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More Tips for Making an Editor Happy

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“Yes! “What she said!” That was my reaction to Dr. Diane Powers Dirette’s Letter from the Editor titled “How to Make an Editor Happy.” It was published in *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy* (OJOT) in Vol. 3, Issue 2, Spring 2015.

I have the privilege of serving as the writing consultant on the OJOT publishing team. Also, for more than a decade, I have helped health care and higher education professionals successfully publish articles in a wide range of peer-reviewed journals.

As an editor and writer who joins my client-authors in the trenches of preparing manuscripts for publication, I have seen first-hand what it takes to wade through an often muddy process and get something published. Dr. Dirette’s five steps and six miscellaneous tips are an excellent guide to avoiding common mistakes. If you have not already, I suggest you print that article or stash a copy in your electronic reference library and refer to it every time you work on a manuscript.

After seeing hundreds of peer reviewer comments from various journals over the years, I would like to add my voice to hers. You might find the following information helpful as you develop a manuscript for OJOT or any other journal. Some of this repeats and reinforces what Dr. Dirette stated in her article.

What Journals Want

There is no magic or secret to getting published. (Sorry. I wish there was!) But from a consulting writer’s/editor’s point of view, here are

some tips that will give you a better chance for success. Journals want:

- Fresh, new material that is specifically targeted to the interests of that journal’s audience(s). Generic, untargeted articles will not work.
- Research protocols, data, and ideas that are solid and will stand up to detailed professional scrutiny.
- A current, thoughtful literature review.
- Author guidelines and other requirements to be followed exactly. This includes using that journal’s recommended style guide (APA, AMA, Chicago, etc.) for your text and references. (OJOT uses APA 6th edition.)
- An abstract that meets the journal’s requirements and accurately summarizes what is stated in the main text.
- Accurate, complete quotes and citations.
- Citations and reference lists that match exactly. Every citation must be mentioned in the reference list, and every reference list entry must refer to a citation.
- Clear, easy-to-read writing in that journal’s style and tone, avoiding excessive jargon and “academese.”
- A positive, cooperative, pleasant relationship with you.

Common Mistakes and Problems

In her article, Dr. Dirette discussed patterns of mistakes made by authors. Again, from a consulting writer’s/editor’s point of view, here are the problems I have seen most often.

Content

- Content is not specifically directed toward the defined audience.
- Literature review is weak/old.
- Findings are incremental and do not advance the field.

- Text is too long or key parts are missing.
- Methods, procedures, or data analyses are invalid or unrepeatable.
- Conclusions reached/stated cannot be justified in relation to the text.
- Figures, pictures, and tables are not directly related to the text, are unclear, are overly complex, or there are too many.
- Writing is overly complex, jargon-filled, or unclear.
- Reference list and citations in the text do not match exactly.
- Citations or reference list entries are outdated or incomplete.

As the author, you will eventually spend so much time with your manuscript that you might not notice these problems. So before you submit it to the journal, ask someone who is good with details but is not an expert in your field to review your article. Ironically, those who have the least technical expertise in your topic may be the most likely to see these types of errors. Another option is to ask a professional editor for help.

Process

- Authors submit the same article to more than one journal at the same time.
- Topic/study does not fall within the aims/scope/audience of the journal selected.
- Submission requirements or author guidelines are not followed exactly.
- Document is submitted without being edited and proofed.
- Authors unintentionally plagiarize.
- Primary author is not actively running the process, allowing deadlines to slip.
- Authors do not build a positive relationship with the journal editor.
- Authors become impatient with the process, take rejection personally, and give up.

There is only one solution to all of these process problems: be aware of them and then do the opposite! For example, never submit the same article to more than one journal at the same time, always have your document edited and proofed before submission, and take responsibility for the process.

One final thought. In working with authors on dozens of manuscripts, I have never seen one receive an e-mail message from a journal that says “accepted with no changes.” Peer reviewers—bless their hard-working, unpaid hearts—seem to feel they *must* change something, no matter how perfect the original manuscript is. So be assured that “accepted with changes” following first peer review is the norm and you should consider it a win.

The OJOT team sincerely appreciates and values your contributions, and we understand the effort it takes to put your creativity and hard work on the page. May all of your manuscripts be easy to write and all of your post-peer review changes few!