Success in Publishing: Navigating the Process

Submission and Review

Rónadh Cox
Williams College
Former GEOLOGY Science Editor
Main points:

(0) Pay attention to your writing: it’s not all about the science (as Nancy has covered).
(1) Pay attention to submission details: it’s not all about the science or the writing.
(2) Unpacking the submission “black box”
(3) Don’t diss the reviewers! Be self-aware.
(4) As an author, you have a responsibility to review.
Pay attention to your writing:
it’s not all about the data: think about clarity and readability.
Make editors’ and reviewers’ jobs easy
“don’t write to be understood: write to not be misunderstood”

• It’s hard for a reader to follow a paper that is poorly written, poorly prepared, or poorly thought through.

• Reviewers may misunderstand your points, and therefore may not be able to provide constructive criticism.

• If they are irritated with your poor writing, they may be sceptical of your science.
Preparing and submitting:
it’s not all about the quality of your writing!
Invitations to submit: tread warily!

[JMSE]—Special Issue “Marine Hydrodynamics: Evolution, Trends and Prospects”

Ms. Arwen Huang <arwen.huang@mdpi.com> to me, jmse, serge.sutulo, sutulo

Dear Dr. Cox,

Journal of Marine Science and Engineering (ISSN 2077-1312), http://www.mdpi.com/journal/jmse) is an international, peer-reviewed open access journal with an Impact Factor of 2.744, ranking Q1 in the “Engineering, Marine” (SCIE) category and Q2 in the “Oceanography” (SCIE) category.

In view of your recent work in the field of hydrodynamics, we take the pleasure in inviting you to contribute to the special issue (SI) "Marine Hydrodynamics: Evolution, Trends and Prospects".

Currently, 2 papers are in review or in preparation, with contributions from scholars all around the world. The papers will be published in a standalone format and also in a Book Format as part of the entire issue.

More details about the SI can be found on the following webpage:

As an Author: Aim high!

You’ve done great science; now prepare an excellent manuscript
→ Do your job right: be professional

- Read and follow journal guidelines for organization and style
- Pay attention to file formats (if appropriate)
- Provide a complete and correct reference list
Highlighting two submission details:

(A) The cover letter
(B) Reviewer suggestions
A. The cover letter matters
Why should the journal consider your submission and put its reviewers to all that work?

How NOT to do it (generic, no details):

Dear Editor,
I herewith submit our manuscript. We would like to have the manuscript considered for publication in your journal. Please let me know your decision at your earliest convenience.

best,
A. Researcher
1. Address the editor by their name if you know it.
2. Include your manuscript's title and the name of the journal.
3. State that your paper has not been published/is not under consideration by another journal.
4. Briefly describe your research. Why is it important? Why will readers find it interesting?
5. Declare any conflicts of interest, or confirm there are none.
6. Include contact information for yourself and any co-authors.
Dear Dr. Ed Itor,

I submit herewith our manuscript entitled “Yet another occurrence of quartz in granite” by Researcher et al. We would like to have the manuscript considered for publication in the Journal of Awesome Geoscience. This work has not been published previously, nor is it under consideration elsewhere.
Despite decades of research, we have not yet fully defined the range of occurrence of quartz in granitic rocks, which impedes our ability to truly understand not only granites, but igneous rocks in general. We present results based on comprehensive field work and detailed petrologic analysis, demonstrating that quartz occurs in 100% of granitic rocks of Proterozoic age in Massachusetts.
This study will be of interest to readers of the Journal of Awesome Geoscience because it provides breakthrough information about granite, which occurs in all orogenic belts and throughout geologic history.
Also affirm that you have read the journal guidelines and done your work properly 😊

...This paper conforms to the journal guidelines as laid out in the Information for Authors. We have no conflict of interest.

Yours sincerely,
A. Researcher

Super University, Superville USA
A_researcher@SuperUni.edu
B. Suggesting reviewers

Pick people with appropriate expertise, whom you think can give a fair evaluation of the work.

Be mindful of ethics!
Categories of people to NOT suggest as reviewers:

- Collaborators & co-authors (within the last 5 years)
- Close friends
- Employers or employees
- Family members
- Institutional colleagues
- Advisor or advisee

i.e. anyone with a real or perceived conflict of interest.

“If in doubt....leave them out!”
Journals and societies have detailed ethics policies you can check
You may also, if appropriate, list “opposed reviewers”: those who would be unlikely to give an objective critique.

