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GDPR—Things We Hadn’t Thought About

By Hannah Wakley
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John Wiley & Sons
Co-Chair
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Hannah: Towards the end of 2017, I started hearing a mysterious new acronym being muttered around the office. When I eventually found out that GDPR meant General Data Protection Regulation, I assumed it was something for the IT department to worry about and thought no more about it. But then peer-review systems suppliers started talking about getting ready for GDPR, and I suddenly realised that I needed to understand it too.

From a personal point of view, the idea that companies would need my consent to hold any data about me and that I could withdraw my consent at any time sounded like an excellent way to reduce the spam in my inbox and stop unwanted phone calls. However, from an editorial office point of view, it required some thought to make sure we could achieve compliance. After several training sessions and conversations with colleagues, we updated our systems and our policies, and we thought we were prepared. (If anyone needs a reminder, Pam’s excellent ISMTE resource covers many of an editorial office’s GDPR responsibilities.) But since the legislation came into effect last May, I think we’ve all come across some GDPR conundrums that need a bit more thought.

Pam: Before implementing any of the following suggestions, do check with your society or owner or publisher to be sure that they don’t already have policies around these issues. Below are some conundrums that came up whilst I was preparing for the North American ISMTE meeting, questions that were asked in the session, and other questions that have been discussed on the ISMTE listserv. (If you’re not already signed up to the listserv, I recommend it—there are some very interesting conversations happening there!)

Proxy-Registering Reviewers

Pam: People have been concerned about contacting new reviewers. In theory, you are not supposed to contact people without their consent. In fact, I’ve heard stories of journals whose publishers have forbidden them from contacting someone who is not already in their database. We know that our editors simply add people they want to invite, using the little applets that our peer-review systems provide. At The New England Journal of Medicine, we’ve chosen to ignore the situation based on the idea that academics review; it’s an essential part of their role. Someone on the listserv pointed out that our editors were finding the potential reviewers’ emails in PubMed or on websites. This means that we are using public information to contact them, so GDPR doesn’t really apply. I find this quite comforting.

Publishing Reviewer Acknowledgement Lists

Hannah: Many journals publish a list of reviewers in each volume, as a way of acknowledging their contribution to the journal. As Laura Kathleen Brashear at the Journal of Veterinary Emergency & Critical Care pointed out in an email to the ISMTE listserv, we now need to consider whether we should collect consent to publish these names. There was some discussion on the listserv about whether publishing reviewer names could be considered ‘legitimate business’ once reviewers had opted in to the journal privacy policies to use the peer-review system. It was suggested that journals could ensure they were meeting the requirements of GDPR by including a note in their privacy policy about the publication
of names. Eventually, several people resolved that the simplest way forward is to add a note to the automatic thank-you email sent to reviewers when they submit their comments to explain that reviewers’ names are published in the journal and give them the option to contact the editorial office to opt out. This complies with GDPR without placing an extra burden on busy editorial office staff.

Sharing Information in a Portfolio of Journals

Hannah: I work on a portfolio of 11 journals owned by the British Psychological Society (BPS). They all use Editorial Manager to handle peer review, and the sites are linked; they share the user database and letter templates. When a new manuscript is submitted to any of the journals, the system automatically runs a duplicate submission check to show whether the paper has been submitted to any of the other BPS journals. The results are available to editors. If a paper has been rejected by one of the journals and then submitted to another, the new editor will often ask the first editor for a copy of the decision letter to find out why it was rejected. When GDPR came into effect, we suddenly realised we might need to re-think this practice. Following a discussion with our Data Protection Officer, we have now concluded that it will be simplest to add a point to our terms and conditions of submission, which authors have to agree to, explaining that decision letters may be shared with editors of other BPS journals, and they consent to that happening for their paper. This gives authors the opportunity to refuse permission by not submitting.

Rhiannon Bugno from the Biological Psychiatry Journals highlighted another point for journal portfolios to consider in an email to the listserv. They transfer papers from the flagship journal to the second journal, which are both managed by the same group of editors and the same editorial office. The journals use Editorial Manager, which automatically transfers reviewer comments and/or identities (if the reviewers have given their consent via the two separate authorisation questions). The editorial office also used to manually transfer the reviewer information to the “notes” section at the second (receiving) journal for ease of editor workflow, but this was done without regard to reviewers’ responses to the Editorial Manager authorisation questions. However, they have realised that with the arrival of GDPR, they are no longer allowed to do this. First, there is no legitimate business need for the reviewer identities to be accessed by the second journal. Moreover, bypassing the Editorial Manager authorisation questions now results in violation of two other GDPR mandates: transparency and ability to withdraw consent. Thus, their transfer processing at the second journal no longer involves pulling information directly from the flagship journal’s Editorial Manager database. Instead, they now utilize only reviewer information that is transferred via explicit consent using Editorial Manager’s built-in functionality.

