

EDITORIAL

Desk-rejection of manuscripts: A necessary step for quality and efficiency

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Journal publication is essential to science and academia, relying on the collaboration of authors, reviewers, and editors. As gatekeepers, editors play a crucial task in ensuring the quality of publications while balancing with efficiency. This responsibility often requires editorial triage to determine which manuscripts should proceed to the peer review stage. Thus, some manuscripts are not subjected to peer review and are rejected without receiving peer review comments. These are referred to as desk rejections, [1] which occur in around half of the instances [2]. The common causes of such rejections are the mismatch between the manuscripts and the journal's scope, non-compliance with author guidelines, and poor readability (in our case, unclear storytelling and subpar English) [3].

We have examined the causes of desk rejections in the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Journal. In 2024, we received 223 submissions; of which 85 (38%) were desk-rejected before reaching the peer review process. This rate is not unexpected, as high-standing journals, such as the New England Journal of Medicine and the British Medical Journal, experience desk rejections of 80%–90% [4]. Conducting an audit of the triage process is essential to inform potential authors and prevent unnecessary time and effort from being wasted on both sides.

The major reasons for desk rejections are shown in Figure 1. The rejections were largely due to formatting and preparation issues, such as non-compliance with the IMRD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion), as well as the failure to submit the necessary documents, including the

EQUATOR (Enhancing the QUALity and Transparency Of health Research) checklists [5]. It appears that a substantial proportion of the authors do not carefully review the submission guidelines [6]. Additionally, some submissions lacked institutional ethical approval. In a few cases, the scientific writing quality was exceptionally poor. Many manuscripts did not meet the fundamental criteria, including word count, the number of data visuals, and the ORCID of the corresponding authors. Although our threshold for initiating peer review was a text similarity index of 15%, we allowed authors with a higher similarity index to revise their manuscripts to an acceptable level before making a final decision. However, submissions having more than 30% similarity index were rejected.

Desk rejections can be frustrating and demotivating for authors, but they enhance journal efficiency and allow authors to submit their manuscripts to other journals more quickly [7]. It is equally important for editors to select appropriate articles that meet essential criteria [8]. There is a notion that journals should allow free-format submissions and handle the formatting later [9]. However, we abandoned this practice because many papers could not be properly formatted due to missing mandatory components, such as ethical clearance and ORCIDs. Additionally, obtaining suitable reviewers and receiving their timely responses has become challenging. Therefore, sending all submissions to peer review creates an unnecessary burden on our reviewers. Regulating the number of manuscripts sent to the peer review helps

Key messages

Desk rejections are frustrating for the authors but necessary for quality and efficiency publications. Major formatting problems and delays in author response to mechanical review comments are the most common causes of the rejections in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Journal. Potential authors could avoid these rejections by paying attention to the submission guidelines and promptly responding to mechanical review comments.

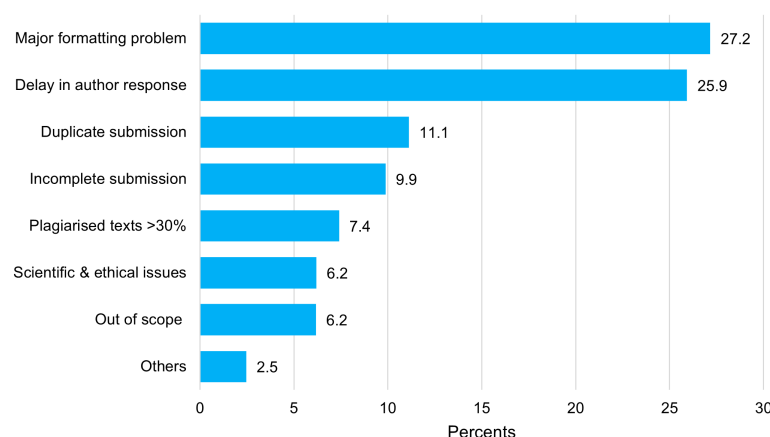


Figure 1 Causes of desk rejections in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical Journal in 2024 (n=85)

maintain an efficient and high-standard peer review process [10]. For Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Journal, we have incorporated a mechanical review stage, through which authors can resubmit updated versions of their manuscripts within a reasonable timeframe to address formatting, word count, text similarity, or readability issues. But, an appropriate and timely response from the authors is the cornerstone of this stage as well as the entire review process. In conclusion, we hope this analysis will help potential authors to reduce the likelihood of desk rejections.

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Conflict of interest

I do not have any conflict of interest

Data availability statement

I confirm that the data supporting the findings of the study will be shared upon reasonable request.

Supplementary file

None

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