



Avoiding Desk Rejection: Editorial Advice for Researchers

Desk rejection: The fastest form of peer review

This material is a short version of the presentation given by Prof. Donata Kurpas at the 13th Congress of the Polish Society for Surgery of the Hand and 3rd Congress of the Polish Society for Hand Therapy (Wrocław, Poland, October 9–11, 2025)



Why does it matter?

- Desk rejection is **not personal** – it's the most common submission outcome in high-volume journals
 - For researchers and clinicians, it means months of work can be dismissed in minutes
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- **Speed matters:** Most editors make an initial decision in under **5 minutes**
 - **High rejection rates:** At reputable journals, **25–50%** of submissions never reach peer review
- But*
- **For clinicians:** Every rejection delays knowledge translation into practice
 - **For early-career researchers:** Desk rejection can discourage future submissions



What happens in real life?

- ~30–40% of desk rejections at *Adv Clin Exp Med* occur before review (approx. 40% – after review)
- **Main cause:** mismatch with journal scope (“Not for us”):
 - *Adv Clin Exp Med* – for studies that not only advance scientific knowledge but also **demonstrate a clear potential for improving patient outcomes and healthcare systems**
 - Contributions that bridge gaps between experimental insights, clinical trials and the implementation of evidence-based practices in diverse medical settings, especially those **developed by international, multi-center research teams**
- Other causes:
 - Disorganized structure
 - Vague or missing research question
 - *Avoid a cover letter addressed to **The Lancet** when you send it to **Advances...***



3 questions every editor asks

- Does the topic fit the journal's scope?

If your paper is about ankle fractures and you send it to a cardiology journal, the answer is obvious

- Are the aim and the method crystal clear?

The editor must understand, in a few lines, what question you asked and how you answered it

- Is it written for the reader – or for the author's drawer?

Some papers look like they were written only to “get published,” not to be understood and cited by colleagues



Common author sins

- Salami slicing
 - Instead of serving one solid study, authors slice it into thin pieces – journals want a full meal, not appetizers
- Copy-paste syndrome
 - Reviewers instantly recognize text from Wikipedia or generic websites – it's like plagiarizing Gray's Anatomy for your paper
- Lost in translation
 - English that reads like automatic translation gives the impression that the science is equally automatic
- Outdated references
 - Citing only pre-2003 references is like performing hand surgery with instruments from the 19th century



How to improve your odds

- Read the Instructions for Authors (yes, they really exist!)

<https://advances.umw.edu.pl/en/instructions-for-authors>

- Editors can tell in 10 seconds if you ignored them
- Check what the journal actually publishes – not just the Impact Factor
- Keep the structure simple: question → method → result → discussion
 - Frame this with a compelling introduction and strong conclusions!
- Add soul: show why your topic matters for clinical practice



Special advice for young researchers

- Don't submit on Friday 23:59 after five coffees
 - We can smell the caffeine through the PDF
 - Exhaustion and haste leave traces in grammar, typos and messy logic
- Ask your most critical colleague for the “reader test”
 - If they understand it, you're safe. If they don't, the editor won't either
- Remember: editors are humans
 - They open your paper on a phone while commuting or before morning coffee
 - If the abstract isn't clear in that moment – rejection is very likely



Positive spin

Desk rejection is not a career death sentence
The difference between frustration and success
is whether you learn from it

- Everyone experiences it – even top orthopedic surgeons and professors
 - It is part of the scientific journey
- If the editor explains the reasons – structure, clarity, scope – treat it as free advice
 - Adapt, improve and resubmit – sometimes, even the same journal says ‘yes’ after revision



Take-home message

- To avoid desk rejection – think: **fit, clarity, logic, quality**
- Editors are not enemies – they're your **first readers who want to help good science get published**
- A well-crafted manuscript is like good hand surgery: **you can see right away that someone knew what they were doing**

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