Workshop Report
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FAME GUIDELINES AND TOOLS FOR JOURNAL EDITORS

How were these documents developed?
These documents were developed by participants at the FAME meeting in Entebbe, Uganda, 18-21 April 2005. FAME acknowledges the support of INASP and WHO for funding this meeting, and Liz Wager (Sideview, UK) who acted as facilitator.

Who are these documents for?
These documents are designed for editors of peer-reviewed medical journals, in particular FAME members.

How should the documents be used?
The aims and traditions of journals vary greatly, so it is often inappropriate to aim for standardization. Editors should therefore use these documents flexibly, as templates to be adapted for their individual journals, or as a resource for improving existing documents or procedures. For example, the tool for selecting reviewers provides a scoring system, but we have not suggested a minimum score or threshold for identifying reviewers. Similarly, the letter suggested in the guidelines on getting reviewers to deliver reports on time is designed to be adapted to editors' personal preferred styles and levels of formality.

We recognise that many FAME journals already have guidelines for reviewers, therefore this document might be used to review existing guidelines and improve them.

The documents are not copyrighted and we encourage editors to copy, adapt and distribute them as they wish.

What do the documents cover?
There are four documents on the peer-review process:
FAME tool for selecting reviewers
FAME guidelines on increasing the number of reviewers
FAME suggestions for journal guidelines for reviewers
FAME guidelines on getting reviewers' reports on time

There is one document on the quality of submissions:
FAME guidelines on improving the quality of submissions

Who wrote these documents?
The documents were developed after discussion by all participants at the Entebbe meeting. Initial drafts were prepared by the following participants:

FAME tool for selecting reviewers
Syed Bokhari *(Pakistan Dental Journal)*, Yousif Kordofani *(Juba Medical Journal)*, James Tumwine *(African Health Sciences)*

FAME guidelines on increasing the number of reviewers
Mercy Newman *(Ghana Medical Journal)*, Oluwabunmi Olapade Olaopa *(African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences)*, Michael Kawooya *(African Health Sciences)*

FAME suggestions for journal guidelines for reviewers
Leonard Mboera *(Tanzania Health Research Bulletin)*, Mahdi Shamad *(Sudanese Journal of Dermatology)*, Alemayehu Worku *(Ethiopian Journal of Health Development)*

FAME guidelines on getting reviewers' reports on time
Clement O. Adewunmi *(African Journal of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicines)*, Adamson Muula *(Malawi Medical Journal)*, Eligius Lyamuya *(Tanzania Medical Journal)*

FAME guidelines on improving the quality of submissions
Edith Certain (WHO, Geneva), Ude Ezepue *(Orient Journal of Medicine, Nigeria)*, Fidelis Morfaw (WHO, Congo), J-P van Niekerk *(South African Medical Journal)*, Ruth Pfau *(Botswana Medical Journal)*, Ben Ugwu *(West African Journal of Medicine)*

A. FAME suggestions for journal guidelines for reviewers
Entebbe, April 2005

1. **Topic:** Is the topic relevant for the journal?

2. **Title:** Does the title reflect the contents of the article?

3. **Originality:** Is the work original? (If not, please give references)

4. **Abstract:** To what extent does the abstract reflect aspects of the study: background, objectives, methods, results and conclusions?

5. **Introduction / Background:** Is the study rationale adequately described?

6. **Objectives:** Are the study objectives clearly stated?

7. **Methodology:** (please provide examples and evidence for your response, do not simply answer yes or no)

   7.1 To what extent is the study design appropriate for the objectives?

   7.2 Is the sample size appropriate and adequately justified?

   7.3 Is the sampling technique appropriate and adequately described?

   7.4 How well are the methods and instruments of data collection described?

   7.5 How well are techniques to minimize bias/errors documented?

8. **Ethical Consideration:** Are issues related to ethics adequately described? (For human studies, has ethical approval been obtained?)

9. **Analysis and results:**
   9.1 Are the methods of data analysis appropriate?

   9.2 Is statistical significance well documented (e.g. as confidence intervals or P-value)?

   9.3 Are the findings presented logically with appropriate displays and explanations?

10. **Discussion:**
    10.1 How well are the key findings stated?

    10.2 To what extent have differences or similarities with other studies been discussed and reasons for these given?

    10.3 Are the implications of these findings clearly articulated?

11. **Conclusion(s):**
    Do the results justify the conclusion(s)?

12. **References :**
    12.1 Are they appropriate and relevant?
    12.2 Are they up to date?
    12.3 Do they follow the recommended style?
    12.4 Are there any errors?

13. **Writing:** Is the paper clearly written?
13.1   Are there problems with the grammar / spelling / language?
13.2   Is the paper presented logically (e.g. correct information in each section, logical flow of arguments)?

