



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Women and Birth

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/wombi

DISCUSSION

The journal editor: Friend or foe?



Jenny Hall*, Vanora Hundley, Edwin van Teijlingen

Centre for Midwifery, Maternal and Perinatal Health, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, Bournemouth University, Royal London House, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, Dorset BH1 3LT, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 November 2014

Received in revised form 18 January 2015

Accepted 22 January 2015

Keywords:

Editor's role

Writing

Publication, Reviewing

ABSTRACT

The role of the journal editor may not be well known by authors. The purpose of this article is to explain the role in order to encourage future participation in reviewing and publication. Illustration is provided of the publishing process.

© 2015 Australian College of Midwives. Published by Elsevier Australia (a division of Reed International Books Australia Pty Ltd). All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

There are numerous books and articles on how to get academic work into print, however within these the role of the journal editor is rarely visible. The editor it is suggested conducts his or her work quietly in the background, and most authors take little notice other than to address their cover letter to the editor.¹ Yet understanding the role of the editor is key for authors aiming to get their work into print. Over the past decade the authors of this paper have been active in editorial roles and involved in a series of talks and training sessions to help early career researchers and clinicians to get published in academic journals. It is clear from the kinds of questions raised in sessions on academic writing, that many budding authors do not know or understand the role of a journal editor.

This paper outlines key aspects of the editor's role, offers insights into the process of submitting a journal article and highlights the need for journal instructions and for authors to follow them. The intention is to make potential authors think actively about the process of submitting an article and the reasons why it is important to follow authors' instructions. The paper provides an insight into the role of the editors, who may be busy professionals, doing the editorial work in their own time over and above the day job of academic lecturer, researcher and/or practitioner. It is often the case that the work of an editor gets done over the weekend or in the evenings after the 'day job' has been attended to.

2. The role of the editor

The first step in demystifying the role of the academic journal editor, whether for a peer reviewed or clinically based journal, is to note that an editor does a lot of things, but rarely 'edits' in the sense of substantive editing, line editing, or 'copy editing', although there are exceptions with regard to editing language and terminology to make it appropriate and acceptable. The editor's role includes:

- maintaining the standards of the journal. In this sense the editor is the gate keeper who keeps papers out that are just not good enough. This includes filtering out manuscripts that do not fit the scope of the journal;
- setting the journal's strategic direction. In order to do this the editor needs to be aware of what will 'sell' the journal, what the readership will be interested in reading and what is topical. This means knowing the readership and perhaps seeking new content areas to encourage readers from other professional groups. For example, journals with a predominantly midwifery focus will also be of interest to sociologists and other groups working in the maternal health field. Equally content with a sociological or psychological focus will be very relevant to midwives. The challenge is often choosing a title that will attract both groups.² Setting the journal's strategic direction also means being aware of important professional issues or political drivers affecting the readers;
- guiding the ethical standards of the journal. This may be ethical standards related to research and writing, especially plagiarism, but it may also relate to understanding marketing ploys by companies that may want access to the journal's audience/subscribers. Editors should have awareness of submitted

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 1202 968318.

E-mail address: jhall1@bournemouth.ac.uk (J. Hall).

research papers that may have received funding from companies with a different ethical stance to the journal;

- encouraging the submission of high quality papers. This may include selecting ‘themes’ for the journal and commissioning some authorship of some papers around a particular subject;
- ensuring all authors of papers have agreed to the submission of the final version. It is normal practice to have a system that emails all co-authors to inform them of the submission and this acts as a safety net in case of misunderstandings about authorship.
- preventing academic fraud and avoiding plagiarism;
- ensuring appropriate content, including making decisions about the appropriate illustrations to support a manuscript and accepting/rejecting advertising;
- promoting the journal at academic conferences;
- selecting reviewers for submitted manuscripts;
- corresponding with authors;
- and, corresponding with readers.

The role now also includes current knowledge and use of web-based resources, as many journals are published only online or have an Internet presence. Editorial selection may be required to identify what will be acceptable directly on the publishing site as a free resource or as a ‘window’ to the publication.

The editor also has a role in ensuring papers are applicable to the journal readership. For example, the author’s perspective can be very ‘local’ rather than ‘global’. The role of the editor (and reviewers) is to ensure that general aspects of local issues are picked out to make such articles relevant when writing for an international journal. The author may need to be encouraged to widen their view to ensure relevance. However, here it is to be recognised that there are many types of journals for different purposes, with some intentionally specific and locally focussed and others aimed at an international audience.