Reports

Pam: The GDPR is quite clear on data breaches: They must be reported to the authorities. The most common way we could create a data breach is through the information we download. I realized that the end-of-year statistics reports that I downloaded and used to create graphs for my presentation included the authors’ names, institutions, and email addresses. For this year, I have re-vamped the reports, deleting the institutions and the email addresses. I still have the countries and the names of the authors, but it isn’t ‘personal data’ anymore. I’m considering keeping only the last name of the author. I’d suggest that all editorial offices look at the reports they are running to be sure they don’t contain the GDPR definition of personal information (which is enough information that could be used to trace back to an individual person).

Keep Calm and Carry On

Pam: The GDPR is a complex bit of guidance, from which each country in the European Union is making actual legislation. The general ‘drift’ from the meetings I’ve been to, which have involved many lawyers from entities doing clinical research as well as EU regulators, is that research and the research community is not something the EU regulators are truly worried about. They are more interested in the Facebooks and Googles of this world. We’re still learning, and we should continue to think along those lines. There’s no need to panic about GDPR; just make a good faith effort whilst still doing the business we need to do.
Life Without Journals? Platforms, Preprints, and Peer Review in Scholarly Communications

By Simon Linacre
Director of International Marketing and Development
Cabells

Introduction
For many of those involved in scholarly publishing, to fittingly describe their trade is to paraphrase the famous New York Times tagline, ‘All the News That’s Fit to Print.’ Instead of news of course, publishers print articles submitted by scholars and curated by their editors. Over the course of a year, they complete their volumes with ‘All the Research That’s Fit to Print.’ Since the first printed journal in the 17th century to the modern PDF online, the independence and rigor of peer review has maintained this steadfast principle through multiple generations of technological development.

As we approach 2020, the vision of what constitutes scholarly publishing has become more complex, more diverse, and much faster. The unit of the journal is being challenged on a number of fronts by different incentives for authors, different access models, different platforms, and even different forms altogether. This increasingly fractured picture has inspired several people to ask if we are witnessing the demise of the journal, which for editors and journal publishers alike poses a fundamental challenge to their continuing existence.

In the Beginning
At Cabells, we also share this challenge as the chronicler of academic journal publications for over 40 years. Our founder, Dr. David Cabell, began his work with the aim of providing information on journals to researchers, tenure committees, academics, and PhD students in order to assist them in the decision-making process. What began as a printed list providing essential contact information for journals in management disciplines has now grown into scholarly community services that include both the Journal Whitelist and Journal Blacklist, manuscript preparation tools, and a suite of journal metrics. With growing partnerships with both large and small academic publishers, editors, societies, accreditation bodies, and other information databases, Cabells provides accurate, up-to-date information to help all users find key journal information to help them make the right decision in progressing their research or academic careers. For many academics, when once they had a relatively simple choice of which journal they should choose to submit their research articles to, they now have this much more complex picture before them. Depending on where you are based as a scholar, there may be open access (OA) mandates in place directing you to choose OA-only journals or lists of designated journals from your Dean in given subject areas or repositories or platform-based outlets that do not operate like traditional journals at all.

Which prompts the question: What is a journal anyway? The traditional definition refers to a periodical publication in which research on a specific academic discipline is published, where the research presented is preserved indefinitely, is designed to aid discussion, and has been peer-reviewed or refereed. At Cabells, we very much align ourselves to these guiding principles in producing our Whitelist and Blacklist. The Journal Whitelist is a searchable, curated database of critical information about verified and reputable academic journals. It has data for over 11,000 academic journals across 18 disciplines, and each journal selected for inclusion has been evaluated and reviewed by trained specialists to give the academic and research communities a hub of information about journals with a minimum standard for journal quality. These standards are represented by key details around:

- Bibliographic information
- Quality metrics (e.g., Impact Factor)
- Editor contacts
- Submission information
- Open access
• Acceptance rates
• Time to review and publication

The Blacklist, on the other hand, points to key features that do NOT fulfil standards of quality for academic journals. As the only searchable database to identify deceptive and fraudulent journals, it is based on the work done by specialists to identify and analyze over 70 behavioral indicators to flag potentially exploitative or dishonest operations. It has grown massively since its launch in 2017 and now has over 10,000 predatory journals indexed within it. Together with the Journal Whitelist, authors can use these resources to identify the right and wrong journals for them in their disciplines and optimize their decision-making at what is always a crucial point for them in their careers.

