

Essays

An adaptable model of electronic editorial services for medical universities

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Abstract We present a model of editorial services and a filing system for medical universities. The model facilitates authors' personalised consultation throughout the writing process, full editing support following peer review until acceptance, assistance with online submissions and manuscript editing at different stages by a team of editors. The model serves as a platform for communication between academic staff and editors. It generates data that can be analysed to improve the author's competency in medical writing.

Keywords Electronic editorial services; filing system; online submission; comprehensive editing; medical writing.

Introduction

Many medical professionals often face the enormous task of writing, submitting, revising, discussing and resubmitting manuscripts in a foreign language.¹ Many authors use English editing companies for editorial services. To enhance publishing capacity and to reach the level of organizations such as the Mayo Clinic¹ and the Cleveland Foundation Clinic², medical communication centres have been established around the world. Ideally, the centres should have tenured faculty members employed by a university to deliver undergraduate and postgraduate courses on medical English, medical communications and writing. The faculty should also act as a team of editors providing editorial support and promoting international publications.¹ To meet increasing publishing demands, electronic editorial services and a filing system should be established simultaneously.

Herein we present an adaptable model of electronic editorial services and a filing system for medical universities based on our own experience. The model is suitable for personalised editorial services for academic staff, particularly in medical universities of non-Anglophone countries.

Adaptable model of electronic editorial services

One of the main goals of a medical communications centre is to offer personalised editorial assistance throughout the whole process of writing and publishing. High-quality electronic editing is provided by academic editors with expertise in a medical specialities and language editing. Baseline electronic editorial services include comprehensive review and editing, cover-letter editing, interpretation of journal decision letters, editing responses to referees and manuscript resubmission and galley proofreading.

1. Comprehensive review and editing

Editorial assistance involves comprehensive and balanced editing with emphasis on checking and correcting the style and format, syntax and language, scientific content and logical flow and overall impact of the study. Style includes the proper use of abbreviations, hyphenation, number style, capitalisation and American or British English. Format includes correct citation and listing of references, word counts, use of equations and formulae, figures, tables, paragraph spacing, indentions and page set-up. Grammar includes correct use of verbs, tense, articles, prepositions, punctuation and spelling. Words and phrases include appropriate use of parallelisms, comparisons and terminology.

During editing, each sentence is meticulously checked for transition words and phrases, grammatical accuracy and readability. Every paragraph is scrutinised for redundancy, language and structural parallelism, transition and logical flow. The AMA Manual of Style (10th Edition)³ is one of the main references for editing, with The ACS Style Guide (3rd Edition)⁴ as a supplement.

Structural review involves identifying the target journal and audience⁵, and checking structure to meet the requirements of the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals.^{6,7,8}

Equally important is a comprehensive review of *scientific content and logical flow* in a manuscript. This involves upgrading medical terminology, checking the validity of the methodology, reviewing scientific nomenclature, units of measurement, symbols and variables, and assessment of the novelty of a scientific work. Final appraisal weighs *overall impact* of scientific knowledge and depth of the study. The comprehensive review and editing model is presented in Fig. 1.

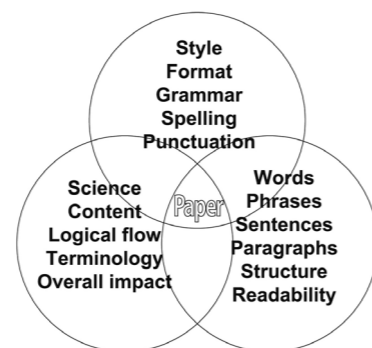


Fig. 1. Comprehensive editing model

2. Cover letter editing

The text and tone of a cover letter are checked and re-written to catch attention and convince the target journal's editor of the importance of the study. Acknowledgement of contributors' efforts, declaration of any competing interest and suggestions for suitable reviewers are also checked or added, as these points are often overlooked by authors.

