

Some Changes in Submission and Handling Policies at the JBC

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One of my goals as interim editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Biological Chemistry* has been to make it easier for authors to submit manuscripts—without sacrificing manuscript quality. A second goal has been to communicate with the Journal's authors and users more frequently and more meaningfully. With those goals in mind, over the past few months, the associate editors and I have developed a handful of new policies, which I'll describe here.

Capsules

Several years ago, the JBC began requiring a brief, four-part synopsis (known as a "Capsule") with each new submission (1). Although "Capsules" certainly have merit, they are more challenging and time-consuming for authors to write and for editors to review than we anticipated, so we've eliminated them.

Supplemental Data

Sometimes the inclusion of supplemental data strengthens a manuscript by providing more raw data to prove a point. However, supplemental data are not always equal in quality to the data in the main body. We will give associate editors and reviewing editors the latitude to decide what are appropriate supplemental data for the papers they review. In my own experience, this varies greatly among research fields. For instance, more chemical and physical papers often require spectra, and "-omics" papers may need large data sets. I do not believe that it is appropriate to impose blanket rules.

Final Checks

In the past, if a manuscript failed to meet certain administrative criteria, we returned it to the authors so that they could fix it before the manuscript went out for review. This slowed down the review process, and so we've decided instead to request those corrections *after* a manuscript has been reviewed. This might seem like a minor change not worth mentioning, but I think most readers would agree it's frustrating to work years on a project and months on a manuscript only to have an editorial office send it right back for reasons unrelated to content.

Authorship

We now require and publish some information about what each author contributed to a manuscript— nothing detailed, just the basics.

Retraction and Withdrawal Notices

The JBC's practice of saying very little in retraction and withdrawal notices has been described by many in the community as opaque—and rightfully so. After reviewing the practices of other journals and consulting with our legal counsel and publications committee, we've reconsidered our approach. JBC retraction and withdrawal notices now will explain, with as much detail as possible, why papers have been withdrawn or retracted.

We at the JBC do not want to over-regulate the process of discovery science and publication. We have some rules for protein structures and a few other things (*e.g.* new sequences), but we do not want to make manuscript submission an onerous process. (I'm an author too, and I can relate to these problems.) Checklists such as those proposed for other types of research (2) are not appropriate for the fields that the JBC covers. Over-regulation can stifle creative research, and there are enough problems in this regard without extending it to publication.

If you have thoughts on these matters, we will be glad to hear from you. Please send an e-mail to feedback@asbmb.org. I do appreciate that there are differences of opinion, and I doubt that we will ever satisfy everyone. However, I do emphasize that the JBC is trying very hard to have the most appropriate policies it can. Our branch of science is based on the ability to reproduce findings and build on them, and the JBC is proud to have been doing this well for the past 110 years. The JBC continues to be a journal run by scientists for scientists.

References

1. <http://www.jbc.org/site/home/editorials/capsule.xhtml>
2. Nosek, B. A., Alter, G., Banks, G. C., Borsboom, D., Bowman, S. D., Breckler, S. J., Buck, S., Chambers, C. D., Chin, G., Christensen, G., Contestabile, M., Dafoe, A., Eich, E., Freese, J., Glennerster, R., Goroff, D., Green, D. P., Hesse, B., Humphreys, M., Ishiyama, J., Karlan, D., Kraut, A., Lupia, A., Mabry, P., Madon, T. A., Malhotra, N., Mayo-Wilson, E., McNutt, M., Miguel, E., Paluck, E. L., Simonsohn, U., Soderberg, C., Spellman, B. A., Turitto, J., VandenBos, G., Vazire, S., Wagenmakers, E. J., Wilson, R., and Yarkoni, T. (2015) Scientific standards. Promoting an open research culture. *Science* **348**, 1422–1425