Freedom

So, given the importance of such a decision that authors have to make on a regular basis, what support is out there for them at a time when the journal environment has become so complex? The truth is that there is very little, as both technology and policy changes have meant a dizzying array of pathways have opened up for them to follow, although where they lead to is not always clear. Of particular concern for some commentators is the potential for some of the changes to impinge on ‘academic freedom.’ This term in itself is not without controversy, as it can mean different things to different people depending on where you are from and which side of a number of political divides you sit on. However, here is a short list of some areas where there is concern for academic freedom in different parts of the world since 2018:

• In Brazil, academics have promised to resist what they say is a breach of their freedoms by the state after campuses were stormed by police and people arrested for their views following the recent presidential election.
• In Canada, a professor was suspended by his school in the summer after blowing the whistle on colleagues who had published in predatory journals.
• Meanwhile in China, it was reported recently that the head of the elite Peking University was removed from office and replaced by a government representative.
• Scientific network ResearchGate has come under fire for allegedly forcing authors to upload their OA publications rather than share a link to them.
• The consortium of research funders that have come together under Plan S—joined this month by Wellcome and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—has also been challenged for not allowing publication of their funded projects in hybrid OA journals.

Looking at these in the round, it is clear there is a wide range of suspected breaches to academic freedoms. While all such breaches are of course worthy of consideration, it is clear that being arrested just because of the nature of your research or having a member of a ruling party be put in control of your institution poses serious questions for academic freedom.

Talk of academic freedom in the higher education press and social media outlets has been sparked by the so-called Plan S in Europe. Started by a group called cOAlitionS in the Autumn of 2018, it was initially made up of 11 major funders from the United Kingdom, Germany, The Netherlands, and other European countries. Their aim was to mandate all the articles emanating from research they funded to be published in fully OA journals or made OA immediately in relevant repositories. While many have supported the push to greater OA, and other funders have since joined the group, others have cautioned against some outcomes of their policy, such as the restriction of choice for the academic of which journal they should publish in.

In essence, there seems to be a huge disconnect on both sides. While some OA advocates stress the fundamental need to make funded research openly accessible, some academics stress the fundamental need to choose which journal to publish in. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive, and it may well be that both publishers and Plan S alike evolve their policies into a joined-up approach that will satisfy both of the concerns expressed. In recent years, publication channels have exploded in number and variety, but research quality remains absolute and a further fundamental need for scholarly endeavor. Academics, universities, and funders alike are unlikely to lose sight of that or any of the other academic freedoms that are currently under threat.

Options

From the author’s perspective, it seems that much of the issue boils down to choice, and despite the complex picture many of them see before them, there is a good deal of choice out there as long as they do some detective work and utilize the research skills they have to ‘research their research’ and find a suitable outlet. In essence, there are two major considerations to help them make the optimal choice for themselves and for those who have picked up the tab for the research in the first place.
Political Considerations

Any faculty member will have some guidance from their institution and/or funders about what an appropriate outlet for their published research is. Politically, it makes sense for the individual researcher to take this on board, but that guidance can differ hugely. For some, it may be a simple ‘any journal as long as it has an Impact Factor’ or ‘any journal as long as it is peer reviewed.’ Using the Cabells Journal Whitelist researchers can see, for example, that for the 11,000 journals indexed, over 6,500 have an Impact Factor with an average score of 2.173 or that over 8,000 are blind or double-blind peer reviewed.

Where it has become complicated is when a funder, institution, or government has put a mandate on what types of outlets are acceptable. In the United Kingdom, if a faculty member wants their article to be ultimately put forward as one of the four assessed pieces representing their work on behalf of their university for the multi-year Research Excellence Framework, since 2018 the article has to be made OA within three months of publication, either as an OA article or available in the author’s institutional repository. In other countries, it may be the funder or individual institution that has similar mandates in place. Either way, it is now incumbent on the author to understand there is a mandate in the first place and wade through the maze of technical and legal jargon from mandators and publishers alike, before hopefully plumping for the right outlet.

With Plan S, this decision can become trickier due to the specific mandate placed on those receiving funding from its signatories. If, for example, you are a researcher that has received funding from UKRI in the United Kingdom, then you need to publish the article in a ‘pure’ OA journal, i.e., one that only publishes so-called ‘Gold’ OA articles, where typically the author pays for publication. Of the 11,000+ journals indexed on the Whitelist, just over 10% are listed as ‘Gold,’ compared to two-thirds that are listed as ‘Hybrid,’ where OA articles are published alongside subscription access articles and which are seemingly not allowed under Plan S stipulations.

Strategic Considerations

Having considered the political implications of the publishing decision, authors also have to factor in more strategic elements into their choice of outlet. Again, this will differ depending on the individual researcher or research team, but for most their career and reputation and that of their institution will be paramount, and as such they will want to publish in the highest-quality publication possible. Journals with high Impact Factors still hold sway here, as will journals that have a good CiteScore through Scopus or are included on one of the many lists promulgated by universities and academic associations.

