Writing & Reviewing Journal Articles: Behind the scenes at IJBNPA

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Session Outline

1. How do journals work? (RJ)
2. How are decisions made? (RJ)
3. What makes a good peer review? (KD)
4. How best to respond to peer review? (KD)
5. Questions (RJ & KD)
1. How Do Journals Work?

Overview of IJBNPA

- **Behavioural** aspects of diet and PA (and sleep, media use)
- Includes research on different levels of analysis:
  - populations, groups and individuals
- And different approaches:
  - Epidemiology, behavioural, theoretical and new measurement tools
Overview of IJBNPA

• **Priority given to:**
  • RCTs
  • Systematic reviews (with or without meta-analyses)
  • Novel and robust observational studies
  • Ground-breaking methodological papers, rigorous qualitative studies, debate papers, commentaries

• Does **not** publish protocol papers or letters to the editors
Internal Structure of IJBNPA

- IJBNPA is published by BMC (BioMed Central)
- Online system – Editorial Manager
- Most journal activity is carried out by the Editors
  - Editor-in-Chief
  - 3 deputy Editors-in-Chief
  - 15 Associate Editors
  - Approx. 100 editorial board members
  - 1 Journal manager (part-time; only paid position; currently at the same institution as Editor-in-Chief)
Editors and Editorial Board

Editor (Russ Jago)

3 Deputy Editors
Kirsten Davison
Clare Collins
Ester Cerin

16 Assoc. Editors
Julie Lumeng
Jess Haines
Teresa O'Connor
Hidde van der Ploeg
Marie Murphy
Teresa O'Connor
Esther Van Sluijs
Melinda Hutchesson

Approx. 100 Editorial Board Members

External reviewers
Brief overview of process - 1

1. Authors submits manuscript via Editorial Manager
2. Checked by BMC
3. Sent to IJBNPA Editor-in-Chief or Deputy Editor
   - Screened: Focus on abstract, tables, discussion
   - Final decision
     - Reject without review
     - Reject and transfer
     - Accept
   - Sent to an Associate Editor for further consideration
4. Associate Editor processes the paper
   • Second level of screening:
     • Final decision OR
     • Sent for peer review (identifies and invites reviewers)
   • When two reviews are received:
     • Final decision OR option to edit and resubmit
   • When revised paper re-submitted:
     • Final decision OR Re-review
   • Final decision
   • Publish
Outline of manuscript flow through the on-line system

1. Manuscript uploaded by author
2. Format and content check by BMC
3. Upload to system and Bristol office notified of new submission
4. Assigned to E-i-C or a deputy
   - Reject without review via online system
   - Assign to Associate editor – notify LW which one by forwarding the notification
     - E-mail sent to author by LW
     - Reject without review via online system
     - 2 Reviewers and 4 alternate reviewers invited
       - Reviews uploaded via online system
         - Reject after review via online system
         - Reject and transfer after review via online system
         - Major revisions via online system
         - Minor revisions via online system
           - Resubmission
       - Assigned associate editor notified and invites one or both of the original reviewers to re-review
         - Reviews uploaded via online system
           - Assigned associate editor notified and makes a decision via on line system
Facts and figures

• Approx 800 submissions per year

• Aim to publish 150 to 160 papers per year

• Aim to reject early in the process to allow rapid re-submission elsewhere

• Most manuscripts that are rejected are rejected prior to review;
  • Those that are rejected after review are done prior to any amendments
  • Only in very rare circumstances will an substantially revised submission be rejected
2. How Are Decisions Made?

Two key criteria:

1. Novelty/scientific contribution
2. Rigour

• How does this paper advance the field?
• If a replication how many times has the work been replicated? Is a review more appropriate?
Frameworks that support rigour

- RCTs MUST be registered, have a **CONSORT** Flow chart and report intervention components via **TIDIER**
- Reviews must have a **PRISMA** Checklist
- Observational studies must have **STROBE** checklist
- Qualitative papers need to outlined how trustworthiness of data was evaluated and rigour of coding
Key reasons for rejecting a paper

1. Paper does not fit the journal aims
   - Titles submitted to IJBNPA have included studies on
     - Trials of homeopathy in Mice
     - Rat based studies of cell transporters
     - Lots of cell physiology papers
     - Lots of protocol papers
   - We do not have expertise in these areas
     - Not sent for review
     - Waste author, journal manager and Editorial time
Key reasons for rejecting a paper

2. Not clear how it advances the field

3. Focuses on “statistical significance” rather than what results mean
   - Key issue is strength of evidence & uncertainties around that estimate
   - Focus discussion on what results mean
   - Null trials are really important and we will publish well conducted trials – but what might explain your results
3. What Makes a Good Review(er)?

1. On Time
2. Mindful of innovation
3. Constructive
4. Organized
5. Thoughtful
6. Look at the big picture
What Makes a Good Review(er)?

1. **On Time**
   - Respond to email invitations in a timely manner
   - Submit review on time
   - If need more time, contact the editor before the due date
   - These metrics are tracked

2. **Mindful of Innovation**
   - Draw on your knowledge of the literature
   - Will the paper excite IJBNPA readers?
   - Is there something novel in the paper?
What Makes a Good Review(er)?

3. Constructive
   • Highlight weaknesses *and* strengths
   • Suggest possible solutions to concerns raised
   • Review and critique the research not the researchers
   • Reflect on what readers will be most interested in

4. Organized
   • Use bullet points or numbers
   • One issue/comment per bullet point or number
   • Structure based on section of paper
     • Start with general comments
     • Then go section by section
What Makes a Good Review(er)?

5. Thoughtful

- Writing 3 lines saying that the research is great and few edits are needed is not helpful
- Good reviews generally at least one page
- Justify your recommendation

6. Keep Big Picture in Mind

- OK to comment on writing style or grammar if impedes comprehension of paper
- But, do not focus on minute details
- Instruct authors on how to improve paper so makes significant contribution to the literature
- Not your job to rewrite the paper
- Nor is the goal to show how much you know
Other tips for writing reviews

• Be thoughtful about accepting a peer review invitation
  • Do you have the necessary expertise?
  • Do you have a conflict of interest?
  • Can you do it in a timely manner?
  • If decline, it helps the editor if you list alternative reviewers

• Create protected time to meet deadline
• Consider yourself as the recipient of the review
• Match up comments with recommendation
• Use the ‘comments to the editor’ box
• Keep the manuscript confidential
Why should you agree to be a reviewer?

Peer review is a cornerstone of science
Promotes transparency, integrity, rigor, innovation

But also...

• Helps the editor makes an informed decision
• Gives you influence in the scientific community
  • Gatekeeper for the field
• Provides insight into editorial process
• Teaches you to write your own papers
  • Spot mistakes made by authors that you could apply to your work
4. How Best to Respond to Peer Review

• Be respectful of the reviewers
• Consider and respond to all comments
  - Restate the reviewers comment, followed by your response – say where in the paper text was changed
  - Use numbering / subheadings
  - Refer back to earlier responses where necessary
• Editors are looking to see if you were responsive to the comments
• It is OK to rebut a comment. But - very sparingly, backed up with facts or data, done in a respectful manner
Key Messages

• Journal reviewing & editing is a volunteer activity
• We ALL get papers rejected
  • IJBNPA Acceptance rate is ~ 20-25%
• We ALL get frustrated, annoyed etc
• Take any feedback that you get and learn from it
• Develop a thick skin!