

Publishing in Academic Journals: Some Notes on the Process

For people interested in publishing their work in an academic journal, the publication process can seem very opaque and daunting. Many scholars (usually graduate students, sometimes undergraduates) learn the ins and outs of the publication process informally, through the mentorship and guidance of senior students, postdocs, and faculty. Yet some scholars may not find or receive this kind of guidance, and some aspiring authors may not be in an academic setting at all. This document is for anyone without a significant history of prior academic publication or training. It describes author roles and author order, various types of publications, and the peer review process. It won't answer all questions, but we are committed to providing helpful guidance.

Matters of Authorship

Most journals in the fields of health, medicine, and psychiatry (including APA journals) follow the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (known as ICMJE) guidelines for authorship. All persons listed as an author on a paper must meet these criteria. The order in which names are listed in the byline also has meaning. This order is generally understood to convey the relative significance of authors' contributions. In medicine (including psychiatry) the first author is typically the individual who made the most important direct contributions to the project: e.g., initiating or leading the project, or playing a major role in analysis and manuscript writing. By convention, the last author is the "senior" author and typically has the second most important role. These authors tend to be senior primary investigators or center directors involved with a project who have provided substantive supervision, expertise, and sometimes funding. Middle authors, or those listed between the first and last authors, are often listed in descending order of their contribution or, in some cases, may be added alphabetically (if roles were generally equal). In many medical schools and health research centers, only first-authored and last- or senior-authored publications "count" toward promotions and advancement, because these positions generally convey major roles, whereas the contributions of middle authors are often much more ambiguous.

Prior to manuscript submission, all authors must agree on what the order of authorship will be. If disputes concerning authorship arise during the peer review and publication process, the paper typically will be removed from the process until such time that the authors can certify their agreement.

The *corresponding author* is the individual designated to submit the manuscript; provide information about research ethics, funding, and any potential conflicts of interest; field all correspondence with the Editor of the journal; vouch for the integrity of reporting; respond to reviewers; field all correspondence with coauthors and respond to the publisher during the copyediting process; and serve as the published contact for future queries about the paper or

project. Although different teams may follow different divisions of labor, most often the corresponding author tends to be either the first or last/senior author and to convey significant responsibility for the manuscript. These responsibilities include keeping the rest of the authorship team apprised of editorial decisions, sharing reviewer comments, ensuring that all authors approve of any revisions prior to resubmission, following up with coauthors to complete their publication forms, communicating with coauthors and the publisher's editorial staff throughout editing and typesetting, and being the point person for any press inquiries postpublication.

All authors will be required to complete publication forms on acceptance of the manuscript to attest to their contributions as authors, to formally disclose financial relationships with commercial interests, and to transfer or assign copyright.

Types of Submissions

Psychiatric Services publishes many types of articles. Here we focus on the difference between empirical studies (regular articles or brief reports) and columns. In general, quantitative and qualitative projects—guided by research aims or questions and involving data analysis in some form—will be submitted as empirical studies.

Columns, which cover specific topic areas (e.g., integrated care, economics, disparities and equity, peer leadership), provide a venue for descriptions of new or novel interventions, processes, or policies. These descriptions tend to be more narrative and less formulaic than a research report, and firm guidelines are therefore difficult to generalize. Any data that are included in a column are typically much more limited, and less central, than would be found in a conventional empirical article submission or brief report. Columns also provide a venue for organizational and programmatic case studies and descriptions of important initiatives relevant to service delivery, policy, or research. Column editors have substantial discretion concerning content; authors with questions would likely benefit from reaching out to column editors.

Other types of submissions include review articles and brief opinion pieces or essays (Open Forum, Viewpoint, commentaries, letters).

Peer Review

Peer review refers to the process by which designated “peers” in the research community read, review, and offer feedback on manuscripts. *Psychiatric Services* follows “double-blind” review, meaning that no author's identity is revealed to reviewers and that the paper's reviewers are never revealed to the authors.

Reviewer selection. Reviewers have published work in a topical area that coincides with the content of the paper. They may be selected on the basis of a keyword match between their areas of expertise and the content of the submission, the submitting author's recommendation,

and the Editor's knowledge and research of expertise in the field. *Psychiatric Services* typically seeks a minimum of three completed reviews per submission, but more reviewers may need to be invited to accomplish this. Additional reviews also may be sought when there are strong differences of opinion or the Editor feels that more reviews are warranted.

The review. In *Psychiatric Services*, reviewers are asked to provide numerical ratings on various criteria (including originality and potential contribution to the field), as well as comments to the authors and, in some cases, to the Editor. As part of this process, reviewers are required to disclose any real or potential conflicts of interest (or relationships and activities that might bias their review of a particular manuscript). Reviewers can suggest major revisions, minor revisions, rejection, or resubmission as a different article type, such as a brief report or column.

The reviewing period. Once a paper is submitted, reviewers are invited, yet securing a minimum of three reviewers and their completed reviews may require several invitations and reminders. When the needed reviews are received, the Editor will evaluate the ratings and comments against the paper itself and render a decision. The Editor and Publisher aim for decisions to be rendered in 4–6 weeks. Authors who do not receive a decision within 8 weeks may contact the journal for an update.

The decision. Once a manuscript has been reviewed, the corresponding author will receive a decision letter from the Editor (or from the column editor for column submissions). The decision letter will indicate whether the submission has been rejected, is to be revised, or has been accepted for publication. Letters inviting revision will include a copy of the reviewers' comments and suggestions for revision.

Responding to an invitation to Revise and Resubmit. When authors are asked to revise, they typically make changes directly to the manuscript and are strongly advised to also detail these changes in a written point-by-point response to each reviewer. Although authors need not follow every suggestion made, a thoughtful response should be provided when suggestions are not followed.

Guidelines for Authors and Submission Information

For detailed information on manuscript formatting and organization and on reference style, please see the general *Psychiatric Services* Author and Reviewer Guidelines section of ps.psychiatryonline.org. For column submissions, please see https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/ps_editorialboard#ps_columns for additional information.