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Session Reports

A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO MANUSCRIPT EDITING

Speakers

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Loretta Bohn and Kelly Schrank share their experiences “in the trenches” when managing manuscripts, including editing and submitting to peer-reviewed journals. As experienced manuscript editors, they believe the overarching goal is to “shine the best light” on the research and the authors. To expand beyond their own experiences, the speakers also surveyed editors to learn what they look for when editing a manuscript and reported their findings (Figure).

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|--|
| What are editors looking for... (N = 12^a) |
| ...in each section? |
| Editing standards (eg, grammar, punctuation, syntax, readability, and spelling) are met. |
| Content addresses the intended purpose of that section. |
| Section contains the components specified in journal guidelines. |
| ...when evaluating the manuscript as a whole? |
| Terms and definitions are consistent. |
| Information flows coherently and logically. |
| Research methodology demonstrates good science. |
| Journal requirements are met (eg, word limit, reference format, title page components). |

Figure. What are editors looking for...

^aAn 8-item survey was developed by Kelly Schrank and Loretta Bohn; it was posted on AMWA Engage and LinkedIn and emailed to the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences’ mailing list and RTI International employees.

Manuscript Editing Checklists Are a Valuable Tool

A good checklist can help editors develop a plan, stay organized, and be more efficient when editing manuscripts and submitting them to journals. A highly recommended book that describes compelling reasons that checklists are valuable is *The Checklist Manifesto* by Atul Gawande, MD, MPH, a renowned surgeon.¹

Checklists can be used for a single manuscript and can also serve as a dashboard to manage multiple manuscripts simultaneously. Bohn notes that checklist use shows your clients or employer that you are a professional and doing what you can to minimize errors on your part. Schrank shared her checklist as an online supplement on the conference platform. Also available to *AMWA Journal* subscribers, the checklist has sections for tracking/metrics, common manuscript features, abbreviations used, author instructions from the journal, notes, and final checks of the edited paper. A valuable tip when scanning the paper for the final check is to use “No Markup” in track changes to make issues visible (eg, extra spaces, typos).

Noted advantages of using a checklist when editing:

- **Consistency**—of acronyms, abbreviations, phrases or terms, nomenclature for key concepts, and other information
- **Structure**—ensures requirements from the particular journal are met, sections are in correct order, and the right data/information is in the correct section
- **Productivity**—keeps you on task, avoids wasted time scrolling pages to check for consistency, reminds you of where you left off
- **Tracking**—deadlines, authors’ return of information you requested, metrics to estimate time required for future editing projects

Author Instructions Are a Gold Mine of Information

Bohn stresses the importance of abiding by the author instructions in manuscript preparation. Instructions can cover everything from the article categories accepted and word count limits to formatting of references and figures.

Several tips:

1. Add the URL to the author instructions in the manuscript checklist (or in your bookmarks for that client).
2. Thoroughly read the instructions.
3. If another person is formatting the manuscript, copy and paste pertinent instructions in an email to save them from sifting through information.

Look for author instructions on the journal's home page, which may be in a tab near the top or a link along the side or near the bottom of the page. Note that submission instructions are usually different from author instructions. Submission instructions include the platform for uploading your manuscript files, any publication fees, and other relevant information.

Common Features of Manuscripts

Schrank toured the common features of modern manuscripts, showing both organization and what information goes where. Journals do vary in placement for some information; here are common things to check:

- Information required on title page
- Specific subheadings for abstracts
- Acknowledgements section—thank contributors (eg, statisticians, medical writers)
- Source(s) of funding
- Conflicts of interest—sometimes duplicated

Dummy Submissions Allow Editors to Discover What the Journal Requires

If the target journal is known, start a dummy submission in the online portal using the login ID and password of the submitting author. Gathering all information and materials from your authors ahead of time will avoid delays when it is time to submit the manuscript. Once you start the dummy submission, read the instruction prompts carefully for any surprises (eg, a cover letter is required and authors have not written one).

Common information requested on submission:

- Email addresses for all authors
- Biography of each author
- Suggested peer reviewers and email addresses; some journals require it and want up to 3 names
- Conflicts of interest/wording of statement for no conflicts
- Open access fees (do authors know this and want to pay for it?)
- Summary Box/Key Messages of the research

Once the manuscript is submitted, it will follow 1 of 3 paths (Table), and some authors will also engage the editor in this phase.

Table. Three Paths of a Manuscript

| Path | Role of the Editor |
|---------------------|--|
| Accepted | <p>Read the article proofs carefully for issues introduced by the journal editors (eg, typos) and for behind-the-scenes comments that should have been removed</p> <p>Respond to queries/comments addressed to the authors</p> <p>Deter authors from requesting new revisions, as this could be costly (if it is allowed)</p> |
| Revise and Resubmit | <p>Ensure response letter is polite; thank the reviewers for suggestions (even if slightly off base)</p> <p>Help author pick the important battles; yield to suggestions and points when ethically possible</p> <p>Ensure that the revision is better, not worse, than the original text</p> <p>Explain to the reviewer what was changed and why</p> <p>Follow instructions for how the editor wants to see changes to the manuscript (eg, track changes visible, detailed cover letter)</p> |
| Rejected | <p>Submit to another journal</p> <p>Rework manuscript then submit elsewhere</p> |

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1. Gawande A. *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*. Metropolitan Books; 2009.

WHERE DATA, DESIGN, AND TECHNOLOGY MEET: EFFECTIVE INFOGRAPHIC STRATEGIES FOR HEALTH COMMUNICATION

Speaker

Kathleen Walker, *Content Strategist, Communicate Health, Fort Worth, TX*

By Sunali Wadehra, MD

What is an Infographic, and Why are They Important?

An infographic is a graphic visual representation of information, data, or knowledge that is intended to present complex information *quickly and clearly*. Slick graphics and data visualization are used to engage the audience, and visual storytelling is used to convey a concept. A well-designed infographic helps people find what they need, understand what they find, and remember what they read. Note that not just any chart or graph qualifies as an infographic; it must represent this criterion.