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From Manuscript to Article: The OJOT Publication Process

Diane Powers Dirette

Western Michigan University - USA, ot-ojot@wmich.edu

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Diane Powers Dirette, PhD, OTL, FAOTA

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If you are around my age, then you remember Schoolhouse Rock’s rolled up piece of paper on the steps of the U. S. Capitol singing a song to teach us that a bill is just a bill until it is approved on Capitol Hill. The same could be said about a manuscript. A manuscript is just a manuscript until it is published. But, what happens to that manuscript from the time it is submitted to a journal until it becomes an article? The publication process can be sometimes long and frustrating. There may be uncertainty about the steps in the process and how each step in the progression happens.

To help ameliorate those frustrations and uncertainties, I have created a color-coded flowchart of the process that happens from submission to publication in *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy* (OJOT) (see Figure 1). The colors represent the actions that are taken during the process. Blue indicates actions that are taken by the authors, yellow indicates actions that are taken by the editors, and orange represents actions that are taken by the blind peer reviewers. The red boxes represent the times when the manuscript may be rejected and the green box represents when the manuscript becomes a published article.

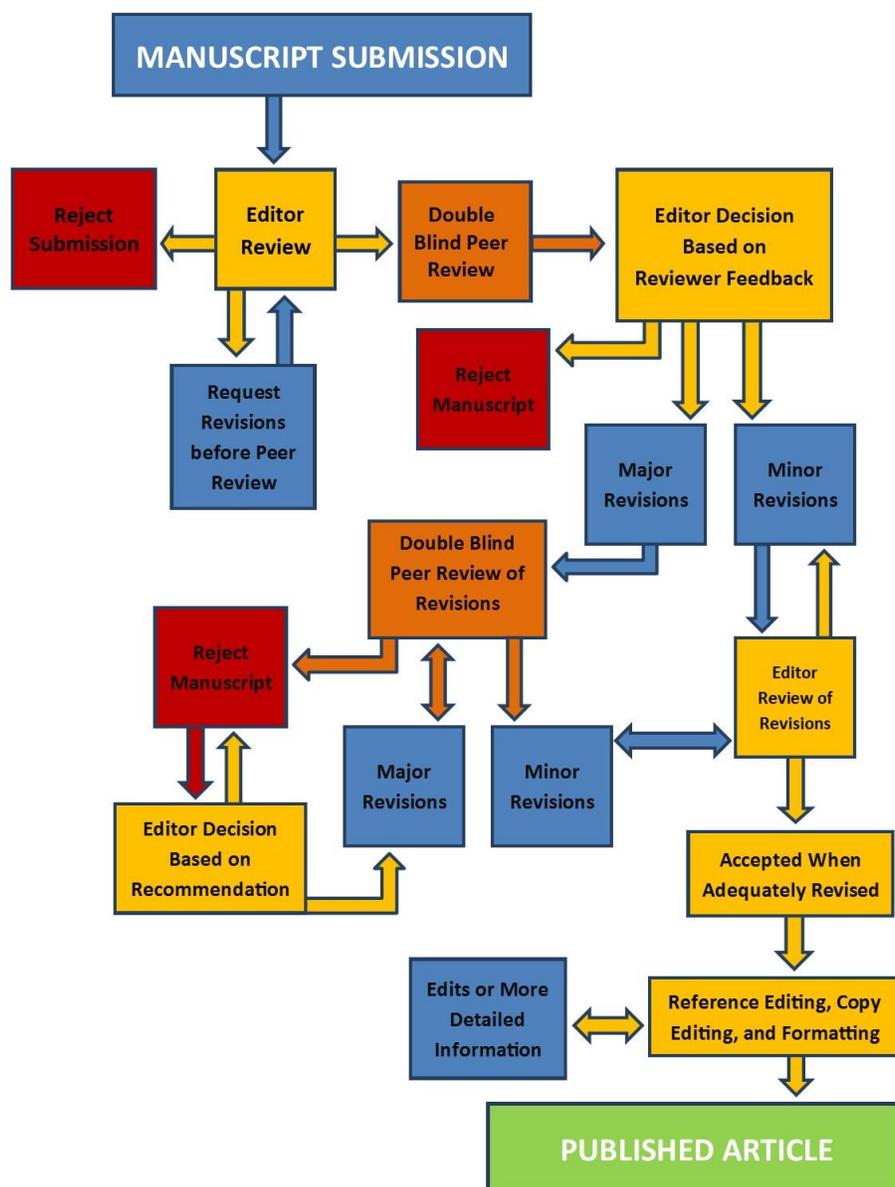


Figure 1: OJOT submission to publication flowchart.

The process begins with the submission of the manuscript by the authors to OJOT.org using the author guidelines and the electronic submission process. Authors should be careful to submit all requested information at that time. The editor then reviews the submission for complete information, de-identification (no names or identifiers in the manuscript), correct category of submission, quality of writing, and value of the content to match with OJOT's mission. If those criteria are not met, the editor rejects the manuscript. If those criteria are met, the editor sends the manuscript to at least two blind peer reviewers who are experts in the content area and/or research method. Blind peer reviewers are not privy to the authors' names, the authors' credentials, or the institution with which the authors are affiliated. And, because OJOT uses a double-blind peer review process, the authors also are not privy to any of that information about the reviewers.

The blind peer reviewers provide feedback about the manuscript to the editor and give a recommendation to accept the manuscript pending minor revisions, to reject the manuscript pending major revisions, or to reject the manuscript. The editor reviews the recommendations that have been made privately to the editor and the ones available to the author/s and makes a decision based on those recommendations. If there is disagreement among the reviewers, then the editor may do an independent review, ask for another reviewer to make a recommendation, or ask a member of the editorial board to review the manuscript and make a recommendation. The editor then makes a decision based on the feedback from the review process. That decision will be either to accept the manuscript pending minor revisions, to reject the manuscript pending major revisions, or to reject the manuscript. The most common recommendation and decision at this point in the process is to reject the manuscript pending major revisions.