Recommendations
Please select **one** of the following recommendations:
1. The paper can be published as it is
2. The paper can be published with minor revisions as suggested
3. The paper can be published with major revisions as suggested
   If you choose this option, do you want to review the revised paper? Yes/No
4. The paper is more suitable for publication in another journal
5. The paper is not acceptable to be published in this journal
6. Other (explain) ....

Do you want your name revealed to the author? Yes / No

Please state any relevant competing interests

Please use a separate sheet to provide specific suggestions to improve the manuscript

B. FAME tool for selecting reviewers
Entebbe, April 2005

Explanatory note

This tool was developed to help journals select suitable reviewers. However, since selection criteria vary between journals, no minimum qualifying score is suggested. Editors should apply the tool flexibly, bearing in mind that several studies have shown that younger (therefore less well qualified or experienced) researchers often produce the best reviews. We also recommend that journals monitor reviewer performance and, once a review has been produced, information on the quality and timeliness of the review(s) should be added to the database/ file.

In most cases, this form will be completed from information extracted from the reviewer's CV, rather than directly by the reviewer. We suggest, when approaching a potential reviewer, the editor should request the CV plus information about which journals the person has reviewed for (since this may not be on the CV).

C. FAME tool for selecting reviewers

Name _____

Date of birth_____

Institution _____

Address_____

_____

Phone _____ Mobile _____

Fax _____

Email _____ Web _____

Education/ Specialisation/ Training

1. Basic qualifications (eg MB BS or BSc)_____ (1point)
2. Postgraduate qualifications _____ (1 point for each qualification)
3. Specialisation / training in research methodology _____ (1 point)

Publications in peer-reviewed journals within the last 5 years

4. Number of primary research publications as lead/ first author published in the last 5 years
   a. Up to 5 _____ (1 point)
   b. 6-10 _____ (2 points)
   c. 11-15 _____ (3 points)
   d. >15 _____ (4 points)

5. Number of primary research publications as co-author published in the last 5 years
   a. Up to 5 _____ (1 point)
   b. 6-10 _____ (2 points)
   c. 11-15 _____ (3 points)
   d. >15 _____ (4 points)

6. Number of other publications (e.g. case reports, letters) published in the last 5 years
   a. Up to 5 _____ (1 point)
   b. 6-10 _____ (2 points)
   c. 11-15 _____ (3 points)
   d. >15 _____ (4 points)

Reviewer experience

7. Journals reviewed for (list journal titles)

D. FAME guidelines on increasing the number of reviewers
Entebbe, April 2005

There are several reasons why journals may have insufficient reviewers on their database. These include:

1. Poor development of reviewers at local institutions due to:
    a. Rote learning and poor analytical skills from early education that carries through undergraduate and postgraduate education
    b. Not enough exposure to research subjects that would produce good reviewers
    c. Knowledge-application disconnect in everyday work
2. Few opportunities to recruit reviewers from local institutions:
    a. Poor research fellows and progression of research fellows
3. Journal databases problems:
    a. Small or incomplete databases
    b. Poor networking between journals locally and internationally
    c. Incompatible databases
4. Lack of incentives for reviewers:
    a. No recognition by institutions and/or journal
    b. Poor interpersonal relationships between reviewers and editors
    c. Lack of evidence and evidence-based strategies to increase number of reviewers

Strategies for increasing reviewer numbers

1. Journal recognition of reviewers
2. Presentation of journal's reviewer problems to local institutions / parent society
3. Mentoring of young reviewers
4. Getting authors to suggest reviewers
5. Getting editorial board to suggest reviewers
6. Database organization
7. Training of editors in how to attract new reviewers
8. Ensuring 'reviewer-friendly' editorial policies
9. Studies on evaluating the review process
10. Curriculum review / change (e.g. incorporating critical evaluation skills into medical training or other university courses)

Actions to increase reviewer recruitment / retention (or reduce reviewer refusals)

1. Journal recognition
    b. Yearly listing of reviewers in journal
    c. Seasonal greeting (e.g. Christmas) cards to reviewers from journal

    d. Certificate of long service to reviewers (e.g. after 3-5 years of efficient service)

    e. Token gifts/ subscription subsidies/ processing fee subsidies for reviewers

    f. Public acknowledgement from journal's institution / parent organization

    g. Invited contributions to journal e.g. editorials, review articles (i.e. asking reviewers to become authors)

2. Liaison with institutions / parent organization (e.g. journal's editorial base, national medical associations)

    a. Newsletter

    b. Presentation on reviewer issues at faculty / organization meetings

    c. Update on journal activities

    d. Identification of current problems including reviewer problems

        i. Number of reviewers

        ii. Specialty

        iii. Quality of reviews

        iv. Recognition of reviewers

    e. Suggestions for improvements

    f. Ask for contribution / advice from faculty / organization members

    g. Any other business: curriculum review, supervision of postgraduate students, mentoring