3. Interpretation of journal decision letters

Following the peer review and the receipt of decision letters, academic editors clarify decisions made by journal editors.⁹

4. Considering comments

Academic editors can also provide support with reviewing and responding to the following journal decisions: 1. accept without revisions, 2. accept after revisions, and 3. reject and resubmit.⁹ After the authors revise the manuscript, academic editors re-edit and help respond to referees' comments in a point by point fashion.

5. Editing responses to referees' comments

The aim of editing response letters is to ensure the following: 1. point by point responses to the comments, 2. explanations of revisions made in the text and cover letter, 3. polite and scientific rebuttal where necessary, and 4. preparation of all ready-to-deliver files with responses and changes clearly differentiated. Comments to editors and referees are copied and pasted into the response letter.⁹

6. Re-submission

Academic editors assist with reviewing based on criticisms and comments raised and discuss them with the authors. Advice is given on the selection of a new target journal based on its subject category, impact factors, rigour of the peer review, strength and limitations of the manuscript and the need for rapid publication.⁵

7. Editing posters and slide presentations

Academic editors provide comprehensive editorial assistance by streamlining and organising texts of poster and slide presentations.¹⁰

8. Oral presentation script editing/presentation coaching

Editing aims to ensure interactivity. When requested, presentations are audio recorded according to the preferred delivery speed and audio file format used.

9. Assistance with guidelines for authors

To publish in a high-quality journal, academic editors ensure adherence to the guidelines of the journal through individual consultations. Importantly, editors clarify the journal's guidelines.

10. Assistance with online submission

Assistance with online submission is also provided, particularly with clarifying submission instructions of the target journal.⁴ This is to avoid pitfalls of exceeding word count limits, inappropriate figure resolution and format, lack of a title page, incorrect abstract format, absence of

a cover letter, other missing elements and omission of the conflict of interest statement, disclosures or institutional review board approval.¹¹

11. Galley proofreading

Galley proofs should be returned by authors to the target journal within 24 to 48 hours. At this stage, academic editors assist with correction of spelling, terminology, punctuation, grammar, typescript, headers, footers and headlines. Queries on how to make changes in a PDF file are also addressed.

Delivery dates

Delivery dates vary and depend on the type and length of a paper. The editorial review includes pre-editing and post-editing consultations with the authors. *Full papers* may include original articles, reviews, case reports, special articles, letters to the editor and book chapters. Delivery times for full papers range from up to seven working days for urgent cases and up to 14 days for regular cases. This can be modified depending on the availability of academic editors. Delivery dates for these and other items can be modified according to the needs and resources of the medical institution.

Editorial workflow

An editorial workflow is designed to provide opportunities for both authors and academic editors to discuss and improve the paper either as a new submission or as a re-submission.