The new kids on the block here, which are likely to gain further attention as a result of Plan S, are the OA megajournals and platforms such as PLoS, Frontiers, or F1000. Promising Gold OA publication and fast, with only minimal article checks to guarantee ‘sound science,’ they offer authors a fast and often cheaper alternative than traditional OA offers through journals. What they lack, particularly in the case of a platform such as F1000, is an Impact Factor or more recognizable quality measures, instead providing article-level metrics and open, post-publication peer review that allow the user to make up their own mind as to the quality and importance of the research. It remains to be seen if such platforms will gain traction, and it is very much up to the author as to whether this new model of publication fits in with their own over-arching strategy.

The Future

The emergence of megajournals and platforms are part of a wider fragmentation of scholarly communication, which is also seeing greater use of so-called altmetrics and other means to judge the wider impact of research against certain grand challenges, as well as the development of what might be called micropublishing as universities and funders decide to take up the mantle for themselves and publish their own research through OA channels. These tectonic shifts have led several people, quite understandably, to question the need for journals at all.
However, the mistake in making this assumption is to envisage one state of affairs applying to all states of affairs, and as we have seen in the many different parameters around the world, not only do things in academia tend to move slowly, there are hundreds of different things moving at the same time, all at varying speeds. While Plan S has moved forward quickly with implications for some STEM researchers, for those in social science and humanities without funding or mandates, the picture is very much the same. While it would be no surprise to see some consolidation of journal numbers in the longer term and accelerated work on more relevant journal- and article-level metrics, the picture is likely to remain crowded and complex for authors into the future, with greater choice hopefully available, but only accessible with a good deal of spade work on their part.

Call for Submissions

Are you a fan of EON? Do you have an idea for an article, column, or special section? EON is currently accepting submissions for our 2019 issues. Contact our editorial office today for more information.
The growing practice of preprinting (that is, publicly sharing manuscripts via online servers prior to the completion of journal-organized peer review) is accelerating the dissemination of scholarly research in many fields. While multiple factors contribute to researchers’ comfort levels with the practice, journal policies influence many authors’ decision to submit a preprint (Figure 1).

Fortunately, many journals are now changing their policies to allow or even encourage preprint posting, but navigating journal websites to find this information can be difficult and time-consuming. The SHERPA/RoMEO database provides a fantastic way for authors to rapidly check whether a particular journal allows preprint archiving. However, policies themselves are often much more complex than their representation in SHERPA/RoMEO, including clauses about versions of the manuscript that may be posted, acceptable servers, licenses that can be applied to preprints, and what media coverage is acceptable. In the following sections, we provide a sampling of the variation among journals (emphasis ours).

**Version of Preprint That Can Be Posted**
- At the Journal of Clinical Oncology, “no revisions should be posted to the preprint server during the manuscript’s peer review process.” ([JCO Journal Policies](#))
- “Posting a manuscript to a preprint server while under consideration for eNeuro is allowed up until the point of acceptance.” ([eNeuro General Information for Authors](#))

**Types of Servers That Can Be Used**
- The Royal Society of Chemistry journals allow deposition with “non-commercial repositories” such as ArXiv and ChemRxiv. ([RSC Processes and Policies](#))
- Development “supports authors who wish to post primary research manuscripts on community preprint servers such as bioRxiv.” ([Development Journal Policies](#))

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**Figure 1.** Survey question regarding influence of journal policies on authors’ preprint behavior. Survey conducted in early 2016 with 392 responses. More details at asapbio.org/survey.
Preprint Licensing Policy

- The Institute of Physics say that authors may post the preprint, provided that “[i]t is not made available un-der any open access or Creative Commons Licence.” (IOP Publishing Support)
- With FASEB Journal, preprint “submissions posted to preprint servers with an open access license [Creative Commons licenses] are allowed, but authors will be required—without exception—to pay the Journal’s open access fee as a condition of acceptance.” (FASEB Journal Editorial Policies)

The vast majority of journals place no restrictions on preprint licenses, and some journals (e.g., PLOS ONE) select a CC BY license for users posting to bioRxiv via the journal. See ASAPbio’s FAQ on preprint licensing for more information.

Community Feedback Policy (Will Comments on the Preprint Be Considered by Editors?)

- FASEB Journal “reserves the right—but is not obligated—to consider the comments made to manuscripts posted to preprint servers and factor these comments into final decisions at any stage of the peer review process.” (FASEB Journal Editorial Policies)
- At eLife, “Editors will primarily base their decision on the content of your submission, but public feedback on the work (positive or negative) might be taken into account. If a full submission is invited, you are advised to be open about the existence of such feedback in your cover letter.” (eLife Author Instructions)
- “PLOS encourages editors to consider comments and feedback available on the preprint record to inform their editorial decision, and where relevant, editors may incorporate those comments in their editorial feedback to authors.” (PLOS ONE “Preprints” page)

Most journals do not list any such policy.

