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WHY YOU SHOULD NOT SUBMIT YOUR WORK TO MORE THAN ONE JOURNAL AT A TIME

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Peer-reviewed journals, such as this one, will not consider submissions that are currently being considered by another journal. Most journals require authors to state, in their covering letter, that their paper has not already been published or been submitted to another journal (ICMJE, 2008).

There are two reasons why editors forbid multiple submissions. The main one is because submitting a manuscript to more than one journal at the same time is a waste of reviewers' time, and that time is precious to editors. Finding suitably qualified reviewers is one of the hardest parts of an editor's job. Persuading those reviewers to donate their time, nearly always unpaid, to the journal by reviewing an article is even harder. Editors therefore regard their reviewers as a valuable resource and are most reluctant to waste their time by asking them to review an article that might be withdrawn because it has been accepted by another journal.

Consider the effect that allowing multiple submissions might have on the most prestigious journals. All authors would like their work to be published in these high impact journals, and if they had nothing to lose, not even a slight delay, they might routinely send all their manuscripts, however unsuitable, to the top journals as well as to more realistic target journals. The result would be that the major journals would be swamped with submissions. Maybe you think the big journals could afford this, after all, many of them are currently very profitable. But bear in mind that the cost of peer reviews is ultimately borne by the scientific community. If a journal wastes money by reviewing many unsuitable articles, then the total cost of running the journal increases and the cost per published article must also increase. The more inefficient the peer-review process, the higher the cost to society. Even though journals do not usually pay their reviewers, it costs time and therefore money to administer a submission, select reviewers, and communicate with the authors. While the growth of electronic publishing has reduced the costs of printing and distribution, it has had minimal effect on the costs of running a journal office and administering peer review. The Open Access electronic journals which charge publication fees give a useful indication of these costs. For journals operating in Western Europe and North America, the cost is around \$1500 per published article. This cost will rise if journals receive large numbers of articles that they do not publish.

The second reason why editors discourage multiple submissions is because they fear that some authors would let their work be published in more than one journal. Such multiple publication is only permissible under certain, specific circumstances, for example a journal might publish a translation of an article it considered particularly relevant to its readers that would otherwise be inaccessible because it was first published in another language. However, such multiple publications must always be clearly referenced to the first publication and acknowledge the original source. But if authors got their paper accepted in more than one journal (through multiple submissions) and wanted to break the publication conventions, they would not tell the journals that more than one version had been accepted, therefore the same research might be published several times as if it were original material. The danger of such redundant publication was shown clearly by Tramèr and colleagues who highlighted the effects of covert redundant publication of studies of the anti-emetic ondansetron on a meta-analysis (Tramèr et al., 1997). Unaware that three studies had been published several times, they included the findings more than once, and showed how this skewed the conclusions when the efficacy of the drug was expressed in terms of the Number Needed to Treat (NNT). Such calculations are frequently used as the basis for guidelines or for hospitals deciding which drugs to include on their formulary, so this breach of publication ethics might ultimately have harmed patients or wasted healthcare resources if it had not been detected.

The peer review system relies on the good will of reviewers who perform reviews without payment on the understanding that others will do the same for them when they submit their own work to a journal. There is a finite pool of suitably qualified researchers and the system is finely balanced. Journal editors appreciate this and therefore do not want to upset the balance and do not want to do anything that might encourage redundant publication and cause publication bias.

For this reason the ICMJE states “Most biomedical journals will not consider manuscripts that are simultaneously being considered by other journals. Among the principal considerations that have led to this policy are: 1) the potential for disagreement when two (or more) journals claim the right to publish a manuscript that has been submitted simultaneously to more than one; and 2) the possibility that two or more journals will unknowingly and unnecessarily undertake the work of peer review and editing of the same manuscript, and publish the same article. However, editors of different journals may decide to simultaneously or jointly publish an article if they believe that doing so would be in the best interest of the public's health (ICMJE, 2008).”

Similarly, this journal requires that “The submission has not been previously published, nor is it before another journal for consideration (or an explanation has been provided in Comments to the Editor) AJTCAM, 2004.”

Slow decisions can make it tempting to submit a paper to more than one journal at a time, and some authors have even argued that this should be allowed (Torgerson et al., 2005). But, if you are tempted, consider the danger. especially if you work in a highly specialised field, there is a reasonable chance that both journals will send your paper to the same reviewer, who will then alert the editor to the fact that it has been submitted to several journals. Editors take this so seriously that they may ban authors from submitting to their journal if they have broken the rules. In most cases, authors cannot plead ignorance of the conventions, because this requirement is usually spelled out in the instructions to authors and the journal may even require authors to sign a declaration that the manuscript is not being considered elsewhere, either in the covering letter or as part of an electronic submission process. In the case of redundant publications, the editor may issue a notice of duplicate publication, naming the authors concerned, and the journal that published the paper after it had appeared elsewhere may retract it. The notice of retraction will appear in the journal, and the editor may also inform the authors' institution. The COPE flowchart on redundant publication recommends that editors should “consider publishing [a] statement of redundant publication or retraction” and also should “consider informing author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance” at the authors' institution (COPE, 2008).

As the 17<sup>th</sup> century Swiss philosopher Madame de Staehl is supposed to have said ‘search for the truth is the noblest occupation of man, its publication is a duty’. All researchers should seek to publish their work in peer-reviewed journals, but to publish it more than once (without a special reason and clear cross-referencing) is not acceptable.

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