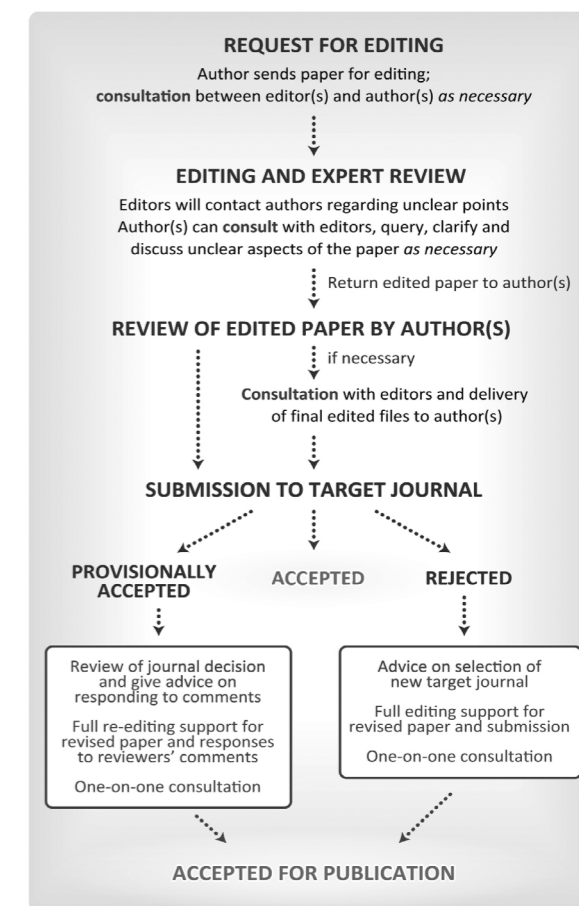


Fig. 2. Editorial workflow model

Electronic coding and filing system

An electronic coding and filing system for manuscripts received for comprehensive review and editing facilitates efficient handling of papers. This system can be developed into an online submission system linked to an editing management system. An example of an electronic coding and filing system is presented below.

Upon receipt of a new manuscript, a coordinator checks and saves the manuscript and all accompanying files in a folder and labels the folder with a code number. An acknowledgement of receipt and information on the delivery date are then sent to the author.

An example of a code number for a paper is **10-8-1-3**, which denotes the year (2010 = **10**), month (August = **8**), ordinal sequence number (first manuscript received that month = **1**) and academic editor number (eg 1, 2, 3, 4). Therefore, the first paper that is received for editorial review in August 2010, initially edited by academic editor 3 is given the code number **10-8-1-3**.

Following this, the author's surname is added after the code number (eg **10-8-1-3 Dr Honda**), and the folder is filed electronically on a network hard disk drive. The coordinator then sends an email to all academic editors informing them that the paper is ready for review and editing. An example of an electronic coding and filing system is presented in Fig. 3.

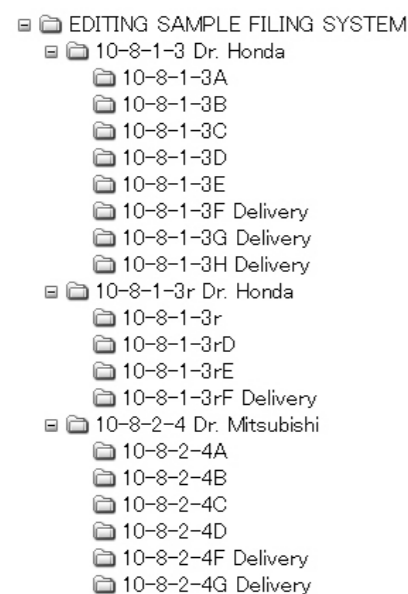


Fig. 3. Electronic coding and filing system model

Editing stages, re-editing and express requests

Ideally, the academic editorial team should be composed of tenured faculty members who are language and medical experts. An adaptable model of the editing, re-editing and express editing stages is presented below.

Editing stages

The comprehensive review and editing of an academic paper can be divided into multiple stages: each stage can include multiple reviews.

For example, for **Stage A**, inside the **10-8-1-3 Dr Honda** folder, the first academic editor makes a new folder and labels it **10-8-1-3A** for the first stage of editing. All files for editing are placed by the first academic editor in this **10-8-1-3A** folder and all files for reference only (eg editing request application form or illustrations for reference only) are left inside the main folder but outside the **10-8-1-3A** folder.

All documents to be edited in this **A** folder are assigned the same code number followed by 'A' and the type of file (ie **10-8-1-3A Text**). Other types of file name may include 'Figures', 'Slides', or 'Cover letter'. Comprehensive review and editing is then performed using the 'track changes' function of Microsoft Word (Microsoft, Seattle, WA, USA).

For **Stage B**, the entire A folder is copied and renamed as **10-8-1-3B**, and all edited files are reviewed and rechecked.

For **Stage C**, the B folder is copied and labelled as **10-8-1-3C** and another review of all the edited files is done.

Stages A-C are completed by the first academic editor (ie a language expert) who comprehensively edits mainly for *style and format, syntax and language*.