Preprint Citation Policy

- In the example references they provide, Nucleic Acids Research includes the wording “pre-print: not peer-reviewed” at the end of a sample preprint reference listed. (NAR “Preparing Your Manuscript”)
- For Nature Research journals, “Preprints may be cited in the reference list.” (Nature Research journals’ policies on preprints and conference proceedings)

Many journals do not list a formal policy.

Does the Journal Link to the Preprint Version?

- “Now, to document and help readers trace the complete publication record, authors are invited to vol-untarily provide a footnote for their [Biophysical Journal] article referencing their preprint in bioRxiv or arXiv, including the DOI number and the date the initial manuscript was deposited.” (BJ editorial on changes as of 2017)
- “If a manuscript with a concurrent bioRxiv preprint is accepted for publication in PLOS ONE, the preprint and published article will link to each other when the article appears online.” (PLOS ONE “Preprints” page)

Most journals do not list any such policy.

Media Coverage of Preprints

- The Royal Society journals say they “employ a strict embargo policy where the reporting of a scientific article published in one of our journals by the media is embargoed until the day of publication. The media should not report on a preprint or postprint article if it is under consideration or accepted for publication by one of our journals until the day of official publication.” (Royal Society “Preprints, Postprints and Embargoes” policy)
- “PLOS does not embargo work that has been made available as a preprint. Authors may address questions about the preprint from the media before publication in PLOS Medicine but are asked to stress that the work is undergoing peer review and may change as a result. Authors should not disclose the journal where the work is under consideration until the work has been accepted for publication and assigned a publication date. We advise authors and institutions against seeking publicity and press coverage at the preprint stage. Conclusions may be toned down as the result of peer review and premature coverage may inaccurately reflect findings. In addition, while prior publicity in the media will not affect decisions to publish work in a PLOS journal, it may affect decisions to publish in another journal. We recommend that authors and institutions distribute press releases for work posted as a
preprint at or after the time of publication of the article.” *(PLOS Medicine “Press and Media” page)*

- “Authors of papers under consideration at Development who have posted their paper to a preprint server are welcome to engage in community discussion about their paper (through commenting on the preprint server or, for example, the Company’s preprint highlighting service preLights). Preprinted articles accepted for publication in Development can still be highlighted through press releases, but can not be subject to press embargo.” *(Development Journal Policies)*

**Scooping Protection Policy**

- “Scooping Protection has now been extended to also apply from the day of posting a manuscript on a recognized preprint server in the same form as the manuscript submitted to *The EMBO Journal*, provided the manuscript is submitted to the journal within 4 months of posting.” *(EMBO Journal Author Guidelines)*

Most journals do not list any such policy.

The above examples paint a complicated picture, but the exercise of structuring this information permits the survey, quantification, and comparison of the full range of policies in each specific area, offering benefits to many stakeholders.

Editors and publishers can use structured policy information to survey and compare the approaches of journals in their own subfield, gain inspiration for establishing or revising their instructions to authors, and unify the policies across their own journals. The exercise may also bring to light common policy categories and help to highlight considerations more at the fringe of what an author would otherwise be aware of (for example, scooping protection).

For the reasons outlined above and in Figure 2, we want to see this kind of information available and easily searchable for every journal. Toward that end, we collaborated with others to initiate TRANSPOSE, a grassroots effort to build a database of journal policies in these and other areas, including policies on co-reviewers and which elements of the peer-review process are open to public evaluation. The current state of collected policies on preprints can be seen on an ASAPbio-hosted TRANSPOSE preprint policy records page (note that some rare policy columns are hidden by default). We plan to make these easy to search, so that confusion around journal policies is no longer a barrier to preprinting. And to make policies easier for authors to understand and comply with, we plan to develop a resource of suggested wording or model preprint policies that editors

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**Figure 2. Rationale for an easily searchable database of journal policies on peer review and preprinting.**

*Icons designed by Freepik and Eucalyph via Flaticon*
can use or adapt to keep their own practices on the cutting edge.

Anyone can contribute to expand the TRANSPOSE database and help researchers make quick yet informed decisions about the submission of their manuscript. Please feel free to add your own journal’s policies to the crowdsourced data form. If you are interested in developing your journal’s preprinting policies, please email us at transpose-publishing@googlegroups.com. We also welcome feedback on the project and suggestions for how to share the information in a way that would be useful to you.

