"How to Advance from a Manuscript Submitter to a Journal Article Author"

Scott J. Anson, Ph.D., P.E.
Associate Professor, Manufacturing and Mechanical Engineering Technology
Program Chair, Manufacturing Engineering Technology
Editor-in-Chief, JASET
Rochester Institute of Technology
College of Applied Science and Technology
scott.anson@rit.edu

Abstract

A description of the journal article publishing process is presented with the goal of explicating the path to scholarly dissemination. Key details are discussed to help authors understand the process of publication so they will be more successful in publishing. The complexities of the process are explained to offer insight to the common timeline. The steps in the process are detailed so that manuscript submitters can learn to efficiently navigate the process and go from manuscript submitters to journal article authors. The intricacies and mechanics of both blind review and double blind review are discussed. The work was originally generated from the perspective of an Editor-in-Chief of an applied technical journal, and gives visibility to the editorial challenges, with the end goal of overcoming article publication challenges. Authors are exhorted to serve as reviewers to: 1) gain firsthand experience with the process, 2) provide service to the technical community, 3) work toward the goal of expediting the general journal publication timeline.

Keywords: **Dissemination, Journal, Publishing, Scholarship**
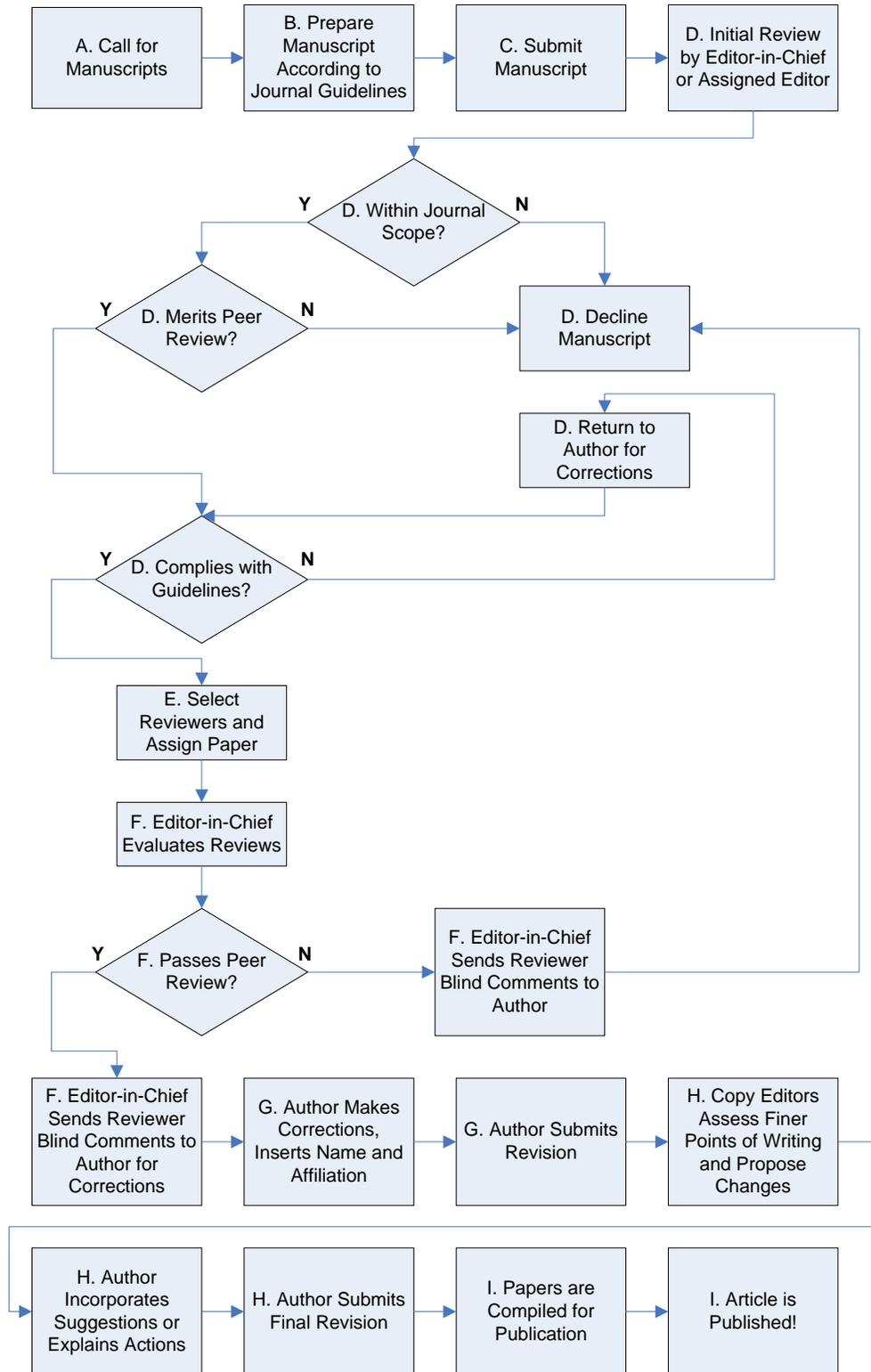
I.   INTRODUCTION

