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Innovative studies, eloquent peer reviewing and cultured editing: Academic desires and tangible dreams of an editor

The progress made in medical sciences is directly linked to the dissemination of innovative and novel concepts through publications. Advances in scientific spheres could not have been achieved without visionary initiatives, critical appraisal of the research and emerging evidences and a collaborative teamwork among scientific peers. The vision, rigorous efforts and valid scientific critique by esteemed past and present editors have immensely improved the prestige and visibility of Indian Journal of Anaesthesia (IJA) over the last few years.

The authors and the reviewers are the two pillars of a scientific journal. The editorial process may be perceived as an automated system but the efforts, core selection of reviewers and editing of the manuscripts demands a high level of commitment from editors.

Editor himself or herself cannot be perfect academically in judging all types of manuscripts and the system, thus has a team of learned reviewers for this purpose. An editor's expectations and desires include but are not limited to prompt acceptance of invitation by the reviewer, timely evaluation of the manuscript as per the journal's instructions and submission of detailed, well-justified and constructive comments with a clear recommendation before the deadline [Table 1]. In the long run, these qualities confer reviewers' a special academic status or a position in the editorial board.

The journal cannot expect submission of eloquent and landmark studies every time. Significant numbers of submitted manuscripts are fillers of lesser interest and are low on research standards. In such cases, the task of reviewers and editors is challenging and explaining the grounds for rejection or acceptance becomes more laborious.

A good reviewer helps the journal in the prevention of publication of unacceptable scientific claims, irrelevant observations, fictitious interpretations and redundant concepts. The disparate quality of reviewers is a factor for the editor, and this may be due to lack of formal training in peer review process to reviewers. Evaluation of journal's reviewers on a periodic basis can improve the skills of the reviewers besides ensuring a bonding between them and the journal.^[1,2]

The manuscripts should be reviewed based on the following aspects,^[3,4] the concept and the title; literature search strategies; completeness of abstract; sequential flow of introduction leading to aim of the study and stating of the objectives; the simplicity and feasibility

Table 1: Editor's expectations of an ideal reviewer

General	
Communication with editors:	Accept/decline review early, ideally with reasons
	Dedicate sufficient 'quality' time for review
	Submit remarks before deadline
Honesty:	Restrict review to areas of interest and comfort
	Maintain confidentiality
	Avoid conflicts of interest and explicitly declare conflicts, if any
	Respect authors and editors
Language:	Stick strictly to academic language while preparing remarks
Academics	
	Structured assessment covering all areas of manuscript, from title to references and illustrations in detail (discussed later)
	Cross check details of results under the results section with related display in tables, graphs, illustrations and also correlation of results with outcomes and evidences under discussion
	Verify the relevance and correctness of the citations of references in the manuscript
	Identify the relevance of the topic to the journal and readers and its contemporariness
	Self-update knowledge of topic with recent literature during review and transmit remarks on this basis
	Suggest specific areas for improvement and assist with additional evidences for author's and journal's benefit

for reproducing the research methodology in practice; selection of proper technique; appropriateness of observations, clarity and precision in results included in the illustrations, graphs, tables; effective correlation of methods and results with available evidence and previous publications; evaluating limitations, scope for future research; overall readability of the manuscript and appropriate citation of references.

Chief editor and his team of associate, assistant and section editors handle the technical aspects and some of the above basic peer review requirements in the initial stages after submission of the manuscript, which considerably lessens the burden on reviewers later. The editorial board of IJA filters off approximately 15–20% of the submitted manuscripts, keeping in mind the precious time and status of the reviewers. Lack of novelty, poor technical quality (poor structure, poor language), inappropriate/vague methodology and statistical methods and/or conveying wrong messages based on results, submissions beyond the scope of the journal (specialty specific), multiple submissions, plagiarised and redundant content, etc., are checked for and dealt appropriately as per the PubMed indexing standards.

To promote the spirit of research and submission for publication, articles with a 'not so significant' outcome and message from first time authors, are advised to be curtailed and submitted as focused Brief Communications or Letters to Editor instead of a full-fledged original article. The reviewers are also suggested to keep this in mind when they submit the comments.

At present, we have more than 850 reviewers in our database. The majority of them have been exclusively chosen on the basis of their area of interest and specialties. The policy of IJA directs that the manuscript is assessed by a minimum of two peer reviewers for a double-blind review.

