

# From the MJM Editors' Desk:

## Common errors authors make in submission to the Medical Journal of Malaysia

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### SUMMARY

Proper understanding the 'Instructions to authors' for a particular journal is the key towards successful submission of a manuscript which will lead to it being published. Common errors that are frequently made by authors in their submission to the Malaysia Journal of Malaysia (MJM) that lead to rejection of their submission or requiring major revisions or minor revisions are listed and discussed in this article. Outright rejection prior to even a peer review process may be made for an article due to: it is poorly written or when there is suspicion on the authenticity of the submission, which contains elements that are suspected to be plagiarised, it is a duplicate submission or not in the format required by the MJM. The editor in charge of the issue makes a recommendation to the Editor in Chief for the final decision.

### INTRODUCTION

The ultimate aim of conducting medical research is to improve the health of the population, and to share the findings with other practitioners and researchers. Publication in an indexed medical journal is one of the more desirable options for sharing important findings with peers. However, the process of submitting the research work and getting it published, seems to be very daunting to the young researchers. Peer review process is not perfect. However, it is still essential for the smooth operation of scientific publishing. In this article, we report the common mistakes made by the authors in their submissions to the Medical Journal of Malaysia (MJM), and in the process hope that it will help to clear some of the doubts that authors may have. MJM publishes original papers, review articles, short communications, articles on continuing medical education, case reports, commentaries, and letters to the editor. The possible outcomes of submission of an article are: accept without any revision, minor revisions, major revisions, and rejection.

#### The common reasons for 'Rejection' are as listed below:

1. The quality of the article is poor or the manuscript is incomplete.
2. Total disregard of the MJM's Instruction for Authors, which lists all the requirements for submission.
3. The article does not offer any new information, knowledge or theory.
4. Flaws in the methodology:

- i. Methods used not appropriate to meet the objectives;
- ii. Sample size inadequate;
- iii. Sample size calculated using inappropriate formula;
- iv. Inappropriate sampling technique;
- v. Questionnaire used has not been tested for validity and reliability in proper population;
- vi. Inappropriate analysis;
- vii. Studies with poor response rate;
- viii. Studies with too much missing data;
- ix. Inappropriate interpretation of results;
- x. No institutional ethical approval for intervention studies;
- xi. Failure to provide consent of patients in study as per requirement; and
- xii. Comments from the reviewers not addressed by the author in resubmission.

#### Errors which may lead to 'Major revision' by the editors/editorial board are listed below:

1. The statistical test used is not appropriate for the type of data.
2. The interpretation of the results is incorrect or inappropriate.
3. The discussion is not based on the results.
4. The results are not critically discussed in the discussion.
5. Conclusions are not based on the study results.
6. Abstract does not follow "Introduction-Method-Results-and-Discussion/Conclusions" (IMRAD) format.
7. Results are not displayed in a proper format.
8. Word count, number of tables/figures, references exceed the permitted number based on article type.
9. Format of the citations and references does not conform to MJM's requirement.
10. Appendices attached after the articles.

#### The common errors which may lead to 'Minor Revision' decision are listed below:

1. Minor errors in the formatting.
2. The title does not address the content of the article.
3. Incorrect format of the names of authors and their medical qualifications.
4. Exceeds number of permitted figures and tables.
5. Tables not labelled with roman numerals.
6. The titles of the tables and figures are incomplete.
7. The references are outdated, and some not relevant.
8. References not according to MJM format.

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9. Number of authors cited in reference exceeds MJM requirements.
10. Incorrect method of citation in text.
11. Citation does not follow sequence in reference.
12. American English used, MJM uses British English.
13. Grammar, spellings, and syntax mistakes.
14. Wrong use of abbreviations.
15. Names of organisms wrongly written (should be in italics).

Some authors assume that the decision by an editor/editorial board to accept for revision will automatically lead to the publication of their manuscript after revision. This may usually be true for an article with decision of 'Minor Revision'. However, for articles with 'Major revisions' it depends on the authors ability to address the comments of reviewers. There may be a mismatch between the objective of the study, analysis and results or the use of a wrong

statistical method for certain analysis of the data. Before the revision, it is important for authors to review the study data to see if the comments raised by the reviewers and editors can be addressed with a reanalysis of the available data. If an author is not clear on the comments raised or the data may not be available to answer the questions, the authors can write to the editor for clarification before revision.

Before submitting a manuscript, the authors should proofread properly, check that the format is according to MJM and remove all hidden commands, symbols, and programmes codes, e.g., EndNote codes. Ensure consistency throughout the report. Ask your friends or colleagues to check your manuscript.

In conclusion, the chances of an article being accepted are good, if the authors avoid these errors.