

Instructions for Authors: Tips and Tricks to Make Them Palatable

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Updating and maintaining a journal's instructions for authors are often some of the more tedious tasks of an editorial team. Most editors will agree that their instructions should be improved but often don't know the best ways to improve them. This session was developed to provide examples of how to help make instructions for authors and related materials simpler for submitting authors while maintaining the elements for the manuscript process that are important to the editorial team.

Katherine Bennett, Managing Editor, Scientific Publications, for the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO), was the first speaker to present during the session and discussed the checklist that ASTRO's Red Journal (*International Journal of Radiation Oncology*), one of its three publications, offers their authors to ensure submission compliance in an easily understandable format (Figure 1). Bennett explained that the Red Journal's instructions for authors are 22 pages and a total of 7525 words. According to Bennett, they created the checklist to balance "the constant back and forth of trying to simplify [and] make [the instructions] shorter" and at the same time address "the need to lengthen [them] for authors who litigate every point." The checklist provides an easily printable and simplified list of key items for authors to review as they finish preparing their manuscripts for submission. Bennett explained the checklist is helpful primarily as a way to "boil down formatting requirements," but it cannot replace the Red Journal's lengthy instructions for authors, which provides important information for authors submitting to the journal.

Mary Anne Baynes, Chief Marketing Officer at Overleaf, followed Bennett's talk to explain how Overleaf and other authoring tools can make the process of writing, editing,

Checklist for Red Journal Submissions – Scientific Articles		
Submission Item	Description	Limits
Title Page (with Author Details)	Lists all authors with their respective degrees and affiliations; also contains corresponding author contact information and a short running title; must contain disclosure or conflict of interest statement.	Restrict to 1 page, if possible; running title ≤40 characters (with spaces)
Blinded Manuscript	All author names and institutions identified should be redacted or substituted with "XXXX" to maintain double-blind review process.	≤3500 words (including summary, abstract, body text, and figure legends)
-Title Page	Only the title and running title should remain.	Not included in ≤3500 word limit overall
-Summary	Addresses the highlights of the manuscript for readers.	75 words or fewer, included in ≤3500 word limit overall
-Abstract	Reflects article content, purpose of study, important results, data interpretation and implications; should be structured using subheadings: Purpose, Methods and Materials, Results, and Conclusions.	300 words or fewer, included in ≤3500 word limit overall
-Introduction	Includes background and purpose of study, hypothesis, and brief description of experimental design.	Included in ≤3500 word limit overall
-Methods and Materials	Describes materials used and experimental/statistical methods.	Included in ≤3500 word limit overall
-Results	Details most important results of the study with as little discussion as possible.	Included in ≤3500 word limit overall
-Discussion	Interprets results in context of other published studies, states conclusions based on study findings, addresses limitations and implications of study.	Included in ≤3500 word limit overall
-References	Reference list should be double-spaced and references should be in the order in which they appear in the text.	≤35 or fewer, not included in ≤3500 word limit overall
-Figure Legends	Must be provided for all figures and tables, magnification and staining levels should be given, with appropriate level of description for the reader.	Included in ≤3500 word limit overall
Figures	Each whole figure should be placed in a separate file (not separate files for each panel). Four color figures are permitted but author assumes all costs for printing (free in online version). Should be submitted in ".tif" or ".eps" format. Photographic images: 300 dpi; Line art images: 800 to 1200 dpi.	Not to exceed 6 (including tables)
Tables	All tables should be in one complete separate file from manuscript, double-spaced, on separate pages. Should be accompanied by table number and brief title.	Not to exceed 6 (including figures)
Supplementary Materials	Figures, tables, data, text, or multimedia files that expand on the manuscript. Read by reviewers and must be inclusive at time of submission. No limitations, but must be cited within the paper if used. These should be submitted in PDF format. NOTE: Only available online, not within printed publication.	
Disclosure Forms	Details any conflicts of interest relevant to the study and must be complete for each author. Fillable PDF available at www.icmje.org .	One form required by each author at time of submission.
Submission Fee	Required for all clinical/critical review submissions, these fees help to offset expenses related to peer review process. Payment required during submission process.	\$75 (USD), payable by credit card

Figure 1. Submission checklist for authors submitting papers to ASTRO's Red Journal.

and publishing scientific documents quicker and easier. Baynes provided background on how author collaboration has changed significantly in recent years and provided visuals to show that Overleaf and other authoring tools can help improve the experience for authors directly from their writing platforms (Figure 2). She also demonstrated how instructions can be customizable and authors can check for adherence prior to submission. Some peer-review systems now have integration directly with Overleaf or other authoring tools that streamline the process for authors, including updating proper formatting based upon journal style, which could help reduce the need for overly detailed instructions for authors.

