



The Initial Flexible Submission of Manuscript: Tackles Bottleneck and Saves Resources

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Abstract

Contribution of scientific research towards the growth of humankind is indispensable and the publication of findings from such research are equally imperative. Considering the lifecycle of a manuscript, it undergoes significant transformations from its initial draft till publication which presents noteworthy challenges for the authors, including the manuscript preparation. The recommendations from the international committee of medical journal editors in the form of Uniform requirements for manuscript submission and similar concepts have helped to tackle the same. Flexibility in initial submission mitigates essential bottlenecks including the problem of reformatting the manuscript in case it gets rejected from one journal. The young researchers and authors need to be aware of the advantages of the flexibility in initial submission. This prevents delay in manuscript publication, and conserves time for more productive research and contribution to scientific literature.

Keywords: Flexible Submission; Manuscript; Author; Journal; First Submission

It is known that research is essential for the growth of humankind, and publication of the research findings is equitable as its conceptualization. Research sans publication deprives the author of due recognition and holds vital scientific information from being shared, besides wasting valuable resources. What lies between a manuscript and its published form is a struggling author, knowing that many published articles have been rejected once or more in the course of publication [1]. It is imperative to consider the bottlenecks faced by the researcher during the process of manuscript submission to a reputed journal and how the recommendations from the international committee of medical journal editors (ICMJE) and specific endeavours from certain journals help to tackle the same by making initial submission easy for the authors. The present article brings forth the course of events during manuscript submission and advocates the benefits of formatting flexibil-

ity provided for the initial submission of the manuscript, which is advantageous and indispensable for authors.

The journey of a manuscript from conception to publication moves through various stages (figure 1) and may take years. An average of 15% of this total time is consumed towards article submission and post-submission process [2]. Manuscript submission necessitates choosing the right journal and preparing the manuscript according to the journal requirements. Finalizing a suitable journal for the specific article type mandates investment of time and efforts, both being valuable assets of a researcher.

Journals prescribe specific guidelines for submission, usually stated in the 'Instruction for authors'. Each journal has a preference for referencing style, criteria of acceptable file format for the main

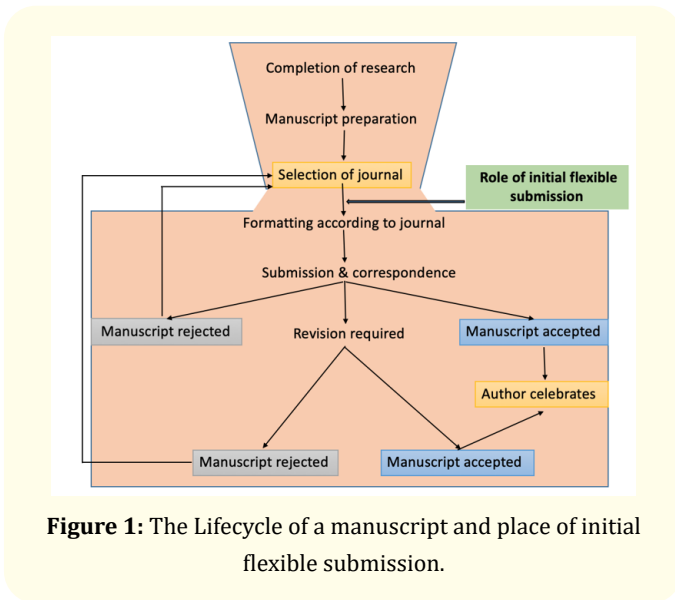


Figure 1: The Lifecycle of a manuscript and place of initial flexible submission.

document, tables, artwork, line drawing, and figures specifications, which may often be intimidating. A thorough perusal of the journal is painstakingly done by the authors to avoid article rejection, including journals with a meagre acceptance rate.