Scholars generate, apply, integrate and disseminate information. Yet many scholars are unclear on how to successfully publish and as to what goes on after a manuscript is submitted. This current work is intended to elucidate and facilitate the process of publishing in a refereed (same as "peer reviewed") journal. While these details are written from the perspective of the Journal of Applied Science & Engineering Technology (JASET) [pronounced jāset], the information is not unique to this journal (2012). This work is intended to help those who are new to publishing, either as new faculty or industrialists or as longstanding members of the technical community with new requirements for scholarship.

II.   DISCUSSION

In our professional practice as either faculty or industry practitioners, we utilize our discipline-specific skills to generate knowledge which we then desire to disseminate for implementation or adaptation. The publication process can seem complicated and mysteriously long. An overview of the publication process is shown in Figure 1. Each step will be discussed to clarify the details.

A. Call for Manuscripts

Papers can be submitted only when there is a "call for manuscripts," which means the journal is actively accepting manuscripts (potential articles) for consideration. Some journals accept manuscripts on a rolling basis, and others have specific time periods when manuscripts are accepted. A common mistake is to e-mail a paper to the Editor-in-Chief and hope it counts as a submission. While e-mailing an Editor-in-Chief can be productive, authors would be better served by asking questions about the manuscript submission process rather than sending a

A. Call for Manuscripts → **B. Prepare Manuscript According to Journal Guidelines** → **C. Submit Manuscript** → **D. Initial Review by Editor-in-Chief or Assigned Editor**

D. Within Journal Scope?
- Y → **D. Merits Peer Review?**
- N → **D. Decline Manuscript**

D. Merits Peer Review?
- Y → **D. Complies with Guidelines?**
- N → **D. Decline Manuscript**

D. Decline Manuscript → **D. Return to Author for Corrections**

D. Complies with Guidelines?
- Y → **E. Select Reviewers and Assign Paper**
- N → **D. Decline Manuscript**

E. Select Reviewers and Assign Paper → **F. Editor-in-Chief Evaluates Reviews**

F. Passes Peer Review?
- Y → **F. Editor-in-Chief Sends Reviewer Blind Comments to Author for Corrections**
- N → **F. Editor-in-Chief Sends Reviewer Blind Comments to Author**

F. Editor-in-Chief Sends Reviewer Blind Comments to Author for Corrections → **G. Author Makes Corrections, Inserts Name and Affiliation** → **G. Author Submits Revision** → **H. Copy Editors Assess Finer Points of Writing and Propose Changes**

H. Author Incorporates Suggestions or Explains Actions → **H. Author Submits Final Revision** → **I. Papers are Compiled for Publication** → **I. Article is Published!**

Figure 1: Article Publication Process **(Letters Correspond with Discussion Sections)**

manuscript and hoping the Editor will get it in the system for them. I have seen numerous

attempts to e-mail submissions that are not compliant with the journal scope (content area),

guidelines (specific rules of formatting), frequently use text messaging syntax in the message

body, and sometimes confuse JASET for another journal. Needless to say, these are not good

ways to start a relationship with an Editor.

B. *Prepare Manuscript According to Journal Guidelines*

Each journal has unique styles and methods for writing and formatting; these are called

"guidelines" or "instructions for authors." Guidelines will cover things such as paper length,

font, reference style, word processing software and the submission method for equitable review.

Blind review is enabled by temporarily removing author names and affiliations from title area

and references to the author's own work. In place of names, generic text can be inserted as

placeholder (e.g. "Author," "Affiliation," and "Author Reference 1"). It is essential that the

manuscript comply with these guidelines for: 1) ease of review, 2) uniformity of articles, and 3)

efficient completion of the publication process.

C. *Submit Manuscript*

This refers to official submittal in the online journal management system rather than the

aforementioned e-mail directly to the Editor-in-Chief. Submittal in the system will result in a

manuscript tracking number and enable "blind review," where the authors do not know who the

reviewers are, and "double blind review," where the reviewers also do not know who the authors

are. During the submission process, authors need to confirm that the paper: 1) is their work to

submit, 2) has not been published before, and 3) is not under review elsewhere. Failure to

comply with these three items is fundamental to why e-mailing papers to the Editor-in-Chief does not count as submission.

D. *Initial Review by the Editor-in-Chief*

Two questions are critical:

1) Is the manuscript consistent with the journal scope? and

2) Does the manuscript merit peer review?