If requested, authors will make either minor or major revisions. Minor revisions are reviewed by the editor and a decision is made to request further minor revisions or to accept the manuscript when it has been adequately revised. That process may go back and forth several times until the manuscript is accepted.

Manuscripts that have had major revisions by the authors will go back to at least one of the blind peer reviewers for further review. The blind peer reviewer will review the manuscript again along with the response from the authors about the suggested revisions. The blind peer reviewer may again make one of three recommendations: accept pending minor revisions, reject pending major revisions, or reject. If minor or major revisions are recommended, the editor will send the manuscript back to the authors for revision. If rejection is recommended, the editor will either reject the manuscript or suggest major revisions that might make the manuscript acceptable for publication and send it back to the authors. The process of major revisions may go back and forth with the reviewers, the editor, or both until it has reached the level of minor revisions. After a manuscript has been accepted with minor revisions, it does not go back to the blind peer reviewers and the editor does all reviews of minor revisions.

Once the manuscript has been adequately revised, it will be accepted for publication, queued for the next available issue, and sent for reference and copy editing. During that process, authors may be contacted to provide needed details about references, quotes, or statements. They may also be asked to answer queries about information in the manuscript or to approve changes made in the copy editing process. When this process is complete, the manuscript is sent for formatting. Again, authors may be contacted during formatting to assist with issues related to tables and layout. All queries during the copy editing and formatting phase must be addressed promptly to ensure timely publication.

When all of the above steps are complete, the manuscript is published in an issue and officially becomes an article. The persistent and diligent work of the authors, reviewers, and editors results in an article that serves to enhance occupational therapy practice by providing clinical solutions and to improve occupational therapy education by providing open access resources. Just as a bill is just a bill until it gets approved on Capitol Hill, a manuscript is just a manuscript until it gets through this sometimes lengthy and convoluted process to become an article. I hope this flowchart and explanation will serve to illuminate that process and assist authors in their pursuit to transform their manuscripts into useful information that will serve to improve the profession of occupational therapy.