Authors anticipate faster reviews and delays can affect the image of the journal. The editor tries to choose the reviewers based on their timely responsiveness besides other subjective criteria. The reviewer has the liberty to decline the review, which allows the editor to allot the job to another reviewer in a timely manner and thereby preventing delays. After all, the goal of both the editor and reviewer is identical; that is to allow only quality manuscript with innovative research to pass through for publication, in time. Quality manuscripts

enhance the journal's visibility, popularity and help in getting a higher impact factor. Non-adoption of such strict measures leads to poor readability and journal's content is viewed with scepticism by researchers, scholars and professionals.^[5,6]

Distress of editor increases with the receipt of vague reviews from the reviewers. Remarks such as 'accept', 'can be accepted', 'article has a message', or 'reject', 'not fit of publication' on first review, without mentioning critical review points either way are not desirable. The authors are the fulcrum of the journal and have to be conveyed reasonable explanation for the rejection.

Over-criticism, inappropriate logics and non-scientific pleas by the reviewers might induce the risk of rejection of a good manuscript by the editor. A reviewer's mind, occasionally, does have subconscious prejudices and negative attitude towards the contents of a study, possibly influencing him to give scathing remarks.^[7] However, editor always 'edits' and conveys remarks to author in a gentle but firm language. Younger reviewers and editors with talent have become active participants, but they may undertake overambitious reviews with a tendency to focus more on highlighting the shortcomings of the manuscripts. Sometimes the editor is compelled to remove the reviewers from the database if they do not maintain the quality and timeliness of their reviews.

At IJA, each manuscript is reviewed by a minimum of two reviewers so as to eliminate a variable subjective bias. The editor sometimes has the envious task of balancing totally contradictory remarks from reviewers on the same article and may hence seek an opinion from additional reviewers. A dissenting reviewer has to understand that the final decision is based on the combined inputs of the team and not of individuals.

Authors may also be confused with conflicting remarks of reviewers; the editor has to balance the opinions of esteemed reviewers and the response of the authors before and after revision. Reviewers should check the articles based on the guidelines mentioned already; they are the beacons who lead the editor to publish quality work. The objective attitude of the reviewer can help in evaluating the manuscript thoroughly if sufficiently backed up by literature.^[8]

New goals are set during IJA editorial board meetings for improving the quality and timeliness of reviews. IJA has also published a special article on peer reviewing in

a previous issue, eloquently describing the art of peer reviewing in the scholarly journals.^[9] It highlights the various clinical, professional and emotional aspects associated with peer reviewing. Qualities of a good peer review, drawbacks and limitations of peer review and measures to improve the peer review process in Indian context have been discussed.

The controversies of the closed versus open system of review have not affected IJA since double-blind review provides a perfect platform for the reviewers to give their free and unbiased judgments. Double-blind peer review, which is the hallmark of IJA, is almost immune to social, academic, political and psychological pressures.

IJA aims to promote not only scientific scholarship but also offers a platform for propagating evidence-based patient care through accurate, novel and sound scientific publications. This can be achieved with the high level of commitment and interaction between reviewers and editors of our own IJA.

S Bala Bhaskar, Sukhminder Jit Singh Bajwa¹

Department of Anaesthesiology and Critical Care, Vijayanagar Institute of Medical Sciences, Ballari, Karnataka, ¹Department of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care, Adesh Medical College, Shahbad, Kurukshetra, Haryana, India.
E-mail: sbalabhaskar@gmail.com

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Announcement

Dr. TN Jha and Dr. KP Chansoriya Travel Grants

For the year 2015 the Dr. TN Jha and Dr. KP Chansoriya travel grant will be awarded to the participants from 15 states. All the states can select their candidate during their annual conference and send them with the recommendation of the Secretary. Only one candidate is allowed from each state. In case if two states have a combined annual meet but separate as per the records, have to select one candidate from each state. If more than 15 states recommend the candidates for the award, selection will be made on first come first served basis.

Dr. Venkatagiri K M
Secretary - ISA

"ASHWATHI", Opp. Ayyappa Temple, Nullippady, Kasaragod - 671121, Kerala
Email: isanhq@gmail.com / secretaryisanhq@gmail.com Mobile: 093880 30395