EDITORIAL

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Increase the Probability of Publishing your Research Article: Recommendations for Authors

Aumente la probabilidad de publicar su artículo de investigación: recomendaciones para los autores

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Impactful research takes time, and, after its completion, the authors dedicate themselves to writing, as well as looking for a good journal to publish the results. In the publication process, rejection of manuscripts is common, a frustrating situation for researchers, given the effort, time, and resources they invested. However, many of those rejections can be prevented if some recommendations that could increase the probability of publication are considered. Below are some suggestions for a higher chance of success.

When researchers have their manuscript ready, they identify the journal and send it. The editor then reviews it and decides to reject it or send it to peer-reviewers. If the submission is sent, the peers return their evaluation and the editor will make the decision to accept it or reject it: if it is rejected, that is the end of the process, but if it is accepted, the manuscript continues with other editing stages (copyediting, design, layout, etc.). In general, this is a brief journey that will have its variations depending on the journal, and it will have some protagonists: the authors, the editor, and the peer-reviewers. Understanding this process is essential to know how to participate in it and what is the role that the author must play. Let us look at some recommendations.

Once the research and the report are finished, the authors dedicate themselves to the construction of the article. When this objective has been achieved, they must assess which is the ideal journal to send the article to. Here is a first and important recommendation: the authors should identify the journal before preparing the manuscript. Journals can propose different structures for the preparation of articles: citation rules, extension, language, and other essential aspects. Keeping this in mind will save time and the article will be more accurate. When looking for the journal, the authors should consider if they have any institutional commitment. For example, publishing in a journal with a specific quartile of the Journal Citation Report (JCR) or the Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR). They should also have among their filters if the article will be published in open access, if they have the resources to publish in a journal that charges the processing of manuscripts (Article Processing Charge - APC), if the publication times of the journal are appropriate (the periodicity of the journal varies: annual, semi-annual, monthly, continuous publication, etc.).

To search journals, they can use the JCR or the SJR and apply filters by areas of knowledge, geographical locations, quartiles, impact, etc. Another interesting option is to check in the references of the article which journals were cited and apply to one of them.

A golden rule is that the authors carry out a realistic review of the article and assess whether it fits the chosen journal, that is, if the subject matter and solidity of the research fit its scope and objective. These aspects are crucial, and every journal publishes this information clearly in its policies. Additionally, the authors can review the latest numbers published: if the articles are potentially citable, the authors are in the right place. However, if there are still doubts, another recommendation is to write to editors and ask them if the research is of interest and fits the theme of the next issues (submit the title and summary of your proposal). Many editors welcome the inquiry and are quick to respond to emails.

Once the journal has been identified, the guide for authors should be read carefully and in detail. Every journal has the necessary instructions for authors to prepare their articles and send the documentation required for the processes. The greatest show of respect from an author towards a journal is knowing and correctly applying its policies. For an editor, it is very discouraging to find submissions with an inappropriate theme, deficient structure, disproportionate length, incorrect or poorly applied citation rules, among many other aspects that differ from the requirements and that can be resolved with a judicious reading of the instructions by the authors. This situation usually ends in a rejection and the editor is left with the idea that the authors did not take the process seriously nor took the necessary time to read and learn about the journal. Every institution, university, research center, hospital, etc., has policies that regulate and guide people's behavior (what is expected of them). The same happens with scientific journals, as they have policies that guide their audience.

When the authors are clear about the scope of the journal and have read its instructions, they have the necessary and sufficient material to structure and prepare the article. Now what follows, metaphorically speaking, is to build a good, credible, and demonstrable story. The process does not begin with writing, since it began, much earlier, with the research design. The article will tell us what the result was and, as in everything, you must know how to tell stories. Details are important so as not to lose sight of any event. First, review the structure that the journal requests for the articles and apply it. In the scientific environment it has been common to use the IMRDC structure (introduction, method, results, discussion, and conclusion).