ISMTE Local Groups have formed through the efforts of members who would like to meet with peers and colleagues in their local area for networking and discussion. Participation is not limited to ISMTE members, and the only cost associated with participation will be your meal, if the group meets at a restaurant.

Active Groups:
- Australia
- Boston, MA
- Denver, CO
- Heidelberg, Germany
- Kathmandu, Nepal
- London, UK
- New York, NY
- North Carolina - Research Triangle Park
- Oxford, UK
- Pacific Coast, USA
- Rochester, NY
- Russia
- Tokyo, Japan
- Washington, DC

Visit the ISMTE Local Groups page to join a local group or to find more information.

Start 2019 off on the right foot by renewing your ISMTE membership today!

ISMTE Members Are:
- connected to a network of peers, publishers, vendors, potential clients, and employers
- learning from the experience of other members
- training and mentoring others
- involved at the ground level of a growing organization

Click here to renew your membership, and don’t forget to tell your colleagues and friends about the benefits of joining ISMTE!
The importance of reporting guidelines to improve the readability, transparency, and reproducibility in research is well recognized. Many journals have policies in place to encourage or even require that completed reporting guideline checklists and/or flowcharts be included at manuscript submission. Increasingly, these supplemental materials are being published alongside accepted manuscripts.

For many years, The Journal of Pediatrics has encouraged authors to use reporting guidelines in their research. As of August 1, 2018, we began requiring that authors submit a completed checklist and flow diagram for randomized trials (CONSORT) and meta-analyses (PRISMA). Authors are strongly encouraged to submit completed checklists for other relevant guidelines. For accepted manuscripts, checklists are published as online-only supplementary material.

Working with our editors, we researched reporting guidelines and reviewed other journals’ guidelines and author instructions. The EQUATOR (Enhancing the QUAlity and Transparency Of health Research) Network site provided a wealth of information and was a key resource. Their “How to integrate reporting guidelines in your journal’s workflow” toolkit was extremely useful and helped us develop an action plan. In addition to promoting the use of reporting guidelines, we wanted to take an educational approach and provide resources for our authors.

We discussed the various reporting guidelines and which ones were used most often based on the types of articles submitted to our journal. In recent years, our editors have increased their focus on clinical trial registration for randomized controlled trials; however, making sure the authors are compliant and have correctly reported the required information can be difficult. Details such as the trial registration number and dates of patient enrollment did not always appear in the same place in the manuscript, and we had an inconsistent policy about what to do with studies that were registered late.

To make it easier on the editorial office and the editors, we decided to query the authors at the point of submission so that we could collect trial registration information in one place (Figure 1). The questions pertain mostly to clinical trials, so if the authors are not submitting a study that involved a clinical trial, they can simply skip this step. The last question asks the authors to list a reporting guideline if one was used and again encourages the use of reporting guidelines and provides a link to the EQUATOR Network.

When new submissions come in, the editorial assistants can easily check the Details page to see if the authors have filled out clinical trial information. If the study is a clinical trial, they check for the accompanying CONSORT flow diagram and CONSORT checklist, which are required. This may also flag inconsistent dates, such as late trial registration if the trial was registered after patient enrollment began. Manuscripts can be sent back to the authors to provide an explanation or be assigned to an associate editor with a note to double check the trial registration information.

When uploading submission items, authors can select “Reporting Guideline Checklist” as a file type. Having a separate file type provides clarity for the editorial office, editors, and production staff. Any checklists submitted with the manuscript are published as online-only supplementary material if an article is accepted.

In addition to the instructions included in the editorial system, we communicated our policy changes through several avenues. Our author guidelines were updated to reflect the changes, and we also included a table listing examples of common types of studies and corresponding reporting guidelines. We published an Editors’ Perspective piece, a short note explaining the policy update and our reasoning. We also posted on our Facebook and Twitter
pages, making sure to tag the EQUATOR Network and use relevant hashtags (i.e., #reportingguidelines, #RCTs). It was exciting to get such positive, immediate feedback (Figure 2).

Collecting this information at submission, especially the information required for studies reporting clinical trials, has made the process more efficient for the editorial office and our editors. It is easier to see if a trial was registered and if the dates of patient enrollment match up. Our editors have also commented that they are pleased to see other reporting guideline checklists being used and uploaded, which we feel is a direct result from explicitly encouraging authors to use these resources.

Prior to our updated policy, the editors handled issues such as late trial registration or no trial registration on a case-by-case basis. Now we have a firm policy that all studies reporting clinical trials must meet the established requirements.

As of this writing, about six months after the implementation of the updated policy, four manuscripts have been rejected at submission due to late trial registration and four manuscripts have been rejected at submission because the trial was not registered. Although we do not have comparative data, we believe that these steps have helped streamline our workflow. Because we are able to screen for clinical trial registration requirements before the manuscript is assigned, we do not run the risk of having a manuscript be sent for peer review only to have it be rejected due to a concern about clinical trial registration.