If the manuscript is not consistent with the journal scope, the journal will be amorphous and lack the cohesiveness needed to target a specific readership. For example, JASET scope covers topics in the combined domain of engineering, technology and applied science and focus on solving technical problems in the spirit of "Scholarship of Application" as defined in Ernest L. Boyer's landmark work, "Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate" (1990). Some manuscripts do not meet minimum requirements in terms of English grammar and technical content and thus do not merit occupying the time of a peer reviewer. Authors are encouraged to have their manuscripts reviewed for grammar prior to submission to a journal. Most universities have a writing center, which is available for general writing assistance of students and faculty. Some universities have publishing and scholarship support centers that assist faculty with grammar and style from the unique perspective of journal articles and grant proposals. The best writers can often benefit from a "fresh pair of eyes" examining their manuscript. Some manuscripts lack major structural components (e.g., Introduction, Problem Statement, Methodology, Results, Discussion, Future Work, and Conclusion). While not all papers need every one of these components, a logical and conventional approach is needed so the reader can focus on the content. Failure to pass muster on either of the two questions above results in a

declined manuscript without the benefit of peer review. If a manuscript passes these two

questions, a third question is: Does the manuscript comply with the guidelines? If not, the

manuscript is returned to the author for corrections. Each of these requirements must be fulfilled

before a manuscript is assigned for peer review.

E. Select Reviewers for Peer Review

The Editor-in-Chief or assigned Editor reviews the keywords, title and content and searches the

journal's reviewer database for a reviewer with expertise in the subject matter of the manuscript.

It is essential that reviewers enter searchable keywords for their interests. For example,

"electrical engineering" is a vague description of reviewing interests, whereas "electromagnetic

fields, high frequency skin effect, control theory and modeling, impedance matching, printed

circuit board design" are searchable and useful. When a journal has a broad scope, it is

sometimes necessary to decline articles due to inability to identify qualified peer reviewers in a

particular area. The review process often involves missed target dates and reminders to

reviewers. This is not surprising, as peer review is inherently done by qualified (read as "busy")

people who are not paid for their service and have their own scholarship to attend to.

F. Editor-in-Chief Evaluates Reviews

The Editor-in-Chief evaluates the reviews for equity and completeness. If reviewers have

drastically divergent opinions of a manuscript, it might be sent out to another reviewer for

additional insight. Based on the collective reviews, the manuscript is either: 1) accepted as is

(extremely rare), 2) accepted pending modifications based on reviewers and Editor-in-Chief's

concerns, 3) declined but encourage revision and resubmission, or 4) declined outright. The

reviewer's public comments are sent to the author for consideration. There is commonly a section in the review where a reviewer can incorporate comments that are just for the Editor-in-Chief, who makes a judgment whether these comments are consequential and summarizes the salient points for advising the author. The time from requesting reviews to notifying authors can be from 1-2 months depending on the reviewer's responsiveness and the potential need to seek new reviewers.

G. Author Makes Corrections and Inserts Names

The author considers the reviewer's and Editor-in-Chief's comments regarding technical content, format and grammatical corrections. While an author might not agree with all suggestions, it is necessary that all suggestions be considered and answered. This is best accomplished by inserting a cover page to the manuscript revision that lists the reviewer's comments and the author's actions or reasons for inaction. Since peer review is complete at this step in the process, it is appropriate and essential to reinsert author names, affiliations and author references. Only the Editors will see the revised manuscript after it is resubmitted. The author submits the updated manuscript as a "revision," not as a new manuscript submission.

H. Copy Editors Assess Writing and Suggest Modifications

Copy editors review the finer details of writing style, grammar and guideline compliance.   The feedback is sent to the author for consideration and correction. The author incorporates the changes and returns the final version of the manuscript to the copy editors or Managing Editor, who spearheads the production of the journal issue.

I.   Issue Generation

Since many articles are published in one issue, the publication process is gated by the slower

reviewers and authors. Authors must submit papers by the end of the call for manuscripts, but

during the review process, many authors wait until the end of the revision target or need multiple

revisions before the manuscript is publishable. For those that persevere in this process,

congratulations, you are about to be a published author!

III.   CONCLUSION

Disseminating scholarly results is fundamental to the academy and extremely desirable for

industrialists, as we all strive to advance our own disciplines and contribute to society.

Publishing scholarly results, while not for the fainthearted, is greatly facilitated by understanding

and cooperating with the publishing process. Several techniques for successful publication have

been discussed, namely: 1) following the guidelines, 2) facilitating double blind peer review, and

3) explaining the author's response to comments from reviewers. Authors are encouraged to

constantly ask, "How can I make this work easier to publish?" This includes technical content,

grammar and cooperating with the publishing process. Anyone who is concerned about journal

publication times is encouraged to volunteer as a reviewer and perform conscientiously. Serving

as a reviewer is a way to sharpen your own publishing skills, gain insight to the publication

process, provide valuable service to your profession and assist in expediting the general journal

publication timeline.

References

Anson, S. J. (2012), Website of The Journal of Applied Science and Engineering Technology (JASET), Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY. Retrieved from http://library.rit.edu/oajournals/index.php/jaset (AKA jaset.rit.edu)

Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass