

CHAPTER 22

REVIEW OF THE MANUSCRIPT

Magnitude and Diversity of Biomedical Publications

As indicated in Chapter 5, over 13,000 biomedical journals are included in the Ulrich's and MedBio-world's databases. The MEDLINE database, though considerably more restrictive, still (August 2016) includes 5,600 journals. Some of these journals are for profit, and some are not for profit. Some are only available to individuals or organizations that subscribe to that particular journal, while others are freely available to anyone with access to a computer and an internet connection. Some have a highly specialized audience, while others target a much broader audience. Given this diversity of scientific publications, it might be expected that there are significant differences in approaches toward reviewing submissions to determine whether a manuscript is acceptable for publication. Surprisingly, however, the overall approach toward reviewing manuscripts to determine their acceptability is remarkably similar for most scientific journals. We have described, below, the overall process for scientific review which is likely to closely approximate the review process used by the journal that an author has targeted for submission. The reader should be cautioned that there are likely to be subtle differences in the exact mechanisms for review. The description below, however, should provide readers with significant insights into what happens after their manuscript has been submitted to a journal for review.

Initial Processing by Editorial Staff

When a manuscript is received by a journal, its point of entry into the system typically involves professional Editorial Staff who will assign the manuscript an accession number. This Editorial Staff will inspect the manuscript to ensure that it has been submitted in a format that complies with the guidelines communicated in the Instructions to Authors. If the manuscript fails to pass this inspection (e.g. because it is not double spaced; the figures are submitted in the wrong format; there is no Abstract, etc.) it is possible that the manuscript will be immediately returned to the corresponding author, without peer review, so that these errors can be corrected. Alternatively, if the Editorial Staff is somewhat liberal with respect to processing manuscripts submitted in an inappropriate format, the improperly formatted manuscript may be sent to reviewers who may become annoyed, to varying extents, by the inconvenience associated with improper formatting. Such mistakes should obviously be avoided given the importance of time in the publication of new knowledge that was discussed earlier (reformatting will result in delays), and the inherently poor idea of annoying reviewers who are about to evaluate your manuscript.

Preliminary Assessment by the Editor

Assuming that the submitting author has carefully read, and closely followed the Instructions to Authors, the manuscript will pass this initial screening and be forwarded to an editor who will read both the Abstract and accompanying cover letter to determine how best to handle the manuscript. The editor may, in some circumstances, also refer to the discussion of the manuscript to determine the author's 'take-home