Usually, the introduction addresses the topic, problem, justification, question, objective, or hypothesis of the research. Lean on current, valid, and suitable background information. Use articles that have been peer-reviewed, which means they are reliable. Do not build on sand but on stone. Regarding the methodology, pay as much attention to it as possible: be detailed to such an extent that any other researcher can replicate the results. Describe the sample, the sampling, and the variables, select valid and reliable instruments, and sufficiently develop the procedure and the analysis plan. Regarding the results, they must respond to the objective. Therefore, start by showing the most important ones and describe them clearly, precisely, technically, and in a logical sequence; rely on tables or graphs to synthesize large volumes of information. If the results are negative, but the authors prove something new and unknown, there is a high probability of success. What is important is to demonstrate how they were achieved and to point out that the proper methods and controls were used. Discuss the results with the background and interpret them realistically considering the theory; hypothesize ex-

planations, solutions, or applications; show strengths, limitations and give recommendations. In the conclusions, emphasize the most important findings and link them to the objective. Regarding references, it is advisable to use a bibliographic manager (e.g., Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote). This will allow authors to be sure that everything cited has been referenced and automatically apply any other citation styles if necessary. Once the article is finished, have it proofread by a copyeditor to improve its writing. Many articles can be rejected because their content cannot be understood. There are plenty of experiences like these. If the article has been written in a language other than English, it is worth having it translated into English by a native expert in the area, so that it increases its coverage, and many people can read it. Most research is written in this language.

Once the article is finished, the authors should check whether the instructions for authors request the submission of any document independently, such as a cover letter, declaration of interests, tables, figures, or appendices. Make a checklist and then proceed with the submission. Use the submission method indicated by the journal. Journals usually have an online platform for this process (e.g., Open Journal Systems). Do not send articles to the editor's e-mail, unless otherwise indicated. Also, do not submit the article simultaneously to another journal. This is bad behavior, which violates ethics. Take care of your reputation and value the time and resources that editors invest in reviewing and publishing articles. If you have the opportunity, indicate to the editor which is the ideal background for the person who will peer-review the article (thematic specialty and academic training) and suggest between three and five researchers who have no knowledge of the article or conflict of interest. This will allow the editor to have more accurate information for the process. Finally, if the article is co-authored, decide who is going to be the corresponding author, so that person can send the article and deal with the communication of the process with the editor.

When the submission has been made, the editors review the proposal, assess the structure, analyze the manuscript with similarity software —to identify possible plagiarism— and verify the required documentation, which will allow them to decide whether to reject it or send it to peer reviewers. It is common for many articles to be rejected at this stage, for not considering many of the reasons given —see more reasons for rejection in Murphy [1]. Normally, the editor sends the article to two or more peer-reviewers, experts in the topic that it develops. Once the peer-reviewers accept the invitation, they return their concepts in an average time of four to six weeks. The time will vary according to the journals and the peers´ schedule. Once the peer submits their concept, the editor must make the decision to publish with modifications or reject. There are few articles that are recommended to be published without modifications. If the decision is to reject it, it is the end of the process. Rejection is common in journals and much more so in high-impact ones. In fact, hundreds of articles written by Nobel laureates were initially rejected [2], as Shah [3] narrates: if an article has not been rejected, it is because you have not sent it enough. However, the regular thing is that if there is no refusal, the article is accepted with major or minor changes. In either of these two options, the following is recommended to the authors:

Read the editorial decision and review every comment and recommendation from peers, no matter how vague or incorrect they might be. There could be evaluations that are beyond the objectives of the research or the scope of the study, so there will already be a place to make your comments. Adjust the article, considering all the observations that help to strengthen the manuscript and highlight the changes with a different color, so that the editor and the reviewers who accompany the process can easily identify them. Then draft a letter addressing

each comment and recommendation from the peer reviewer and the editor. Do not avoid responding to any comments. Be assertive, constructive, and courteous, regardless of how uncomfortable the comments may be for you. Explain each applied change with arguments. In the same way, give solid reasons if any recommendation was not met and indicate if other changes were made other than those suggested. It is important that you reply to the editor by the requested dates, and if for any reason you need additional time to complete the adjustments, please contact the editor to have the deadlines extended.

Once editors receive the article and the report of the changes, they will assess whether they can approve them (a clear and reasoned letter and an article that highlights the changes help to make this decision) or if the article should be sent to the peers who made the recommendations, or if, failing that, it is necessary to send it to new peers. Everything will depend on the complexity of the evaluations, the changes, and the response of the authors. It is important to consider that the article can be rejected, although if all the recommendations have been met or the justifications for why a change was not applied are given, it is unlikely that the rejection will take place. On some occasions, more adjustments may be requested, so it is recommended to follow the same steps indicated above.

If the article is accepted, it advances to the other editing and publication processes. The regular thing is that the article goes to copyediting, design, layout, and markup. It is recommended for the correspondent author to be very attentive, respond on time, apply the requested corrections, and read the entire article before its publication to avoid loss, duplication, or misconfiguration of information. It is important for the corresponding author to have fluid communication with the other authors and that they all approve the latest version. Once all this has been done and the article has been published, what follows is to give it the necessary dissemination, a task carried out by the journal and in which the support of the authors is appreciated.

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