We hope that these policy changes, which were relatively simple to implement and favorably received, lead to increased transparency in the research we publish and more widespread awareness and use of reporting guidelines.
Working with Figures

By Monica Leigh
Senior Managing Editor
KWF Editorial

At six months following the annual ISMTE North American Conference, we thought it would be a good time for a refresher on figure handling for those struggling with this daunting task in the new year. My colleague, Lindsey Mitchell, and I presented on working with authors to improve their figures at the conference. Here are our best tips for getting the high-quality images you want for your publication.

Raster Versus Vector Images and the Basics of Resolution

Raster images are made up of pixels, or individual points. When we talk about “dpi,” we are referring to “dots per inch.” This gives a measure of the quality, or resolution, for the figure and is literally the number of pixels per inch in the digital image to be printed. (Technically, dpi refers to printer dots per inch. Today, the term is often misused because we really mean ppi, or pixels per inch. When we say we want a photo that is 300 dpi, we really mean 300 ppi.1 But because dpi is the more commonly used term, I have retained it here.) The more points, the better, leading to higher resolution for a figure. Common file types for pixel-based figures are TIFF, JPG, PNG, BMP, and GIF.

If you take that figure and expand it to a larger size, the individual points will stretch. Therefore, the fewer number of points you have to expand, the lower the resolution of the image once it is expanded. This is called artificially inflating the resolution of an image because while you have made the figure bigger, you have not actually improved the quality.

Often, authors do not understand this concept. When you ask them for a better figure, they just send you a bigger image. But if all they did was stretch the original image, which was at a low resolution (or fewer dots per inch) to begin with, all they have done is given you a poorer-quality version of the original image. A low-quality image cannot be made into a high-quality image. Instead, they need to export the figure from its original source at a higher resolution, or more dots per inch, increasing the dpi of the figure, and therefore the quality.

Vector images, on the other hand, are not made up of points but rather individual shapes. The great thing about vector images is that they can be resized, or expanded, without losing quality. Because of this, these types of files are often preferred. The most common file type for vector images is EPS, and they can also be created in, and therefore exported from, PowerPoint (PPT) and PDF.

Compression and Quality

File types that are not preferred are often those that undergo compression, by nature of the file type, when the file is created, making it harder to enlarge the figures and retain quality. These are often file types used on the Internet where compressed files are ideal. The most common compressed file types are JPG, PNG, BMP, and GIF, all of which are pixel-based images. TIFFs, however, are not compressed, and that is why, if you have a pixelated image, this file type is preferred because it is not automatically compressed when the file is made, making it possible to enlarge the figure for print without losing quality.

The kind of software you’ll want to use for working with figures will depend on the figure itself. If you are working with a rasterized image (pixels), you’ll want to use Adobe Photoshop or GIMP, which are designed to work with raster images. If you use software designed for raster images on a vector image, the program will “rasterize” the vector image and can reduce quality. Software designed for vector images includes Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Acrobat, IrfanView, or EPS Viewer. These will retain the individual shapes the image is made of.

Choosing the Right Software and Converting File Types

Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, and Acrobat DC are programs for which a license must be obtained. They can be expensive, have lots of editing tools, and will likely have more features than most editorial offices need, but there is a robust support network, and the software is continually updated or improved by Adobe.

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1 For more information, see “What is DPP?”, a page contained in an online digital photography resource.
Free programs include GIMP, IrfanView, and EPS Viewer, which have fewer tools but probably enough for editorial office needs. The downside is possibly the lack of support available from the developers, and updates are not as common to improve existing features. As such, they often require additional plug-ins or drivers for added functionality.

Because understanding the nature of figure quality can be confusing for authors, who may manually inflate the dpi of a photo in a program like Photoshop thinking that will satisfy the resolution needs of a journal, it is always best practice to use the zoom function to expand the figure and look closely at image quality. Once the figure is blown up to 200% or more, if the lines are not crisp and clear but are instead blurry and fuzzy, you do not have a high-quality image.

This is often when editorial offices go back and forth with authors, trying to get better-quality images, either because the staff are overburdened, do not have access to needed software, or have a general policy of not editing content for fear of accidentally changing author-intended meaning. If, however, your editorial office staffing, policies, and access to software allows, it is often quicker and easier to ask the authors for the original figure, in whatever format it was originally created, and to export the figure at a high resolution to a usable figure type in house. Adobe Acrobat DC (and Acrobat Pro) can convert PDFs to TIFF or EPS images. PDFs are more easily obtained from PowerPoint, Excel, and many other software programs than TIFF or EPS images. So, if you can get the authors to export to PDF, or you can do it yourself, you can use the paid Adobe program to convert the images to TIFF or EPS if either file type is required.