Editors may also consider the balance of papers in a particular issue. For example, ensuring a balance between different types of papers, some empirical, data-based articles, reflections, reviews, theoretical and clinical papers. Or a mix of papers from different parts of the world or submitted by authors based in different disciplines. Sometimes an editor may hold back a paper for the next issue because for example the current issue already has two or three papers from Nepal, or on barriers to antenatal care or on student reflections on midwifery education. Sometimes an editor may hasten the publication of a paper which is based on a major political report or important new research evidence. Alternatively there may be a plan for an issue of the journal to be focussed on a theme with a variety of viewpoint papers. For example, the recent series on midwifery published in *The Lancet* in 2014 (<http://www.thelancet.com/series/midwifery>) and the series on Fear and post-traumatic stress in *Midwifery* ([http://www.midwiferyjournal.com/issue/S0266-6138\(13\)X0014-2](http://www.midwiferyjournal.com/issue/S0266-6138(13)X0014-2)). If the editor needs to bring a publication out quickly, this may result in moving already accepted papers to a later print issue.

The editor also has an important role in linking with publishers and editorial teams who provide the sub-editing and production of proofs. Clinical expert editors sometimes have to educate publishers who are not familiar with midwifery or to advise sub-editors who may not recognise the midwifery terms used. Occasionally this can be challenging as there is a need to balance the business concerns with the sometimes lengthy debate of issues among academics.

3. The journey of a paper through the review process

Fig. 1 gives a simplistic outline of the editorial process that starts with a review by the editor. Often editors do not have enough

time to read a whole paper and for the initial submission will rely on the title and abstract as windows to the study. They may only read the abstract, and perhaps skim the paper, in order to make a decision about whether to send out the paper for review or to reject it. In the health field editors normally also check whether or not a primary study has been granted ethical approval or the paper provides a statement of ethics.

Each journal has clear instructions to authors and it is important that authors follow them. Many journals now have online processes for submission which may take time to work through. It is possible that a paper will be rejected at this stage if submitted incorrectly. An abstract should be written according to the protocol of the journal. If the guidance has not been adhered to then many editors will reject the paper without getting into the main text. Failure to follow instructions may mean that authors do not even pass the first hurdle.

Papers may also be rejected at this stage because they do not cover an appropriate topic or are not of sufficient quality to be sent to the reviewers. The editor may offer advice to submit to a different journal or direct the author on how to gain support with academic writing or where the standard of the written language is not good enough.

It may not be surprising to find that editors and authors often have different perspectives. For example, the authors may think their title is clever, fashionable, funny or catchy, but the editor is probably asking herself: “Does this title explain what the paper is about?”; “Will this title still make sense to the readership in a decade?” or “Does the paper link to a hot topic in the media?” “Does the paper have a decent lifespan?” or “Has there already been an article in our journal on this topic recently?”

If the editor decides that the paper is of interest and relevant to the journal then it will be sent to reviewers who usually have expertise in the subject or methods. Obtaining the correct reviewer can be a minefield, especially for a truly specialist subject. Good reviewers are difficult to find, as many are themselves overburdened by requests to review for several different papers.

Reviewers are given a deadline by which to review and return their comments. However, they may also be busy clinicians, academics or researchers who do review as volunteers, so this process may take time. Reviewers who accept may not deliver their review within the expected time frame, even with the best intentions. The editor has very little leverage over a peer reviewer who has promised to review but does not deliver. However, increasingly journal editors are imposing response times after which they will ‘terminate that reviewer’ in order to keep the review process moving.³ Thus the processes outlined above may take a number of weeks if not months. A journal should highlight in the instructions the time it takes for a review process to be completed. The author should wait until this time has passed before contacting an editor to inquire about the decision on a paper.

The editor may read the paper in more detail when the reviewers’ reports come back, especially if the reviewers contradict each other. The editor as a ‘judge’ acts as an additional reviewer to establish whose view is more appropriate. Occasionally when there is a lack of agreement by two reviewers the editor may send out the paper to a third or fourth reviewer (particularly if additional methodological or statistical advice is needed). Sometimes the editor may act as the third reviewer but this information should be transparent within the process of the journal. The editor then needs to recommend the changes that the authors are required to make, and whether additional analysis or information is necessary. This demonstrates that an editor’s role is time consuming.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5866296>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5866296>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)