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## How to Make an Editor Happy

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# How to Make an Editor Happy

**Keywords**

manuscript, submission, errors

**Credentials Display**

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Working as the Editor-in-Chief of *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy* (OJOT) is a labor of love with many challenges and rewards. I am often amazed by the quality of the scholarly work I get to edit and I still get excited about every new submission. After working as the Editor-in-Chief of OJOT for the last 2 years, I have discovered some patterns of mistakes made by authors who submit manuscripts for review. Often, the content of the manuscript is interesting, but the errors seem to influence the review negatively. To help potential authors, I have compiled some tips that will make the editors and the reviewers more inclined to give a manuscript a positive review. The following five steps and miscellaneous tips will provide guidance for assuring that the manuscript is submitted to the right journal and category within that journal, for including the needed content and appropriate cover letters, and for making the editor and the reviewers happy to read your scholarly work. The five steps include:

1. Choose the right journal for your manuscript
2. Correctly determine the category for submission
3. Use the author guidelines
4. Write good cover letters
5. Include all of the required content

### **Step 1: Choose the Right Journal**

The first step is to determine the journal that is the right fit for the manuscript you have written or are intending to write. There are three sources of information that will help you make this determination. First, look for the journal's mission statement. This statement will give you an idea about the general types of articles the editors intend to publish. For example, the [mission of OJOT](#) is to

publish high quality articles that focus on applied research, practice, and education in the occupational therapy profession. This tells you that manuscripts submitted to OJOT should directly apply to either practice or education specific to occupational therapy.

Next, review the last 5 years of the journal contents for the topics and types of research that are typically published by the journal. This may seem like a tedious task, but you will gain a lot of insight about what is typically published in the journal. If the journal never has published either the topic or the type of research you have in your manuscript, this may not be the journal to which you should submit your work. If, for example, you have completed a case study using a new assessment or treatment technique, you would not submit your work to a journal that has only published randomized, controlled trial studies that examine well-established assessments or treatments with large groups of participants.

The third source of information about the journal can be found in the letters from the editor at the beginning of each issue. These letters will give you many ideas about the editor's philosophy. Often times, the letter from the editor includes new areas of interest to the journal or directions the journal is interested in exploring. Although your review of the topics in the journal may not include articles that match with your scholarly work, the editor may still be interested in publishing articles in that area. For example, in order to solicit more submissions of Guidelines for Practice, I explicitly stated in the [Letter from the Editor](#) in the Winter 2013 Issue of OJOT that we were interested in

publishing more articles in this category, even though we had not yet done so.

In summary, to choose the right journal you should:

1. Review the journal's mission statement
2. Examine the topics and the type of research published in the journal
3. Read the letters from the editor

## **Step 2: Determine the Category for Submission**

Once you have chosen the right journal for your submission, determine the category that fits with your scholarly work. Each journal will have different categories of articles that are published. Submitting to the wrong category can cause confusion, delays, and even rejection of your manuscript.

OJOT has five [categories of publication](#), including Applied Research, Topics in Education, Guidelines for Practice and Technological Guidelines, Opinions in the Profession, and Letters to the Editor. Applied Research manuscripts are reports of research findings that address specific clinical problems that are important for the practice of occupational therapy. Topics in Education manuscripts include research and opinion articles that examine issues of importance for the education of occupational therapists. Guidelines for Practice and Technological Guidelines should be original or significantly modified guidelines that address clinical problems within the occupational therapy profession's domain. These manuscripts should provide therapists with guidelines for problem identification and amelioration based on the most current and valid theoretical information. Opinions in the Profession are manuscripts that present a relevant discussion of an issue that is important to

the profession of occupational therapy and that is supported by a succinct review of the literature or other methods of research. This is not a complaint drop box, but rather it is a professional presentation of the opinion that leads to a productive suggestion of implications for the future of the profession. Letters to the Editor are also not the opportunity for registering complaints, but should present a brief scholarly response to articles that have been published or to issues that have been addressed in OJOT.

## **Step 3: Use the Author Guidelines**

[Author guidelines](#) are provided by all journals and should be used precisely. The author guidelines will help you determine the category for submission and then provide details about the number of pages, tables and figures, and references for each category. The author guidelines will also help you format the abstract with the number of words and content required by the journal.

Two recurring problems I have observed in OJOT submissions related to the author guidelines are the incorrect use of the publication style and references. OJOT uses the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th Edition. This manual guides the structure, content, clarity, and mechanics of writing and also provides the format for tables, figures, and references. Frequently, reviewers will comment that the authors have not used the guidelines accurately and this is reflected in their review and recommendation for the manuscript. A manuscript that is poorly written, has numerous grammatical errors, or does not adhere to the style guidelines makes it difficult for reviewers to find value in the content. Careful

editing can prevent the editor and the reviewers from having a negative impression of the manuscript overall.

The author guidelines will also provide a detailed description of the publication process that is used by the journal. The publication process includes an explanation of all the parts that need to be included in the submission and the procedure that will take place once a manuscript has been submitted. Careful adherence to the content and procedures of submission can expedite the review process and prevent delays. For example, many journals require tables and figures to be submitted separately from the text. OJOT, however, asks authors to embed the tables and figures in the text. Because OJOT is published exclusively online, there are fewer formatting issues and embedded tables and figures are easier for reviewers to critique.

In summary, you should use the author guidelines to help you:

1. Write an abstract with the correct format and length
2. Develop the structure, content, clarity, and mechanics of your writing
3. Format tables, figures, and references
4. Follow the submission and publication process

#### **Step 4: Write Good Cover Letters**

Most submissions will require two cover letters; an initial cover letter at submission and a follow up cover letter with the revised manuscript. The initial [cover letter](#) should provide the editor with the title and main contribution of the manuscript; a statement of exclusive submission to

that particular journal (state the name of the journal); and the credentials, contact information, and affiliations of each author.