For **Stage D**, the C folder is copied and renamed as **10-8-1-3D**. At this stage, the paper goes to the second academic editor, who is a medical expert. This person is a tenured faculty member of the center who is either a medical doctor or an expert with advanced medical or biomedical degree and academic status. Medical experts act as pre-reviewers, performing a comprehensive review and quality check of a paper.

For **Stage E**, the D folder is copied and renamed as **10-8-1-3E**. This last stage is completed by a third academic editor, either a language or medical expert, who makes a final review and assessment of the overall impact of the paper.

Queries are resolved with the authors at a mutually agreed time. The consultation process allows the centre to cover all areas of expertise by enabling its editors to clarify any uncertainties. Once the queries are addressed, corrected portions are incorporated into the **Stage E** documents, which show all track changes up to that point.

Final files can be presented to the authors in PDF format with the track changes along with Word files with accepted changes. All PDF and "clean" Word files are then saved in an F folder for delivery to the authors. The final files are then sent to the authors who complete the online submission to a journal.

Re-editing and express requests

When the author requests re-editing after peer review, the same code number of the paper is used but an 'r' letter is added, denoting re-editing (eg **10-8-1-3r**). In the re-review and re-editing process, the same stage-based system as that for the first submission is used. If the paper is returned for further re-review and re-editing, another 'r' can be added (eg **10-8-1-3rr**). If an express service is requested, an 'e' letter is added to the code number (eg **10-8-1-3e**).

Advantages of the editorial services

Firstly, e-editorial services presented here enable *personalised consultation* throughout the writing. The process allows discussing uncertainties before contacting a journal. This mode of consultation is endorsed by Benfield and Feak.¹² It yields a high-quality revision.¹³ Secondly, authors receive comprehensive editorial support at all stages. Thirdly, authors can get assistance for online submissions and preparation of ready-to-deliver files. Fourthly, the editorial review, follow-up and support by editors generate data that can be used to further improve the authors' writing skills. Finally, each paper is comprehensively reviewed and edited by a team of linguists and medical experts.

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Competing interests

None declared

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Tracking historical papers and their citations

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Abstract The multidisciplinary Web of Science® (WoS), in particular the WoS Century of Science archive, and some other databases enable tracking historical papers published before 1960. With historical papers we enter an area of completely different publication and citation culture. There are a number of factors making the search for historical papers a daunting task: limited coverage of journals, limitations of specific subject fields, complex author names, complicated journal titles, database errors, etc. Applying bibliometrics to historical papers, ie counting citations as a measure of the impact, may require careful consideration of a large proportion of erroneous citations. It is also necessary to apply time adjustment of the citation counts.

Keywords Historical papers; citation analysis; literature search; errors; bibliometrics; physics.

Introduction

Century of Science back files launched by Thomson Reuters in 2005 expanded coverage of Web of Science® (WoS) back to 1900.¹ Some specialised literature databases such as Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS) database for chemistry and INSPEC database for physics, electronics and computing also switched to the coverage of sources dating back to 1900 and even earlier.²

The availability of bibliographic information of old journal items and their citations in WoS permits investigation of the differences in publication and citation cultures over time and to comprehensively evaluate the citation-based impact. The results of the investigation are important for researchers, particularly historians of science, frequently referring to and analysing historical papers.

There are some limitations of the search for these papers and counting their citations as a measure of the impact: incomplete coverage of relevant journals, patchy coverage of WoS-indexed journal items, limitations inherent to specific search fields, database errors, translation errors, misspelled references, variations of author names, complicated journal names, etc.^{3,4,5} There are also some phenomena limiting value of citation counts as a measure of the scientific impact. Long-ago publication cultures differ substantially from those in our time.

Publication of research papers in different time periods

Archives of available databases reveal differences in publication records over time. For example, sources in physics listed in INSPEC database slowly increased from 2,500 items in 1900 to 10,000 in 1950. Over the period between 1950 and 2010, however, the number of the items