



## Editorial (desk) rejection without peer review of a manuscript revisited; A note to researchers

Abdel-Hady El-Gilany,

Department of Community Medicine Department, Faculty of Medicine, Mansoura University, Mansoura, Egypt.

### **Editorial**

Despite the importance of understanding the editorial process at medical journals, many authors lack the information about immediate editorial decisions whether editorial rejection or acceptance. The editor in chief (EIC) is in charge of the whole editorial process and decisions including the desk rejection or acceptance based on desk review. The early reject process is somewhat controversial and needs to be transparent and fair. There are many publications on editorial rejection, however little is known about editorial acceptance. This editorial answers many questions raised by researchers; What is a desk reject/acceptance? Why is a manuscript desk rejected? How often and when does this happen? What can authors do if a manuscript is desk rejected?

### **What is editorial rejection?**

Editorial rejection of a manuscript is also known as desk rejection, immediate (quick or early) rejection, editorial triage and rejection without peer review. The manuscript is rejected by the journal's EIC at an earlier stage prior to sending it out for peer review. There are no universal desk rejection standards and each journal develops its own policies. Editorial rejection is usually based on in-depth consultation between editorial board members and the decision letter includes a summary of this discussion so that authors can consider the concerns of experienced editors.<sup>1-3</sup>

### **What are the reasons of editorial rejection?**

There are many reasons for desk rejection, the common reasons to be considered before submission are: (1) The manuscript is outside the aims and scope of the journal, including mismatch with journal scope or readers' interests; (2) Poor manuscript preparation e.g. poorly organized or incomplete manuscript, missing files, tables or graphs, non-adherence to journal guidelines, outdated references, etc.; (3) Lacks of originality, novelty and impact e.g. outdated data and lack of new intellectual contents. It is important to note that null findings can be novel or inform practice; (4) Flaws in research methods including biases in study design, research hypothesis, sample size, sampling methods, data analysis and interpretations, lack of objectivity and limited generalizability; (5) Poor quality of writing, including non-scientific language, typos, punctuations, grammatical and vocabulary errors as well as plagiarism; (6) Ethical considerations including violation of clinical, research and publication ethics; and (7) Other reasons not related to scientific and ethical background e.g. journals are overwhelmed with submissions and editors have to filter them. Additionally, the manuscript may not be immediately desk rejected, but eventually rejected when no reviewers accept to review the manuscript or when reviewers never provide feedback after initial acceptance to review the manuscript. Another reason

**Corresponding Author:** Abdel-Hady El-Gilany, Department of Community Medicine Department, Faculty of Medicine, Mansoura University, Mansoura, Egypt. Email: [ahgilany@gmail.com](mailto:ahgilany@gmail.com)

is that one of the authors is blacklisted, belongs to disadvantaged group, or has publication ban by the journal or publisher for previous research misconduct. Some authors claim that editors of reputable and top international journals are discriminating against authors from developed and developing countries.<sup>1,5</sup>

#### **What is time to desk decision?**

It varies from one journal to another as well as according to reason of rejection. It ranges from few hours up to many months.<sup>5-7</sup>

#### **Why are desk-rejections increasing?**

The ratio of desk rejection is high and increased dramatically during the last few decades, especially for top-tier journals and ranges from 26% up to 80%. Most editors find it quite easy to isolate and get rid of the bottom 40-60% of the submissions.<sup>1-6</sup>

#### **What are the pros and cons of desk rejection?**

Desk rejection is an important part of the review process, and depriving editors of this right could hamper their ability to shape the direction of the journal or continue managing the journal with current resources.<sup>8</sup> The mechanisms for rejection differ from one journal to another. It can be based solely on EIC's decision; one editor decides in consultation with other editors, or a joint decision of the editorial board member.