The cover letter for the revised manuscript should first acknowledge the feedback and assistance that have been provided by the editor and the reviewers to improve the manuscript. In this second cover letter, provide a detailed list of all of the changes that were made in response to the reviewers' suggestions. If specific changes were not deemed necessary or possible, that should be explained in the letter. The editor will then determine if the revisions are adequate or if the manuscript needs to be sent back to the reviewers to help with this determination. A detailed cover letter helps with this process.

In summary, good cover letters include:

1. The title and professional contribution of the manuscript
2. A statement of exclusive submission to the journal (by name)
3. The credentials, contact information, and affiliations of all authors
4. A detailed descriptions of revisions

#### **Step 5: Include the Required Content**

Each [category of submission](#) has specific content criteria. The category that authors seem to struggle with the most is the Applied Research category. Quite often there are missing sections or missing information within the specific sections. Use the following checklist in Figure 1 if you are submitting in the category of Applied Research. For all other categories, review the author guidelines and create your own checklist if necessary.

<b>Introduction/background</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Statement of the problem <input type="checkbox"/> Definitions of terms
<b>Literature review</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Review of the recent and relevant research on this topic <input type="checkbox"/> Research question or hypothesis based on the literature
<b>Methods</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Design (including a statement of institutional review board approval) <input type="checkbox"/> Participants <input type="checkbox"/> Procedures <input type="checkbox"/> Instruments <input type="checkbox"/> Data analyses
<b>Results</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Demographic or descriptive statistics <input type="checkbox"/> Quantitative and/or qualitative data <input type="checkbox"/> Tables and figures to enhance the understanding of the data <i>*No interpretation of the meaning of the data should be included in this section</i>
<b>Discussion</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Interpretation of the results in relation to the research question <input type="checkbox"/> Comparison of the results to the literature that was reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion of limitations <input type="checkbox"/> Implications for further research or clinical practice <input type="checkbox"/> Conclusion

Figure 1. Applied Research Author Checklist

### Miscellaneous Tips

To make the reviewers and the editor happy, there are a few more miscellaneous tips. These tips include:

1. Do not include identifying information in the cover page, text, or appendices of the manuscript
2. Clearly present the problem and define terms
3. Have your manuscript proofread for typographical and grammatical errors
4. Double check your references
5. Respond positively to feedback
6. State the contribution that your work makes to the profession

First, do not include any identifying information (names, facility, etc.) in the cover page, text, or appendices of the manuscript. OJOT and most other journals use blind, peer review. Having

to work to remove these identifiers will delay the review process.

Always think of the editors' and the reviewers' perspectives. They are reading your work for the first time. Clarity in your writing, including a good presentation of the problem and definitions of terms, will prevent confusion right from the beginning and give a good first impression. Never assume the reviewer will know the terms you are using. At times, it seems like reviewers have become confused or angry while trying to critique a manuscript. When this happens, they seem to have difficulty finding the positive aspects of the manuscript. The bottom line on this tip is that you should not confuse or anger the reviewers.

Reviewers also respond negatively when there are many typographical or grammatical errors. Have someone who has not been involved in your scholarly work proofread your manuscript before you submit it. Often, you have read your work so many times that you will miss these types of errors. Simply getting a manuscript proofread will help enormously.

It is also important to double check your references. Make sure all of the references in the text are on the reference list and make sure all the references listed are used in the text. And, when a journal uses digital object identifiers (DOIs), as OJOT does, please be sure to include the DOIs in your reference list. In addition, double check the quotes or interpretation of ideas you reference for accuracy. Sometimes the reviewer is the person being quoted or cited or knows the work well. If the person is misquoted or if the research is misinterpreted, those errors will illicit questions about the entire manuscript.

Try to respond positively to the feedback from the reviewers and editors. The feedback is not personal. Some feedback may not feel like it is constructive, but the tone of the feedback should not be confused with the intention. Journals provide the best kind of feedback: anonymous, objective help from your peers. Take advantage of that help. Although there have been some well-written and interesting submissions to OJOT, every submission has needed some revisions. Keep in mind that the comments from the reviewers are suggestions. You are the writer and you can make the suggested revisions or justify why they were not made.

Typically, when authors respond to the feedback in

a methodical way, the manuscript will be greatly improved. I am always amazed at how much a manuscript can be transformed by this process. There have been several manuscripts submitted to OJOT that have required significant revisions, but through the collaborative process among the reviewers, the editors, and the authors, have become stellar articles.

The final miscellaneous tip is that you should clearly state, in both the cover letter and the conclusion of the manuscript, the importance of your work. The manuscript will need to pass the proverbial “so what” test. Think about the main points and conclusions that can be reached from your work and state clearly how it contributes to the profession’s body of knowledge. If the reviewers and editors do not feel the work contributes to the profession, the manuscript will not be accepted for publication.

### **Conclusion**

So what has this letter from the editor contributed to the profession of occupational therapy? Overall, I hope it is clear that there are common mistakes made by all authors in all categories and at all levels of experience. The blind, peer-review and editorial processes are in place not only to filter for quality, scholarly work, but also to assist authors to make their written work accurate, comprehensive, and easily understood. There are almost always revisions that need to be made. Using the aforementioned steps and tips will hopefully help authors eliminate some of the most common errors and produce the highest quality submissions possible. As always, we look forward to reading your scholarly submissions to OJOT and

helping you through the publication process. We appreciate your continued contributions to the profession of occupational therapy.