Alternatively, if you ask the authors which program was used, such as statistical graph software, to create the original figure, you can perform an Internet search to see if you can find user instructions for how to export from the software to a PDF or other usable file type. An important step to realize is that the person who created the figure is not always the corresponding author, and if you need a better figure, it is often better to get in touch with the author responsible for creating the figure rather than trying to go through the corresponding author.

We hope this article has helped you, or someone in your editorial office, understand more of the nuances of figure handling. Please feel free to get in touch if you have any questions or would like to learn more about figures.

Who Will You Nominate?

We are now accepting applications for the 2019 International Society of Managing and Technical Editors Awards. As an annual event, the Awards celebrate the success and achievements of editorial office staff. The range of Award categories has been designed to be accessible to all members. The Awards provide an opportunity for businesses, organizations, and individuals to appear in the spotlight and celebrate their editorial achievements. They are a way to give recognition to and motivate fellow members. Nominating is easy to do and all online. Have someone in mind that you would like to nominate? Visit the website to find out how.

The ISMTE Awards will be offered in four categories:

- ISMTE Award for Achievement or Innovation
- ISMTE Early Career Award
- ISMTE Jason Roberts Founder’s Award
- ISMTE Ira Salkin Scholarship
“Innovation Session” Call for Proposals

Does your company provide an innovative product, service, or idea that you want to showcase? Then we want to hear from you!

The ISMTE 2019 North American Conference Planning Committee is seeking proposals for its new “Innovation Session” to be held during the conference on August 1-2, 2019, in Durham, NC. The Innovation Session will feature selected vendors who will present on an innovative product/service/idea that they offer.

To apply to present at this exciting new session, send a one-page description of your product/service/idea and how it relates to what managing and technical editors do all day. This is a great opportunity to get in front of the people who use publishing products and services every day!

Submissions and questions can be sent to Kimberly Retzlaff, Committee Chair, at kretzlaff@awwa.org. Submissions are due by March 15, 2019. Vendors will be selected by committee vote and notified by April 1, 2019.

The session itself will be one hour in duration, and each speaker will have 10–12 minutes to present, followed by a Q&A with the audience. At the session, we’ll have a “people’s choice” award for the most innovative presentation. The winning speaker will walk away with bragging rights and an award that demonstrates their innovativeness.

Writing Your Proposal

Proposals should be brief—no more than one page—and should focus on how the product/service/idea affects the work of ISMTE attendees. Proposals should be clear about how the idea is innovative. Presentations should not be a sales pitch.

Attendees

Breakdown of attendees from 2018:
70% Managing Editor
17% Editorial Assistant/Coordinator
4% Director of Publishing
4% Vendor
2% Associate Editor
2% Graphic Designer

Ira Salkin Scholarship

The application process is open for the 2019 International Society of Managing and Technical Editors Ira Salkin Scholarship.

Ira was one of the founding fathers of ISMTE and sadly passed away in 2016. His goal was to ensure editorial office professionals are educated and vigilant in matters of publishing ethics.

The essay topic for 2019 is “How can editorial offices create proactive policies that make handling publication ethics matters smoother?”

The submission deadline for entries is May 31, 2019.

Eligible applicants must be members of ISMTE.

Applicants must include a short cover letter stating their position and some background.

Read the official Rules and Regulations here.

We are looking forward to receiving your entries for the 2019 Ira Salkin Scholarship.
Permission to publish this flowchart was granted by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Please visit http://publicationethics.org/ for additional flowcharts and information.
Calendar of Events

The London Book Fair
March 12-14, 2019
London, UK
http://www.londonbookfair.co.uk/

STM Annual US Conference 2019
April 10-12, 2019
Washington, DC, USA
http://www.stm-assoc.org/events/

15th Annual Meeting of ISMPP
April 15-17, 2019
National Harbor, Maryland, USA
http://www.ismpp.org/
Discount Code: AM15ISMTE10

2019 CSE Annual Meeting
May 4-7, 2019
Columbus, Ohio, USA
https://www.councilscienceeditors.org/

48th EMWA Conference
May 7-11, 2019
Vienna, Austria
http://www.emwa.org/

SSP 41st Annual Meeting
May 29-31, 2019
San Diego, California, USA
https://www.ssnet.org/

ISMTE North American Conference
August 1-2, 2019
Durham, North Carolina, USA
www.ismte.org
EASE members receive ISMTE member registration rate

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A note on English: ISMTE aims to be a truly international society. English will represent our lingua franca, but we would like to stress that, in materials published in EON or online, variations in idiomatic usage and spelling should reflect the origins of the author. No one version of English is preferred over the other.

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