Merits of immediate decision: Initial screening of the manuscript is important to save time and efforts of editors, reviewers, and authors. Desk rejection saves some of the reviewing load on editors and relieves the burden on volunteer reviewers. It free up the time of editors and reviewers to concentrate on the promising manuscripts. This benefits the quality of the review process. If all submitted manuscripts are sent for peer review, reviewers would be overburdened, frustrated and submit poor quality review Desk rejections are quick and efficient and the authors are set free from the long tedious process of waiting for editors to find reviewers, for reviewers to accept and complete their reviews, and for editors to review their reviews.<sup>2,9</sup>

#### **Demerits of immediate rejection**

Some scholars argue desk rejection violates the principle of peer-review because editors cannot be experts enough on all topics. Others added that it is procedurally unfair if takes long time and does not provide reasons for rejection so authors can improve their manuscripts and making the decisions appear arbitrary. Editors make both Type I (accept some bad papers) and Type II (reject some good papers) errors. The actual prevalence of such errors is unknown. Journal internal audit could measure these errors based on reviewing previous publication and history of submissions.<sup>10</sup> There is a potential to discrimination against disadvantaging scholars e.g. not well resourced and/or are from traditionally underrepresented groups It causes a lot of frustration for authors, who may see the desk rejection as unfair; it is feared by authors and causes their disappointment.<sup>8</sup>

#### **What can authors do if a manuscript is desk rejected?**

Rejected manuscripts still have a chance of being published within a reasonable time. Authors should consider reasons for immediate rejection before submitting to another journal. However, most desk rejections are accompanied by little feedback and the main reason is that the manuscript doesn't fit the journal.<sup>6</sup>

#### **What is desk acceptance?**

Despite desk rejection is well known, little is known about desk acceptance without peer review. There are controversies about desk acceptance. Some see it is possible for exceptionally novel outstanding well written manuscripts; this relies on the good judgment of editors regarding the quality of the manuscripts. The majority see it is almost impossible to publish a manuscript without any kind of review as the conceptual novelty is intrinsically difficult to quantify. If this happens it needs to be taken for a full justification of why this paper has not been peer reviewed by external reviewers. Automatic acceptance

without review of exceptional manuscripts had a positive impact on published quality, especially when the incidence of selfish referees is high. However, this strategy is vulnerable to the editors' own biases.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, there are variable reasons for immediate editorial decision whether rejection or acceptance of the manuscript. Authors need to be aware of these reasons to consider them before submission. Desk rejection has its own pros and cons. The journals should be more transparent about the standards of desk-decisions and their time-scales. The decision should be based on objective reasons that should be timely communicated with authors.

**Conflict of interest:** none

**Funding:** none

**Ethical consideration:** none

**Abdel-Hady El-Gilany, MD<sup>1</sup>;**

<sup>1</sup>Community Medicine Department, Faculty of Medicine, Mansoura University, Mansoura, Egypt

## REFERENCES

1. Greiff S, Ziegler M. How to Make Sure Your Paper is Desk Rejected. A Practical Guide to Rejection in EJPA, European Journal of Psychological Assessment 2017;33(2):75-78
2. Picciotto M. Editorial. Why Editorial Rejection? The Journal of Neuroscience 2018;38(1):1-2
3. Charlesworth Author Services. Reasons for Desk Rejection – and how to avoid it. 26 May, 2022
4. <https://www.cwauthors.com/article/reasons-for-desk-rejection-and-how-to-avoid-desk-rejection>. Accessed: June 21, 2022
5. Craig J. Desk Rejection: How to Avoid Being Hit by a Returning Boomerang. Family Business Review 2010 23(4) 306-309
6. Leibovici I. Immediate rejection of manuscripts without peer review at the CMI. Clinical Microbiology and Infection 2017; 23:499
7. Gupta V, Bhatia R, Pathak M, Ramam M. Analysis of submissions, editorial and peer-review process, and outcome of manuscripts submitted to the Indian Journal of Dermatology Venereology and Leprology over a 6-month period. Indian J Dermatol Venereol Leprol 2020;86:519-25.
8. Iwaz J. My article has just been rejected!. European Science Editing 2020;46
9. Bonneau C, Kanthak K. Desk Rejecting Against Desk Rejects. PS October 2021 P 690-693
10. Sharma, P. Editor's note: 2009—A year in review. Family Business Review 2010;23:5-8.
11. Ansell B, Samuels D, Desk Rejecting: A Better Use of Your Time. January 2021. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3742867](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3742867) Accessed June 22, 2022
12. D'Andrea R, O'Dwyer JP. Can editors save peer review from peer reviewers? PLoS ONE 2017;12(10): e0186111.

**Cite this article as:** Abdel-Hady El-Gilany, MD<sup>1</sup>; Editorial (desk) rejection without peer review of a manuscript revisited; A note to researchers. *Egyptian Journal of Community Medicine*, 2022;40(4):230-232.

**DOI:** 10.21608/ejcm.2022.148554.1226