



Help Journal Editors Help You: Five Top Tips from *Eye & Contact Lens*

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Academic editors and reviewers love their work, or they wouldn't volunteer their skills toward improving the scholarly literature. But as time-pressured professionals with multiple priorities, they can be instantly turned off by a poorly written or executed manuscript. Do you want to run the risk that a turnoff becomes bias, and that the editors won't work with your manuscript further? Many journals won't bother.

At *Eye & Contact Lens* we actively recruit young researchers and post-doctoral students who often need some guidance to get their manuscripts under way. It can take as many as three communications containing itemized instructions before one of these manuscripts makes it to peer review. But if they're patient, authors can get a lot out of this effort, and we at the journal think it's worth it because the peer review process goes more smoothly for everyone. Regardless of whether the manuscript is ultimately accepted, the next submission will be much better. The up-front work pays off in the end by expanding our author pool and improving submissions.

That said, it doesn't always work this way. Authors who repeatedly ignore at submission our Information for Authors or our requests to reformat (or rewrite, proofread, or edit for clarity) become familiar to the editors and they take on a kind of blinking quality in the editors' inbox: *invest no more time here*. It's best to get the editors on your side from the start.

Following are a few tips that can guarantee a publishing experience with minimal bumps:

1. Get the English right

It should go without saying that *any* submission to an English-language journal should be in carefully written, punctuated, and proofread English. If the authors are not native English speakers, they should take it on faith that their manuscript must undergo review and possible revision by a native English speaker, a professional English language editor, or [an English editing service](#) prior to initial submission. Journal editors may perceive that the content is good but the language is opaque, and thus may triage the manuscript right out the door.

2. Sell yourself

Journal editors want to know why your submission is significant. What is unique about your study or perspective? Is it clear in your cover letter and in the introduction? If your topic is esoteric, say so, but explain its relevance further. If it's novel and applicable in a clinical journal, state the reasons explicitly. The editors may reject a manuscript because they perceive it is not new or novel, but what if they're wrong? Invest as much thought in your cover letter and introduction as you do in the rest of your manuscript.

3. Guarantee that the editors *read* your manuscript

Journals provide authors detailed information on the scope, topics, and types of articles they welcome, and step-by-step instructions on manuscript preparation. An arresting title and keywords that demonstrate the manuscript's relevance to the journal will attract the editors, but they can spot a thoughtlessly prepared manuscript even before they've read it; improper reference formatting, for example, is a quick tip-off. Authors risk a swift rejection by failing to respect the journal's requirements.

Treat the [Instructions for Authors](#) as a guide for preparing a manuscript and a final checklist *before* you submit, and feel free to call or email the managing editor for speedy resolution to any problems. Contact information for the managing editor is listed in the Information for Authors on the journal's submission page.

4. Beware self-plagiarism

While *plagiarism* is widely understood as the presentation of another's work as if it were yours, *self-plagiarism* is often poorly understood and likewise can be considered academic misconduct.

According to a white paper from iThenticate, the plagiarism-prevention software program used by many scholarly journals (including *Eye & Contact Lens*), "self-plagiarism is defined as a type of plagiarism in which the writer republishes a work in its entirety or reuses portions of a previously written text while authoring a new work."¹ In short, the authors are "plagiarizing" themselves. The issue arises from copyright law protecting the original work, as well as the authors' guarantees to the publishers that original and subsequent works are not previously published.

The subject is thorny and rife with conflict over the location of the line between quoting portions of previously published works acceptably, and infringing on a publisher's copyright by borrowing too much. It doesn't help that clarity is elusive and the conversation is ongoing; publishers and editors themselves disagree on how much text is acceptable to appropriate. But authors would do well to limit references to their previous works and quote them carefully; publishers use plagiarism-prevention software to catch text that matches too much of a previously published work—whether or not it's yours. Avoid rejection by taking care to prepare your manuscript accordingly.

For more information on plagiarism and self-plagiarism, see [the Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\) website](#), an excellent, searchable resource for authors and editors alike. For suggestions on text reuse limits and subsequent authorship, see the [Chicago Manual of Style](#).

5. Carefully address each reviewer's comments

The peer review process is a rich source of information on how best to conduct a study, demonstrate its findings, and explain them so their significance is clear and will generate attention in the academic literature. Editors will not enter a manuscript into peer review unless they already feel it has merit, and they choose reviewers whose knowledge and capacity for thoughtful review are proven.

When you receive a manuscript for revision, take care to clearly address each comment in the Response to Reviewers, identify what and where any changes have been made in the revision, and highlight them in the text. The easier you make it for editors to review and trust your work, the more likely your manuscript will breeze through review and be accepted without further revision.

The bottom line is, anything you can do to attract editors, respect their labors by carefully preparing your manuscript, and take to heart the suggestions and criticisms of peer reviewers will smooth the way to acceptance—and a publication you can be proud of.

Reference

1. Ithenticate.com. The ethics of self-plagiarism. 2011. <http://www.ithenticate.com/hs-fs/hub/92785/file-5414624-pdf/media/ith-selfplagiarism-whitepaper.pdf>.