Author perspectives on what’s broken in the academic publishing process

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Editage / Cactus Communications
Have you seen the news?

Is the Peer Review Process for Scientific Papers Broken?

Online debate erupts to ask: is science broken?
Panel discussion about the shortcomings of science sparks chatter about possible remedies.

Scholarly publishing is broken: Is it time to consider guerrilla self-publishing?

The scientific publishing culture is broken - can it be rescued?

Opinion: Academic Publishing Is Broken

Academic research publishing is a broken system that needs to be fixed

NOVEMBER 1, 2015 ~ DIGITALBIOLOGIST
Let’s begin with some facts for perspective...

EVERY YEAR

ABOUT 8 MILLION RESEARCHERS

8,000,000

PUBLISH

2,500,000

2.5 MILLION ARTICLES
2.5 MILLION ARTICLES IN

28,134 Peer-reviewed English-language journals*

10,900 journals

Included in Thomson Reuters’ Journal Citation Reports

22,000 journals

Included in Scopus

* As of 2014 - Ulrich’s database

Note: Venn diagram not to scale
More research output from ESL countries
Previously identified gap in perspectives between authors and editors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors think...</th>
<th>Editors think...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• They understand publication ethics and do the best they can to adhere to standard guidelines</td>
<td>• Authors don’t realize the importance of publication ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They address and respond carefully to all peer reviewer comments</td>
<td>• Authors only address the peer reviewer comments they find agreeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Journal instructions for authors are often incomplete and unclear</td>
<td>• Journal instructions for authors are generally clear and complete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This causes a lot of pressure...

For authors

And for journal editors
What would ease up the pressure a bit?

Journal editors bridging the gap and getting closer to authors!
So we asked authors globally for their opinions

- Ongoing survey by Editage Insights, a global learning and resource platform for researchers
- Survey being run in English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Portuguese

Seeking authors’ opinions on all aspects of the journal publication process

Supported by the industry

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@Editage
#CSE2017
Interim results: 5293 respondents

Respondent demographics
Total number of respondents for each survey language

- English: 1724
- Simplified Chinese: 1950
- Portuguese: 1027
- Japanese: 296
- Korean: 296

n = 5293
Which of these primary roles do you identify yourself with as a researcher?

Author: 83%
Journal editor: 4%
Institutional head or Administrator: 1%
Other: 12%

Responses from only this segment presented hereafter

Roles identified when selecting “other”
- Consultant
- Professor
- Fellow
- Independent
- Lead Scholar
- Science
- Student
- Researcher
- Medical Writer
- Editor
- Published
- Author
- Academician and Clinician
- Librarian
- Doctor
- Lecturer
- Content Reviewer
- Assistant
- Retired
- Postdoctoral
- Teacher

$n = 5259$
Top 10 countries represented (current location)

Number of authors currently working in these countries

- China: 1,493
- Brazil: 909
- Republic of Korea: 306
- Japan: 283
- United States of America: 273
- India: 211
- United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: 78
- Australia: 68
- Turkey: 50
- Canada: 45
- Portugal: 44

n = 4299
Author respondents by field of study

- Medicine and Allied Health Sciences: 37.8%
- Life Sciences: 16.4%
- Physical Sciences: 18.2%
- Humanities and Social Sciences: 8.7%
- Other (please specify): 18.9%

Fields identified when selecting “other”

Architecture Information Technology Development
Human Business Law Mathematics Teaching
Chemistry Research Engineering
Interdisciplinary Science Public Health
Education Arts Management Psychology
Applied Test Economics Veterinary Medicine Nursing Energy

n = 4299

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@Editage
#CSE2017
Experience and English proficiency of author respondents

How long have you been involved in academic research and/or journal publishing?
- More than 5 years: 50%
- 1 to 5 years: 38%
- Less than 1 year: 12%

What is your written English proficiency?
- English is my first language: 10%
- English is not my first language but I'm comfortable writing in English: 52%
- English is not my first language and I find it challenging to write in English: 38%

How many papers have you published in an international English-language journal?
- More than 5: 29%
- 1 to 5: 36%
- Trying to publish my first: 17%
- None: 18%

n = 4298
Publication-related challenges authors face
What do authors struggle with most?

Percent authors who find specific stages of the publishing process “VERY DIFFICULT”?

- #1: Manuscript preparation and submission 33.8%
- #2: Responding to peer reviewer comments 27.1%
- Selecting a journal for your manuscript 18.9%
- Tracking manuscript status in journal submission systems 14.7%
- #5: Ensuring compliance with relevant ethical guidelines 8.5%

n = 4427
Which of the following bodies/guidelines are you familiar with?

- COPE
- ICMJE
- Declaration of Helsinki
- GPP2
- CONSORT
- All of the above
- None of the above

Familiarity with good publication standards:

- None of the above: 0.0%
- Declaration of Helsinki: 3.2%
- CONSORT: 13.6%
- GPP2: 16.3%
- ICMJE: 18.4%
- COPE: 48.5%
What aspects of manuscript preparation are “VERY DIFFICULT”?

- Framing a research question: 28.2%
- Structuring the manuscript in IMRAD format: 20.7%
- Presenting information from previous studies in your own words: 20.4%
- Conducting a literature review: 16.6%
- Drafting the manuscript title and abstract: 15.9%
- Creating figures and tables: 14.0%
- Formatting as per journal guidelines: 13.6%

n = 3797
Where do authors seek help when in doubt during the publishing process?

