

Frustration with the Submission Process/System: Results from Survey Data

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Appendix

The appendix consists of the survey question and answers that were sent out to four different publishing companies and Chief Editors.

Questions and Replies from Publishing Associates

Question 1. What does your team feel is the most burden on authors, reviewers, and editors regarding the processing system?

ASCO 1.

Editors—finding reviewers who agree to review and have to go through many steps to make a decision, invite reviewers, etc. within the submission system.

Authors—time to decision. We aim to be quick, but this can be hard for authors, particularly if they are rejected and have to resubmit somewhere else.

Reviewers—reviewer fatigue. Even more so with Covid, reviewers seem to be stretched thin in terms of being able to review. Reviewers seem to be declining reviews more frequently because they don't have the time/bandwidth.

ASCO 2.

Authors: Entering author information, logging in/technical issues with completing forms

Reviewers: logging in/technical issues, needing more time to review

Editors: Finding reviewers

Urology 1. The most burden for authors is completing the submission/disclosure information; for reviewers it is not being able to login the system to review a manuscript because they have duplicate accounts; for editors it is searching for reviewers (but we just installed a new tool that should help ease this process).

Urology 2.

Burden on authors regarding the process: having to answer the Corresponding Author questionnaire (and subsequent contributing author questionnaires at acceptance); adhering to word and reference limits

Burden on reviewers: having to juggle multiple reviewer invitations a year with their other responsibilities and commitments

Burden on editors: finding enough reviewers to review a given manuscript without overtaxing the same pool of reliable experts

Microbiology 1.

I would separate this into two answers: First, for authors, the greatest burden is the submission process for revisions and resubmissions. I feel that many authors have trouble with the files needed for revisions and resubmissions, especially figures in the correct format and supporting files, such as Responses to Reviewer Comments and Compare Files. I think this is a matter of understanding or our communication to authors rather than an issue with system uses and function. For Reviewers and Editors, I think the overwhelming major burden is time and not system function, that is, investing the time to handle this volunteer work as an editor and a reviewer. I have not had reports of system difficulties from editors and reviewers.

Microbiology 2.

I would say the time it takes in peer-review would be the most burden on authors and editors. I get the most communication from authors and editors on the time it takes reviewers to submit their comments from the time they accept. We give them two weeks, but most reviewers take longer than that to submit their comments. Some editors also have trouble securing reviewers for manuscripts, which makes the process last even longer.

Microbiology 3.

I think the largest burden on authors, is the waiting period between initial submission to the first decision, and then the follow-up time to final decision. There is very little communication to the author during this time and is often when we (staff) hear the most complaints from them. The largest burden on reviewers is juggling their time. They are not paid for their work during peer review but are expected to move fast and handle as many papers as they can. And lastly, the largest burden on editors is picking the right editors

so that they can feel comfortable making a final decision. They have to really know their field of study and sometimes have to make a really tough decision.

Question 2. What's one or two things' authors complain about when having to submit?

Replies:

ASCO 1. I would say maybe entering co-author information can be the most time-consuming item for the corresponding author at submission, particularly if there are a lot of co-authors. Our system tries to pull co-author information from the uploaded title page, but it isn't always able to do so.

ASCO 2. What's the one or two things' authors complain about when having to submit?

- manuscript submission: the system is difficult to work with, it takes too much time to format and upload my submission

-peer review: a decision takes too long, and the editors/reviewers didn't understand my paper

Follow up question to ASCO 2.

Regarding the submission system which part if there is one that the authors find difficult?

Reply: Probably the same as #1: Entering individual author information, and logging in/technical issues with completing forms We use a separate, ASCO database to collect COI disclosures, which adds to the confusion.

Urology 1

Authors have complained (or requested) about not being able to enter 2 corresponding authors in the system for a submission, which Editorial Manager does not allow.

Urology 2.

One or two things' authors complain about when having to submit: having to answer the Corresponding Author questionnaire (and subsequent contributing author questionnaires at acceptance); waiting on reviewer comments (and hence, editor's decision) to come through, especially when the editors have to send out a second round of invitations in the event of a "split decision" or not enough reviews submitted after the first round of peer review invitations.

Microbiology 1.

I think authors have more trouble with figure files than anything else, size, applications, and combining multi-panel figures into one image and system limitations on file types and sizes. I hope this is useful for your study.

Microbiology 2.

