

Editorial

Q and A. Part 1.

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During our approximately three years of editing, we have been queried recurrently about policies and procedures pertinent to manuscript review. Conversely, we have collected a list of avoidable pitfalls generated by authors that tend to dismay reviewers and editors. We thought it timely, therefore, to air these items as a service and aid to potential contributors. Part 1 provides some answers to questions about review. Part 2, which will appear in the December issue of *Comparative Medicine (CM)*, will address pitfalls and peeves.

Author: I am preparing a manuscript that I would like to submit to *CM*. However, I am not sure whether the subject is suitable. Would you be willing to give me a preliminary opinion about my manuscript and, if so, tell me what you need to know about it?

Editors: Preliminary communication between authors and potential editors can save time and effort for all parties during manuscript preparation. Queries regarding suitability should include at least the following information: 1) the title of the manuscript, 2) a draft of the abstract and 3) the author(s) assessment of its major contribution(s) to comparative medicine or laboratory animal science. We ask that authors be discriminating about frequency when contacting us directly, but with that caveat in mind, we welcome substantive pre-emptive correspondence at: robert.jacoby@yale.edu or susan.compton@yale.edu.

Author: The *CM* Mission Statement and Information for Authors indicate that you accept manuscripts on a variety of topics relevant to comparative medicine and laboratory animal science. *Contemporary Topics in Laboratory Animal Science (CT)*, which also is published by AALAS, seems to cover some of the same territory. How do I determine whether *CM* or *CT* is more appropriate for my manuscript?

Editors: This question is asked frequently and implies that there is at least modest confusion in the scientific community about differences between the journals. You may have noticed that some guidance toward an answer is found in the opening paragraphs of *CM*'s Information for Authors as well as our Mission Statement. Both indicate wide-ranging interest by the journal in stimulating, scholarly manuscripts about animal biology, disease and biotechnology related to human and animal health. The Information for Authors also states that brief case reports or manuscripts that deal primarily with animal technology or

management may be more appropriate for *CT* than for *CM*. As it turns out, the potential for "mission overlap" was raised at a recent meeting attended by the editors of *CM* and *CT*. The most troublesome category is clinical articles. The editors agreed that recent revision of the *CM* Mission Statement should be complemented by revision of its *CT* counterpart to help prospective authors make the right choice, especially for clinical articles such as case reports. In the meantime, we hope contributors will be comforted by the knowledge that the editors of both journals have a good working relationship and understanding of "best fits." As a result, we refer manuscripts to each other (with author permission). Sound judgment in these matters is one of the ways that we earn our keep.

It may also be helpful for you to know that *CM* and *CT* have somewhat different readerships. *CM* has about 3,200 subscribers. Twenty-three hundred (about 75%) are AALAS members and a hefty proportion of these receive the journal as a benefit of Gold Level membership. Remaining subscribers (about 25%) are from non-AALAS scientists and academic libraries. *CT* has about 5,400 subscribers. More than 5,200 (about 98%) are AALAS members, the vast majority of whom receive the journal with Gold or Silver Level membership. Thus, a substantively greater segment of *CM* subscribers come from the scientific community-at-large. Both journals are, however, fully refereed and carried by major bibliographical indexing services, including *Index Medicus*.

Author: How long will it take *CM* to review my manuscript? I am asking because the outcome is important for an impending grant application.

Editors: We understand that timely review is essential for many reasons and state so clearly in our Information for Authors. Here, briefly, is how review works and what you can expect from it. Let us assume that you have prepared and submitted your manuscript, following the Information for Authors "to the T." When it arrives at "AALAS central" in Memphis, Tennessee, copies of the abstract and Submission Sheet are faxed immediately to our editorial office in New Haven, Connecticut. This initial information allows us to begin considering appropriate reviewers straight away. In many cases, final selection of reviewers requires us to read most or all of a manuscript. Therefore, the Memphis staff also sends the full manuscript and illustrations to us by overnight mail. We select five potential reviewers for each manuscript (two primary reviewers and three alternates) from a computerized database that guides selection by scientific expertise and send, by e-mail, the selections to the

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journal's editorial specialist, Phyllis Robinson, within a day or two. She commandeers at least two reviewers per manuscript, one of whom often is a member of the Editorial Board, and forwards the appropriate materials. Reviewers are obliged to complete their work within three weeks or face being hounded by the editorial staff. Completed reviews are faxed immediately to the editors for decision and corresponding letters are sent to authors within a few days. If you have been adding as we go along, you should have concluded that initial review normally takes roughly one month.

Author: I should probably expect reviewers make criticisms or suggestions that will require revision of my manuscript. How can I minimize this step? Said somewhat differently, what are the common pitfalls to avoid during preparation of my manuscript?

Editors: The best short answer is make sure you follow the Information for Authors scrupulously. A more complete response will appear in Part 2; i.e., in the next issue of *CM*. If your

manuscript requires at least some revision (and most do), re-review is usually performed directly by us, reducing the interval from re-submission to decision to a week or so. The most critical aspect of this exercise, however, lays with the author(s). Careful and expeditious revision is the key to an early and successful outcome. We normally give authors two months to complete this task.

Author: How soon will my manuscript be published after it is accepted?

Answer: Generally speaking, review and production (copy editing, etc.) for a given article each take about a month. Therefore, publication is usually slated either for the issue immediately following acceptance or the one after that.

Author: Thank you.

Editors: Thank you!!