Finally, the speaker and moderator Shari Leventhal introduced an interactive component to this session to help enliven the atmosphere and engage participants. As participants entered the session room prior to the start of

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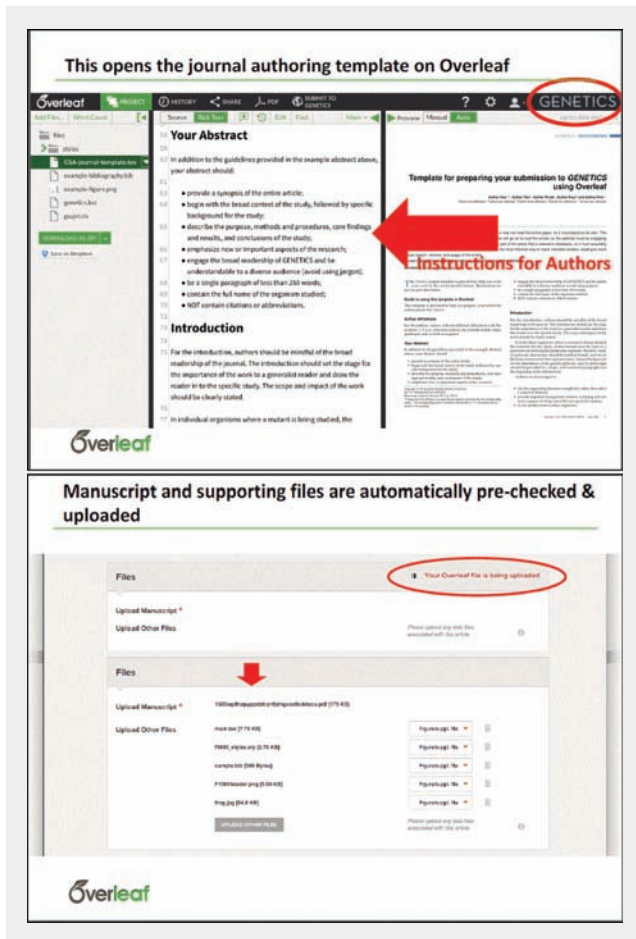


Figure 2. Samples of Overleaf interface.

the session, an electronic poll was on the screen, made available through Poll Everywhere. Participants were told they could answer the question on the screen and the

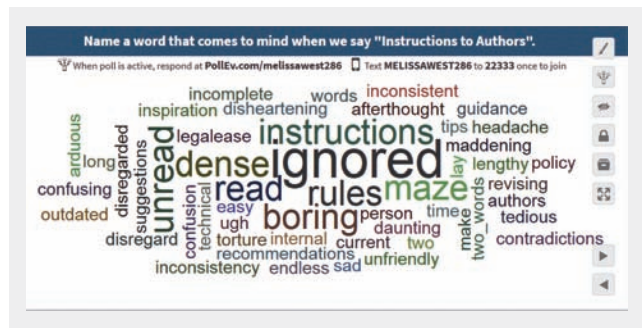


Figure 3. Word cloud responses to Poll Everywhere question: “Name a word that comes to mind when we say ‘Instructions to Authors.’”



Figure 4. Graph of responses to Poll Everywhere question: “What are your biggest challenges with author instructions?”

interactive component would be revisited following the two speakers (Figures 3 and 4). The questions were developed by the speakers and moderator as a way to share frustrations and brainstorm with one another on what works or might work to improve the process. Participants were receptive to the interactive format and engaged in asking questions and sharing answers with one another.