I would say getting their manuscripts in proper format would be what authors complain about most. Many times, they complain about the file's formats, and sometimes it is the formatting we ask for within the manuscript.

Microbiology 3.

The biggest complaint we hear about the actual submission is not wanting to format their paper, which varies from journal to journal and publisher to publisher. It's the reason we moved to "format neutral" upon initial submission. They still complain about having to format during revision, but they have to do it at that point so there is nothing we can do.

Follow up Question

What is your company doing to reduce the stressors on authors, editors, and reviewers?

ASCO 1.

EZSubmit: "Format-free" on initial submission; we try not to return first versions to authors unless it is missing something critical (CONSORT diagram for example). See <https://ascopubs.org/jco/authors/author-center>

Rapid review and fast track presubmission programs provide expedited review. See <https://ascopubs.org/jco/authors/author-center>

Partnership with Editage: Author services including manuscript preparation support

Publons/Web of Science Reviewer Locator: This tool in EM helps editors find reviewers by matching the manuscript to individuals in the Web of Science database

Urology 1.

Regarding your follow up question below, we are currently working on revising / condensing our

Corresponding Author Questionnaire, which is completed at submission. Not only will this save a little

time at submission, but we are excited that this condensed yet comprehensive Corresponding Author Questionnaire will save coauthors from having to answer the same questions later in the review process when they complete their own questionnaires. This improved questionnaire will save the Corresponding Author time yet again when it comes to reviewing the proof because definitive answers regarding funding, support, informed consent, conflict of interest, ethics, etc. will all have been provided on the original Corresponding Author Questionnaire. The Corresponding Author's responsibility at this stage, therefore, will be to simply confirm information at proof rather than being asked to provide any missing information not captured by the questionnaires.

Question and Replies from Chief Editors

Question 1. What is your biggest complaint about working with article processing systems?

Editor 1.

- a) The biggest issue is not with the system but the level of prescreening of paper before assigned to the editors/associate editors. In many cases, some manuscript are poorly written (low editorial quality) or have poor resolution images.
- b) Another big problem is the lack of the systems to have comprehensive review databases but with searchable keywords to be able to find the most suitable reviewers. This relies to authors/reviewers to put their keywords of expertise, and many do not.

Editor 2.

- 1) At the top of the list is the latency, these systems are quite slow generally.
- (2) Not all info is visible on the page and the headings are not intuitive.

Editor 3.

- 1. Sometimes they are aggravatingly slow, regardless of the time of the day you access them.

Editor 4.

small window to view the Reviewers comments, it does not allow highlighting or bolding the text, etc.

Editor 6.

I think sometimes papers get through that should not, so may not be screened as carefully for content or completion of fields, etc. i.e. format is not at all correct for a typical paper.

Question 2. If you have authored articles not only with ASCE but other avenues, what complaints top the list.

Editor 1.

- a) Rejected papers from the editor: In some cases (from high impact factor journals) there is no justification of the rejection from the editor while many article with lower quality and, novelty and impact get published. So sometimes appears to be network and biased-based decisions.
- b) Accepted papers (for some other publishers): In may times the proofs are of poor quality. In some journals this varies depending on who is the person assigned to do the proofs. There are many times I requested to see the corrected proofs for a second time to make sure before the article is published.

Editor 2.

- (1) At the top of the list is the latency, these systems are quite slow generally.
- (2) Not all info is visible on the page and the headings are not intuitive.

Editor 3.

1.try to brow-beat you in their 1st review to cite their articles, thus inflating their impact factors.

Editor 4.

Uploading the files need to be made easier

Editor 5.

The uncertainty about the length of the review period.

Editor 6.

The need to complete so much metadata is cumbersome. I realize why it is needed though, so maybe if there was. Way to give the lead author (often a student) co-access to that portion, but then the contact author the authority/ability to handle the paper... tricky I know but it would facilitate easier submittals with the correct amount of info.

Question 3. If you have reviewed articles again biggest complaint.

Editor 1.

- a) Lack of line number and figures at the bottom of the manuscript. It is better to have the figures within the pages (in the appropriate place and the lines number (incremental from line #1 (first line) in the first page to line (example) #655 (last line of the paper) of the last page.

- b) Poor quality English, which in many cases I just reject and telling the editor, the manuscript is not readable.

Editor 3.

1. Editorial Manager does not work well. After you immediately decline a review, you still get a termination email after the response deadline is lapsed.

Editor 5.

In general, the quality of the papers

Editor 6.

Not coordinating request to review.