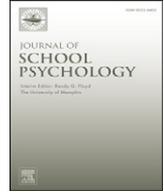




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### Commissioned Article

# Publication criteria and recommended areas of improvement within school psychology journals as reported by editors, journal board members, and manuscript authors<sup>☆</sup>

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#### ABSTRACT

Two online surveys were completed by editors, associate editors, editorial board members, and members or fellows of the Division 16 of the American Psychological Association. These surveys targeted (a) the criteria for a manuscript to be published in school psychology journals, and (b) the components of the peer-review process that should be improved. Although prior surveys have targeted these issues in general, none have been conducted in school psychology or examined differences in perspectives between those who serve in a reviewing capacity or those who have served only in an author capacity. Results identified the most important characteristics for a manuscript submitted for publication to be positively reviewed as well as identified differences in the expectations for such characteristics between novice authors (who do not contribute to the journal editorial process) and those authors who serve the journal editorial process more extensively (e.g., editors and associate editors). In addition, key areas to target for improvement (e.g., reducing potential reviewer bias) within the reviewing process were identified.

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## 1. Introduction

The primary purpose of scholarly journals is to advance the scientific understanding of pertinent issues within the relevant academic area and to serve as a dissemination outlet for these scientific endeavors (Nihalani & Mayrath, 2008). Furthermore, the organizational structure of scholarly journals, when combined with the peer-review process that occurs before the research is published, serves as a quality-control mechanism that provides a reasonable assurance that the research that is published within each journal is high quality and that it meets certain scientific thresholds. Maintaining this quality control facilitates the likelihood that the scholarly journal will continue to serve as the primary communication mode between scientists, professionals, and practitioners. However, questions exist as to whether the publication and peer-review processes operate in such a manner that limits the amount of quality research that is actually published. Whether this criticism is legitimate or not, it is important to examine possible improvements to the peer-review process and to disseminate more information that explains the desirable qualities that make manuscripts more publishable so that more scientific research can be disseminated to expand our knowledge base.

### 1.1. Importance of publishing

Aside from advancing knowledge by reporting valid research results, publishing is important for a variety of other tangible reasons, including the occupational success of people in academia, the reputation of institutions, and the perceived reputation of journals and their sponsoring professional organizations. Publishing allows new doctoral graduates to secure positions; faculty members to receive higher salaries, promotions, and tenure; professors to change jobs; and scholars to gain recognition and prestige (Nihalani & Mayrath, 2008). Often, journal publication and citation counts are publicly reported and used to determine ratings and rankings of the most productive and highest impact authors and institutions, including graduate school programs. For example, Garfield (1992) published lists of the (a) most productive authors and institutions; (b) most cited papers, authors, and institutions; and (c) highest impact authors (along with their institutional affiliation) and institutions, that were all determined by publication or citation counts. In school psychology, Carper and Williams (2004) published a ranking of school psychology training programs based on faculty member publications, and Kranzler, Grapin, and Daley (2011) updated this list of school psychology training programs based on publication output. Such scholarly publications have significant consequences for the reputations of authors and institutions, making publishing a necessity for those in research-intensive institutions, often referred to as the “publish or perish” phenomenon (Campbell, 1982).

### 1.2. Publishing process

The sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010) outlines authors' responsibilities in publishing scholarly articles in four areas: (a) preparing the manuscript, (b) attending to administrative and ethical responsibilities, (c) complying with journal policy requirements, and (d) working with the journal editor, editorial staff, and publisher. These responsibilities cover a broad range of issues, including selecting the appropriate research design to answer the question of interest, providing a strong theoretical rationale for the research hypotheses, using the correct analyses, correctly interpreting the results, using clear writing in the manuscript, and following required formatting within the manuscript. Clearly, there are a significant number of responsibilities that need to be met and a significant number of skills that need to be displayed to produce a manuscript that is appropriate for submission to a scholarly journal. For example, it has been recommended that authors, before submitting a manuscript for review, confirm that the target journal is still appropriate, review the journal editor's guidelines for submission, and proofread their manuscript (see Floyd et al., 2011; Martinez, Floyd, & Erichsen, 2011; Nihalani & Mayrath, 2008).

The submission of a manuscript initiates the peer-review process, which is intended to examine the quality of the manuscript, its relevance to the field, and its appropriateness for the journal (APA, 2010). The peer-review process begins when a manuscript is submitted and the editor or an editorial assistant acknowledges receipt of the manuscript, assigns it a number, and reviews the manuscript for its fit in the journal. On occasion, the editor will reject the manuscript without full review (see Floyd et al.,

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