- I search online using a search engine: 39.0%
- I approach my seniors or colleagues: 38.6%
- I check on specific social media or an online forum for researchers: 8.5%
- I ask my librarian for resources or visit my university writing support center: 7.6%
- I feel lost and don’t know where to look: 6.3%

*n = 4277

*Multiple selections allowed
Perspective-based questions for authors
How do authors choose a journal for their manuscript?

Factors considered, ranked from most important (1) to least important (7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The journal should have a <strong>high impact factor</strong> for my field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The journal should have published <strong>similar papers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The journal should offer a <strong>short time-to-publication</strong> or have a rapid publication option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>My <strong>colleagues and seniors</strong> should be reading the journal regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The journal should have a clear and professional-looking <strong>website</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The journal should be <strong>open access</strong> or have an open access publishing option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The journal’s <strong>submission process and charges</strong> should be clearly mentioned on its website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$n = 3876$
In general, how well do you think journal guidelines for authors are framed?

- Clear and complete: 27%
- Clear but incomplete: 42%
- I don't know: 11%
- Unclear and incomplete: 16%
- Unclear but complete: 4%

n = 3799
Perspectives on open access publication

Have you ever published in an open access journal, or chosen to make your paper open access in a subscription-based journal?

Reasons for publishing open access (% respondents)*
- Increase research reach (34.3%)
- Coincidence (29.5%)
- Preference for OA (15.3%)
- Publication guarantee by the journal (13.6%)
- Institutional/funding body mandate (7.3%)

Reasons for not publishing open access (% respondents)*
- Coincidence (34.3%)
- Affordability (29.5%)
- Lack of understanding (15.3%)
- Mistrust in quality of OA journals (13.6%)
- No adequate benefits of OA seen (7.3%)

n = 3875

*Multiple selections allowed
Author-Journal communication
Do authors approach journals without hesitation?

Have you ever written to the journal for queries or clarifications during the publication process?

- Yes 55.6%
- No 44.4%

If yes, how did you find their response?
- Prompt and clear (42.7%)
- Delayed but clear when it came (28.4%)
- Prompt but not clear (17.7%)
- I didn't get any reply (7.8%)

If no, why not?
- I didn't have a query (51.1%)
- I didn't know how to contact the journal (14.8%)
- I didn't know I was allowed to contact the journal (16.6%)
- I was scared to contact the journal (17.4%)

n = 3760
Time to publication
### Perspectives on time to publication

**What is the shortest time in which you’ve had a paper published (from submission)?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I haven't had a paper published yet</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 6 months</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 6 months</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 months</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 month</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How long do you think it should ideally take to publish a paper in a journal (from submission)?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It doesn’t matter how long it takes if the quality of publication is high</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 3 months</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 month</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n = 3775*
Duration of manuscripts at different stages in the journal workflow

“In your experience, how long does a manuscript remain at the following status points on the journal submission system?”

“WITH EDITOR”
- Less than 5 days: 28%
- 5 to 10 days: 36%
- 10 to 30 days: 17%
- More than 1 month: 19%

“UNDER REVIEW”
- Less than 1 month: 19.4%
- 1 to 3 months: 47.0%
- 3 to 6 months: 8.0%
- More than 6 months: 16.4%
Duration of manuscripts at different stages in the journal workflow

“In your experience, how long does a manuscript remain at the following status points on the journal submission system?”

“DEcision in Process” or “Awaiting Decision”

- Less than 5 days: 14%
- 5 to 10 days: 29%
- 10 to 30 days: 31%
- More than 1 month: 26%
The verdict...
What aspects of journal publishing do authors want changed?

Would you like to change something in the publishing system?

- Yes (check my comments below) 51.7%
- No. I am satisfied with the system 48.3%

n = 3712
What aspects of journal publishing do authors want changed?

Main pain points and author-suggested areas of improvement

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Main Area of Improvement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Time to publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Peer review process/quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fairness/objectivity/bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Affordability (costs/charges)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pressure to publish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Process standardization</td>
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$n = 3712$
Sample author comments about the journal publishing system

Yes, the system needs to be faster and less bureaucratic

Why take months to close to a year just to say no

There should be an effort to uniformize manuscripts requirements (such as file type, file size, figure embedding and so on and so forth)

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Sample author comments about the journal publishing system

- High impact journals charge too much to publish the article
- It should have a defense system where authors can file complaints
- Expand bilingual or trilingual journals in order to internationalize science.
- Young researchers should have a different section for publication in each peer reviewed journal.
Sample author comments about the journal publishing system

More access to resources / help for publication

(Journals should) use instant communication tool like QQ, WeChat

I believe that the pressures should be reduced in order to get a really good, reproducible study
Key takeaway... There's a lot that's broken!

Let's begin by fixing the basics!

1. Reduce time to publication
2. Increase transparency in peer review
3. Eliminate bias
4. Communicate effectively with authors
5. Create new opportunities for young researchers
6. Offer learning resources
Get involved!

Participate in the Editage Insights survey and share it with your authors!

https://www.editage.com/survey-author-perspectives-on-academic-publishing
Question Period / Open Discussion

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