

Navigating the Journal Review Process

1. You should write your manuscript in such a way that it anticipates reviewer comments. In other words, if you know there are weaknesses to your manuscript (i.e. small/non-representative sample, issues with reliability/validity of measures, an inability to control for potential sources of spuriousness, etc), you should identify these weaknesses and discuss steps you took to minimize those weaknesses or reasons why such weaknesses may not be all that consequential. If you don't take these precautionary steps, then reviewers will seize upon those weaknesses and use them as justifications to recommend the paper be rejected.
2. Carefully format your paper according to all requirements of the journal. An incorrectly formatted paper is an easy reason for the editor to return or reject the paper without even sending it out for review. A poorly formatted paper suggests you are not attentive to important details, which signals to editors that you might also have been sloppy in executing your analysis.
3. It is important to consider the "fit" of your manuscript for a particular journal. It is often useful to read through the "aims and scope" section of a journal's website to see if your topic fits with the journal.
4. The typical review process is a "double-blind" process. The journal will request a "blinded" copy of your manuscript (one that does not include information that would identify who you are as the author), and your manuscript will be sent out to anonymous reviewers (you will not be told who the reviewers are), typically 2-3. This helps to reduce the potential for both favoritism and bias.
5. Journal editors (the persons who are in charge of each journal) will often select reviewers based on who you have cited in your paper. Thus, if you spend a lot of time talking about the research of a particular scholar, you had better make sure you have correctly interpreted and discussed that person's research in your paper, because they may end up being asked to review your paper. More generally, experts on a given topic will be asked to review papers on that topic.
6. The quality of the methods used in a manuscript is rated as the single most important thing that guides editorial decisions to accept or reject a manuscript. Thus, in addition to being able to tell a story in your paper by reviewing the literature and identifying "gaps," you must also learn the skill of how to properly describe your methodology and analyses.
7. Expect to wait anywhere between 1-6 months before receiving an initial decision on a manuscript that has been sent out to reviewers. Some reviewers are very quick in providing their reviews (I aim for no more than 2-3 weeks), whereas others may place requests for reviews on their back burner and might wait several months to get around to the task.
8. The majority of manuscripts that are submitted to academic journals are rejected. The more prestigious the journal, the higher the rejection rate (the overall average for sociology and

criminal justice journals is about 80%). You must be willing to accept criticism and develop a thick skin. Some reviewers are very nice in describing the limitations of your paper, whereas other reviewers can be quite harsh.

9. I have never heard of a paper that has been outright accepted after the first round of reviews. If the paper is not rejected after the first round of reviews, typically the author is invited to “revise and resubmit” the manuscript. This means the editor and the reviewers see merit in the manuscript, but that certain things require modification and/or further consideration.

10. If you are fortunate enough to receive an invitation to “revise and resubmit,” you should be particularly attentive to the comments provided by the anonymous reviewers and the editor (the editor will often point out or echo things noted by the reviewers). If you choose not to heed a specific recommendation of a reviewer, you should provide a calm, reasonable explanation why.

Additional Reading:

Mustaine, E. E., & Tewksbury, R. (2013). Exploring the black box of journal manuscript review: A survey of social science journal editors. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 24(3), 386-401.

Pratt, T. C. (2014). How to be a successful publisher. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 30(4), 378-391.