

AUTHOR RESOURCE REVIEW

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Will Your Paper Be Accepted? What the Editors of *RETINA* Look for in Manuscripts

By Yoshihiro Yonekawa, Mass Eye & Ear; Eric Nudleman, UCSD; and Jonathan Prenner, NJ Retina (*RETINA Roundup* Editors); Carol Shields, Wills Eye Institute; Lloyd Paul Aiello, Joslin Diabetes Center; and William Smiddy, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute (*RETINA* Associate Editors)

You've worked countless nights dissecting data and then drafting and re-drafting your manuscript, for the hypothesis that is going to revolutionize the field. Your co-authors finally got back to you with their edits, and the last straggling collaborator has turned in their authorship forms. You double check the *RETINA Instructions for Authors* page and make sure your references are formatted correctly. The right buttons are clicked in Editorial Manager, and you press the button: "SUBMIT."

The screenshot shows the Lippincott Williams & Wilkins Editorial Manager interface for the *RETINA* journal. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for HOME, LOGOUT, HELP, REGISTER, UPDATE MY INFORMATION, JOURNAL OVERVIEW, MAIN MENU, CONTACT US, and SUBMIT A MANUSCRIPT. The SUBMIT A MANUSCRIPT link is highlighted with a red arrow. To the right of the navigation is a dropdown menu labeled "Role: Author". Below the navigation, the *RETINA* journal logo is displayed, followed by the text "THE JOURNAL OF RETINAL AND VITREOUS DISEASES". In the center, there's a welcome message from Lippincott Williams & Wilkins: "Lippincott Williams & Wilkins welcomes you to the Editorial Manager™ interface for **RETINA®**". Below this, there's a section titled "BEFORE USING EDITORIAL MANAGER, PLEASE FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE REQUIREMENTS LISTED BELOW." To the right, there's a thumbnail image of the journal cover and a link to the website: <http://www.retinajournal.com>.

What happens after that? The details of the editorial process will be for another post in the future, but the paper is routed to our Editor-in-Chief Dr. Alexander Brucker, who reviews the submission and

assigns an associate or assistant editor to facilitate the review process. The editors, especially the associate editors, have years of experience providing feedback for manuscripts to help advance our field.

So what do *RETINA* editors look for in papers? How do they make their recommendations of “Accept” or “Reject”? We had the opportunity to pose these questions to three of our esteemed associated editors: **Lloyd Paul Aiello, MD, PhD** of Joslin Diabetes Center, Harvard Medical School; **Carol Shields, MD** of Wills Eye Hospital, Thomas Jefferson University; and **William Smiddy, MD** of Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, University of Miami (left to right, below).



We hope that you will find their insights to be valuable, not just for your next submission, but for approaching research and innovation in general.

What is the most important thing you look for in a paper?

Aiello: Good science, importance to the field, relevance to the Journal.

Shields: The 3 most important aspects of a solid scientific report involve well-designed approach, organized results, and knowing how to interpret the results in the discussion. The report should be pointed to answer a single question in a clear fashion.

What is your thought process and steps in reviewing or editing a paper?

Shields: I start with the title – this says a lot if the authors can succinctly summarize their research accurately.

Next, I review the abstract. I am occasionally surprised at how authors struggle to organize a neat and easily readable abstract. The concluding statement should only reflect what their results revealed.

Since most readers focus on the title for entry into a report and then only read the abstract and maybe only the concluding statement – you can imagine how important these opening pages are. If these 2 pages meet my standards, then I move into the report for review.

Smiddy: What I look for first in a submitted manuscript is if it presents something that is new to the body of literature. If it does not, tolerance for defects in study design, grammar and writing organization, and the validity of the conclusion may become moot points but, in general, we can be more tolerant of the latter if the former is true. At that point the editor's and reviewers' role becomes how to help the author refine and put into context this contribution – how to improve it.

My mentor always had great respect for a reviewer's comments, indicating that you can always learn something from a review that can make your study better, even if the review is not a stellar or well executed one. When an author demonstrates a dismissive attitude towards those comments, it is more difficult to smile on the manuscripts disposition. A response to submitting a manuscript is not a confrontation, but rather it is a cooperation.

What are the most common mistakes that rejected papers make?

Aiello: Poor science, studies too limited, low sample number.

Shields: In my opinion, the most common mistakes are poor scientific design, disorganized data without direction, authors trying to answer too many questions with too little data.

What are your philosophies on the peer review process?

Smiddy: Peer review literature remains one of the last bastions of potentially honest, unbiased dissemination of information. While the explosion of online journals is a perfectly fine development- even invoking freedom of speech concepts- I think it is incumbent upon the most respected of journals that espouse a more rigorous review process to continue such vigilance so that it can remain a source of respected and trusted substrate for learning and teaching, so as to sustain our great field in the most effective way.

There is still a vital role for presenting material that has been endorsed by peers that are hopefully experts in the field. However, peer review is difficult for all – editors to secure reviewers, reviewers to read and critique a study, and for the investigators to address or face disappointment. I have been a frequenter of all three roles, experiencing the highs and lows, as it were, of each. I think each role has rewards, but also responsibilities that must not be taken lightly.

Aiello: Critically important. Should be held to a high standard.

Shields: It is a double edge sword. You have to be certain that you are selecting reviewers that are not biased towards the authors or the information. I believe it is necessary to have manuscripts reviewed for accuracy, honesty, and opinion. However, the job of the associate editor is to be open-minded and select the jury of reviewers who are expert, interested, fair, and are willing to put in the time to review. Sometimes, this can be challenging.

What is the most enjoyable thing about being an associate editor?

Aiello: Seeing a particular good paper come through.

Shields: For me, the single most attractive aspect of being an associate editor for *RETINA* is that I have the opportunity to review “hot topics” before they hit the newsstand. Additionally, I enjoy the international flavor of consulting experts worldwide to give an opinion on a certain report.

What do you think is the future for academic publishing, in terms of how we reach readers?

Aiello: Will become more and more online.

Shields: Woah! Dispersion of information has changed so much in the past 10 years. I think there will always be a need for a peer review forum for scientific publication, but we might not be publishing in paper format, or on a monthly basis, or with the current style. This could morph into a format whereby you pre-select your interests and the relevant articles are delivered to your inbox weekly or daily.

We thank Drs. Aiello, Shields, and Smiddy, for their expertise, valuable time, and dedication to RETINA, and for supporting RETINA Roundup!