

# Publish or review. That is the question

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*Revista Colombiana de Gastroenterología's* motto is "A journal by everyone and for everyone." Scientific journals are created for institutions and researchers. Researchers often cannot or do not want to publish in their journals. They prefer to do so in other journals with better indexing for greater visibility and significance.

An author publishes in a scientific journal to enhance their visibility and credibility, establish themselves as experts on a particular subject, improve their resume, increase their salary at an institution, or disseminate their research results.

Research is an activity aimed at gaining new knowledge<sup>(1)</sup>. The publication of a scientific work is the most effective way to transmit knowledge obtained from research, and its visibility is crucial for researchers and the institutions where they work. This scientific dissemination is achieved through publication in scientific journals. Meanwhile, the editors of scientific journals aim to achieve a readable and reliable journal through the quality and adequacy of articles<sup>(2)</sup>. So, scientific journals aim to publish papers of the best quality and disseminate novel information among their readers. However, scientific journals cannot publish all the manuscripts they receive<sup>(2,3)</sup>.

The editorial process begins with the article submission by the author to the journal. The editor or editorial board preliminarily evaluates it to check whether the article meets the basic requirements of the journal, such as content, style, clarity, accuracy, and important messages. If the manuscript is accepted, reviewers are chosen for "peer review." Then, they communicate to the editor their suggestions for improving the writing and, after gathering the recommendations, decide whether the article is publishable. All these comments are transmitted to the editor, who sends them to the authors to make the suggested corrections and thus have a better-prepared paper ready for publication. Generally, this evaluation process is double-masked<sup>(4,5)</sup>. Therefore, journals require peer reviewers in addition to papers and authors<sup>(1)</sup>.

Peer review is how a manuscript submitted for scientific publication is independently, subjectively, and critically evaluated. Expert peers (equals) who are generally not on the editorial board perform this task. This evaluation can be considered an essential extension of the scientific process. Peer review is accepted as the "gold standard" for scientific communication, but its ability to ensure the competence of published articles remains difficult to verify. In fact, the greatest danger of this review is not the undue rejection of high-quality manuscripts but the indifferent acceptance of low-quality ones<sup>(2)</sup>. The role of reviewers is fundamental to ensure the quality and novelty of manuscripts published in scientific journals. In any case, the editor of a journal is ultimately responsible and

can make decisions on issues unrelated to the quality of a manuscript<sup>(2)</sup>.

There are three critical roles in the editorial process of a journal: the authors who write the article, the reviewers who, as experts, provide comments and recommendations, and the editors who make the final decisions on the manuscript's acceptance or rejection<sup>(1)</sup>. There is generally pressure on the part of the authors to have their articles published quickly, and they may know or ignore that the role of reviewers is fundamental within this editorial process. Reviewing someone else's work may seem relatively easy, but adequately reviewing a scientific manuscript requires training, effort, and time<sup>(1)</sup>. Hence, authors must understand that they must be permanent reviewers of other papers. With this dynamic, articles will be better evaluated, and the journal's quality will improve<sup>(1)</sup>.

There are advantages within the peer review stage: transparency in the publication process reflected in whether an article is publishable, an opinion is better expressed, and the quality of articles is improved. Generally, this evaluation is made by experts who help with comments and suggestions to authors to improve the product, helping to increase the journal's quality due to a rigorous filter on articles and to verify research. Being invited as a reviewer is an honor because you are recognized as an expert on specific topics<sup>(2,6)</sup>. There are also disadvantages, and probably the most notable is the slowness of the process: It can last weeks and often months; reviewers evaluate the works depending on their own beliefs, but there are also biases such as the reviewer's overwork; and the absence of payment, which can be reflected in poor or very superficial evaluations. Sometimes, inconsistencies can be found in two or more reviews or recommendations, resulting in conflicts for authors and editors. Besides, non-acceptance by reviewers causes delays<sup>(6)</sup>.

We recommend that the reviewer<sup>(1,6)</sup>:

- Be professional.
- Be friendly and respectful.
- Be helpful: Recognize what is good and what deserves improvement. Suggest how the article can be improved.
- Be scientific: Comment on what will improve knowledge and increase credibility.
- Meet the deadlines: Generally, the time required may vary but is estimated between 4 and 6 weeks.
- Be realistic concerning the work submitted and the changes to be made by the author.
- Be empathetic: Write respectfully and sensitively.
- Be open-minded: The editor has trusted your judgment as a reviewer.
- Be organized: The review should be structured and logical. State your impression or interpretation of the work. Major and minor elements of the essential points can be described so that the manuscript has proper validity.

Peer review is a strategy to improve the quality of the scientific information we read and maintain the trustworthiness of writings. Peer review is at the heart of the process. It is a hallmark of most scientific journals and is the cornerstone for evaluating their publications<sup>(1)</sup>.

As the researcher or author progresses in their career, they will increasingly be asked to get involved in the peer review process. It is a complex, anonymous, unpaid, and time-consuming task. However, others are the reviewers of our works, and we have been able to publish thanks to them. Then, the least we could do is return that service by accepting to be reviewers<sup>(1)</sup>.

A golden rule: *Evaluate others as you would like to be evaluated*. Contributing to the peer review process makes us better researchers and authors<sup>(1)</sup>. This editorial is addressed to peer reviewers; as it is an anonymous task, it is not sufficiently acknowledged by the scientific medical community.

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