because our networks do not include many researchers in these fields. This may lead to long delays in identifying referees. Since these referees may not be personal or professional contacts of the section editor, there is a higher chance that they may not respond to the invitation to review the manuscript.

Typically, a manuscript is sent to 2–4 referees so that different viewpoints are available and time is not lost in case one of them is unavailable or unwilling to review the manuscript. Once referee comments are available, an alert is sent to the section editor to move it to the next step.

SECONDARY SCREENING

In addition to framing a courteously worded, constructive and fairly detailed assessment for the authors, referees make one of several recommendations to the editor. Every author's dream is to have the paper accepted as is, but this is a distinctly uncommon outcome of the review process. More frequent is a recommendation for revision and resubmission.

Since a request to revise the paper is an indication of interest by the journal, the section editor will normally discuss this with the editor/associate editor before proceeding. If both agree, the manuscript is sent back for revision with referee and editorial comments. Once the author resubmits a revised manuscript, it is evaluated to check if referee comments have been adequately addressed and if deemed necessary, it may be sent out for re-review to the same or a new referee. Once the revised manuscript is considered satisfactory, it is provisionally accepted for publication.

An alternative outcome is that referees recommend rejection of the article, either the first time around or after revision, if modifications made to the manuscript are unsatisfactory. If the section editor and editor/associate editor agree with this referee assessment, the authors receive a rejection note with detailed referee

and editorial comments that we hope are useful. About 50% of all articles received by a section editor end up being accepted while the rest are rejected.

Provisionally accepted manuscripts are returned to authors with a prepublication checklist and other corrections that may have been noticed following peer review. The section editor checks the revised manuscript for compliance with the checklist and if she is satisfied, she makes a final recommendation to the editor/associate editor that the manuscript can be accepted for publication. This ends the section editor's long engagement with the article.

LANGUAGE EDITING

Following this, the manuscript is turned over to the publisher's production team which gets copy editing and technical editing done. The proofs are then sent to the authors and when they have approved it, the article comes back to the editor/associate editor.

In theory, the manuscript is now just a step away from publication. However, we have found that there is often substantial work left to do to improve the language, grammar and readability of manuscripts that have been approved for their scientific content. A set of about ten language editors, all dermatologists, share this task. This step is undertaken offline, outside the journal's manuscript handling system. The text and images are downloaded and e-mailed to the language editor. One editor corrects 1–2 short manuscripts or one long manuscript every 10 days or so. As this step requires close reading of the manuscript to understand what the author is trying to say and rephrasing it more lucidly and elegantly, some issues that escaped notice during the review process are picked up during language editing. If there are major issues, the manuscript is sent back to the authors for revision but this is uncommon and rejection at this stage is even rarer, but not unknown. More frequently, language-edited manuscripts are returned to the editor/associate editor who takes a final look and then sends it to the publisher for preparation of page proofs. Minor problems are addressed as author queries in the proofs.

PAGE PROOFS

Till a couple of years ago, the step of preparing page proofs would be undertaken only when an issue was being readied for print. Since we began to publish

articles online, ahead of print, this is now an on-going process. Page proofs are corrected by authors and the editors/associate editors. As there is no pressure to get proofs ready before a print deadline, proof correction can be done in a thorough and relatively relaxed manner.

Image editing

This is also an opportunity to edit images carefully. We have devoted considerable energy to improving the readability of articles and have a set of editors exclusively working on this. Recently, we have also turned our attention to the "viewability" of articles. The current focus is to have images of at least column width so that details can be seen: we are trying to get rid of collages and composite images that result in postage stamp-sized images being printed. But more can and should be done to crop out distractors and correct images for brightness, contrast, saturation and color balance, among other aspects. Page layouts could also be better. At present, this task is undertaken by the editor/associate editors, but we feel that having a cadre of image editors will help us do a better job.

ONLINE AND PRINT PUBLICATION

Once the text and images in the proofs are approved for online publication, articles appear on the journal website and in the MEDLINE repository soon afterward.

When it is time to bring out a print issue, we pick articles from those that have been published online and put them together to make up an issue. Some articles such as editorials, obituaries and book reviews do not quite fit into this scheme and have to be shepherded through the editorial process so that they are ready in time for publication.

As soon as we have decided on which articles to put into an issue, usually a month and a half before the online publication date, we send the full text or page proofs of all articles to the Viva Questions team which races to prepare this manuscript by the publication deadline. The sequence of the articles is then decided and a cover image is picked. IADVL and other notices are included at appropriate places.

The issue appears online early in the month preceding the due date, for example, the September–October issue appeared online in the first week of August. The managing editor obtains art work from advertisers and

submits the advertisements, bookmarks and envelope material to the production team and specifies their position in the journal.

Proofs of the print issue including all this material are submitted to the managing editor and editor/associate editor. Once they approve, the issue is sent to press and about 2 weeks later, copies of the journal are dispatched to members and subscribers.

Why have we told you all this in some detail? Partly because we thought it is an interesting story that

you would like to hear. Partly because we believe many authors would like to know what happens to their manuscript after it is submitted. And partly because we wanted you to know what members of the editorial team do. If you would like to help the editorial effort, and help is always welcome, we hope this account indicates the many different ways you can contribute: as triage editor, referee, section editor, language editor, image editor and associate editor. Please contact us if you would like to be part of this somewhat demanding but academically rewarding endeavor.