There are author assistance services, but most of the available services for the authors are charged. Hence declining this option for many researchers, and instead, it counts on their precious time to manage these tasks. Additionally, if the article does not meet a pleasant fate in one journal, the entire process from journal selection to the response from the editors is reiterated. Sometimes the “Rejections” may be from more than one journal, and at this point, an unnecessary delay in publication may be due to excessive immediate rejection time [3]. Nevertheless, knowing that the average journal handling time is prolonged for papers that have been rejected or require revision more than once [4], a need to speed up the publication process was realized. Though the online submission services have been instrumental in taking care of time management, the core concern of the authors has remained the same. The researcher desires to see their data published soon before anyone else does the same work. Of note is manuscript formatting, which consumes enough time and effort, with no certainty of article acceptance.

ICMJE is a group of general medicine journal editors who were thoughtful of the above challenges towards research and publica-

tion. The group members came up with the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (URMs) [5] in 1978 to keep a standard format for manuscript submission, which has been revised to the “Recommendations for the conduct, reporting, editing, and publication of scholarly work in medical journals. Most of the journals participating with the ICMJE corroborate with the manuscript preparation guidelines recommended by ICMJE, and mostly for initial submission, the manuscript does not need to conform to all of the formatting requirements given in the journal. The pioneer recommendation from ICMJE has been helpful in tackling the bottlenecks during manuscript preparation. The article’s initial uniform formatting seems like a practical solution to save potential resources of the authors and editors. It offers a straight and easy way of manuscript preparation, which expedites the submission and dissemination of research findings. The author spends less time formatting common technical details for rejected articles, and the peer review process is also quickened. Manuscripts formatted according to ICMJE recommendations are not scrutinized for technical fallacies by the journals participating in ICMJE. The article, if rejected from one journal, can be conveniently submitted to other journals due to the uniformity of article structure.

Several journals also allow ‘Flex Submit,’ which again exempts strict formatting requirements for initial submission till the paper is revised [6]. Besides this, similar initiatives like ‘Your paper your way’ type of submission, have been found to be author as well as editor friendly [7]. It encourages uploading a complete manuscript in a single file, including tables and figures. It imparts subtle flow in the content simplifying the reviewing process.

The initial flexible submission retains the significance of the study, quality of the content, details of the result, and the flow of the language. It allows submission of relevant content in detail for easy peer-reviewing without emphasizing strict formatting for the first time. The manuscript has all the crucial sections suitable for the article, like the abstract, keywords, main document with introduction, methods, results, and discussion. It precisely eliminates the formatting of the article for references, tables, and figures. The minimum requirement is to have a complete list of references adequately cited and in a uniform format. Once the revision has been proposed, or the journal accepts the article, the manuscript is logically, happily formatted.

The initial uniform or flexible submission concept eliminates many hurdles faced by the authors, and they can focus on the quality of the manuscript rather than technical specifications during the initial submission. This flexibility hastens the dissemination of research findings for the interested readers and prevents researchers from the tedious task of formatting the article multiple times. It should be stated that ICMJE's early initiative of uniform requirement for manuscript submission has been instrumental and most journals have adopted an easy submission, but several other journals still ask for strict formatting. Authors also still seem to be feeling tremendous pressure in formatting their manuscript before submission to a journal. In a recent survey in Jordan, only 27.2% of the participating faculties were aware of the ICMJE criteria [8]. Another article emphasized that many authors are not aware of the recommendations of ICMJE uniform requirements [9]. Plausible reasons may be the information about flexible submission on author's guideline page of journal remains inconspicuous amidst the other details. This may be highlighted on the landing page of the journal for easy accessibility in initial submission. Though the journals mention that they follow ICMJE's guideline, but young authors seem to be more drawn towards the ICMJE's authorship criteria or disclosure of interest rather than its uniform manuscript preparation instructions. Taken together, the young researchers and new authors need to be aware of the advantages of the flexibility in initial submission and remaining journals should make an attempt to ease the initial submission. It should be acknowledged for saving time and resources for more productive research and contribution to scientific literature.

Conflict of Interest

None to declare.

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Author's Contribution

- Pooja Ojha: Conceptualization and design, drafting, approval, accountable.
- Pawan Kumar Dixit: Conceptualization and design, critical revision, approval, accountable.

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