3. Steps to database organization

    a. Obtain relevant software and hardware

    b. Design database format *(see FAME reviewer selection form)*

    c. Ask potential reviewers to supply CVs + list of journals they already review for

    d. Collect and collate data on reviewers

    e. Enter data on database
(this might involve hiring data entry/data management staff)

    f. Analyse data (identify gaps)

    g. Share data and network with other journals locally and internationally

    h. Regular audit/update of database (include data on reviewer performance)

E. FAME guidelines on getting reviewers' reports on time
Entebbe, April 2005

The quality of a journal depends, in part, on the performance of its reviewers.
Reviewers may fail to deliver reports for a number of reasons.
The reviewer:
a   is too busy to respond in time
b   has limited knowledge of some aspects of the paper
c   has personal problems
d   has communication challenges

e   has technical problems (e.g. computer crashes, viruses)
f   is apathetic.

The following actions may help:
1   sending reviewer reminders (preferably by both e-mail and hard copy)
2   setting precise deadlines
3   journals having CVs of reviewers (before selecting reviewer)
4   careful selection of reviewers (see FAME tool for reviewer selection)
5   performance evaluation.

The letter to request review should contain the following elements:
- clear deadline for return of review
- MS title / MS number
- reviewer checklist (e.g. FAME guidelines)
- if supplying a form/checklist, indicate how other/ additional comments should be included
- preferred response format (e.g. e-mail, fax)
- request to inform journal if reviewer has problems meeting deadline or other reasons why s/he cannot deliver the review
- any competing interests that might be relevant
- explanation that editor would prefer the reviewer to be realistic and refuse than to accept and then not deliver the review
- request that, if the reviewers are unable to review the paper, they suggest some alternative reviewers

Deadlines and reminders
Template letter / e-mail which could be adapted for individual journal use

> *MS title / MS ref number / date MS sent to reviewer*
> *Date [of letter]*
> *Dear Reviewer,*
> *Could you please confirm whether you have received the MS #.*
> *If you have received the MS, we would appreciate if you would let us have your comments on this by DATE.*
> *If we have not received this by DATE, we will assume that you are unable to review this MS. In this case, please return the MS to the editorial office. [for paper copies]*
> *Yours*
> *Editor*

Reviewer recruitment

1   General invitation to act as reviewer e.g.:
        e-mail, phone call, letter, fax
        (choice of method will depend on time, cost, etc.)

2   If reviewer agrees, editor requests CV showing area of specialistion and
        interest, list of publications, qualifications
        [* ? use FAME tool for reviewer selection]

3   Journal applies its own selection criteria to decide whether or not to use this reviewer

4   Editor records reviewer details on file/database

Reviewer performance evaluation

1   Measuring timeliness/promptness of response
        e.g. met deadline / missed deadline

2   Quality of review
        e.g. whether reviewer justified comments
        whether reviewer appreciates journal requirements
        if journal supplies a checklist, has the reviewer followed this?

F. FAME guidelines on improving the quality of submissions
Entebbe, April 2005

Journal editors might consider the following options to raise the standard of submissions.

1   Mentoring

Definition
A process by which an experienced individual helps a less experienced person to acquire scientific writing / editing skills.

Basic assumptions
1) Trainee is already admitted to research institution (for new authors)
2) Mentor is:
   a) qualified
   b) active in writing / publishing / editing
   c) available, accessible and willing
   d) positive towards mentoring

Content
1) Familiarization with journal article structure / format
2) Critical analysis of materials (e.g. other articles in journal)
3) Writing exercises

Source of mentors and trainees
1) Faculties/research institutions
2) Professional associations (e.g. national medical associations)

Mentor rewards
Journals should consider a scheme for rewarding mentors (e.g. subscription subsidies, processing fee subsidies, recognition in journal, invitation to join editorial board).

Implementation
1) Editors / editorial boards set up mentoring by linking mentors to inexperienced (unpublished) authors or those whose manuscripts do not meet journal standards but could be improved (e.g. low quality presentation rather than poor underlying research)
2) Training is driven by editors
3) Editors could approach faculties / institutions / professional associations offering assistance for students / members through position paper, CD, workshops, talks

2   Training in scientific writing

1) Journals or organization such as FAME could offer 'train the trainer' workshops and training material (e.g. CD / slide set) to develop individuals who, in turn, train other trainers or writers
   - Initial workshop could be at African regional level (e.g. South, West) respecting differing needs (e.g. language) cascading out to:
   - National / zones within countries
   - Individual faculties / institutions

2) Training objectives
   - Writing papers acceptable to peer-reviewed journals
   - Specific – structure, style, title, abstracts, tables/diagrams, references etc.

Photo credit: Tumwine, J.

Participants at the FAME workshop, Entebbe, Uganda 18-21 April 2005

A photo album to the Entebbe workshop can be found at website:
http://www.who.int/tdr/publications/entebbe/default.htm

More information on FAME can be found at:
http://www.who.int/tdr/publications/publications/fame_entebbe.htm