Again, ethics matter! You can’t exclude someone for having different ideas or for working on the same thing, *only if you know that they will not give you a fair review*.

- scientific disagreements
- “competitors”
- antagonistic personality

✓ yes, exclude

✗ no, do not exclude
(2) Inside the “black box”: what happens after submission?
**Authors frame paper**

Data, results, ideas

Choose target journal

Authors write and submit paper

Final decision

Technical check PASS

Editor selects reviewers

Reject

Revise

Editor analyses and summarises reviews, makes decision

Reviewers review

Editor evaluates revisions

Authors submit revisions plus detailed response

Final decision
The review-revise loop
Aim for a single circuit 😊

Attention to detail and clarity in writing are key to efficient and successful review outcomes

Authors submit revisions plus detailed response

Editor evaluates revisions

Editor analyses and summarises reviews, makes decision

Reviewers review

Revise
(3) Don’t diss the reviewers!

They are busy humans too....
Appreciate the work of the reviewer.
Don’t be dismissive of criticism

- Reviews are a preview of how other readers may receive your paper. Take them to heart in good spirit.
- If the reviewer did not get your point, consider the possibility that you may not have explained it well.
- If you disagree with a comment, refute it (in your response to the editor) in a collegial way, providing solid grounds for your position.
When working on your revisions:
The tone you take is important: don’t be snarky 😊

- Don’t go at the revisions like a bull at a gate: be organised.
- Make a list of reviewers’ points. As you address each one, update your list with the changes you made: i.e. build your “response to the reviewers” as you go along.
- **ALWAYS** use “track changes” in your manuscript!
- If you do not make a suggested change, specify why that change is not necessary.
Writing and reviewing are interlinked
As a writer you must consider your reviewers (and other readers) Thinking like a reviewer makes you a better writer.
And once an author, you will yourself become a reviewer of others’ work
Reviewing is an integral part of the culture and practice of research
(4) As a submitting author, you have a duty to review the work of others.

Every paper you submit for publication will be reviewed by 2-3 people. You should plan to pay that forward.

But also...reviewing is an opportunity! It’s great experience, and it teaches you a lot about writing.
As a Reviewer:
Appreciate the work of the writer.

- Don’t be snarky, or dismissive. Provide constructive criticism (don’t be blind to the good points).
- If you disagree with the writer’s points, refute them in a collegial way, providing solid grounds.
- If you see or suspect ethical or other serious issues, address them in confidential comments to the editor.
- Your main task is to evaluate the science, but if you see a way to help the writer express their thoughts more clearly, provide that feedback.
The importance of reviewing: a cautionary tale—and true!

Dear Dr. X,

...General stuff about the paper...

“I then examined the reviewer records of the first two authors and discovered that, of the 23 requests for reviews sent to you and Dr. Y over many years, not a single completed review has resulted (due to rejection, termination, or failure to provide an agreed review). Although you are not the prime culprit in this record, I find it frankly remarkable that collectively you would submit to a journal in whose well-being you have shown so little interest.

Your paper has been rejected without review.”
As a Reviewer:
Take the opportunity to learn and improve your own writing

• If the writer makes some point well, or you notice a good structural or narrative technique, take that on board and add it to your arsenal.

• If the paper is dreadful, try and understand why it fails, so you can avoid those pitfalls yourself.
In sum:
Be organised and thorough: professionalism is key!
Be grateful for reviews and be grateful to reviewers.
Seek out opportunities to review!
The publishing giant will likely survive the latest boycott by scientists. An overhaul is needed to make science publishing fair and open.

Many scientists struggle to see the value Elsevier provides. Elsevier usually demands a high price to publish a paper—on the order of $4,000–$5,000—and has also shown a willingness to play hardball in negotiations with whole countries. Importantly, Elsevier’s authors, reviewers, and most editors never receive any of this money.
Support Science by Publishing in Scientific Society Journals

Scientific societies provide numerous services to the scientific enterprise, including convening meetings, publishing journals, developing scientific programs, advocating for science, promoting education, providing cohesion and direction for the discipline, and more. For most scientific societies, publishing provides revenues that support these important activities. In recent decades, the proportion of papers on microbiology published in scientific society journals has declined. This is largely due to two competing pressures: authors’ drive to publish in “glam journals”—those with high journal impact factors—and the availability of “mega journals,” which offer speedy publication of articles regardless of their potential impact.