

Brief Overview of Journal Metrics

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The points included here are intended to advise and inform; they are not to be taken as prescriptive but regarded as guidance, not policy. The discussion will enable editors to use their discretion and editorial autonomy, in line with their journal's niche, image, aims and scope.

Metrics form part of continuing discussion about the assessment of journals and their content; and if this is to be done, then how it is to be done.

Advice to authors regarding publication of their addiction research may vary according to how well established an author is. For new or less experienced authors, the advice is likely to centre around originality or significance of topic and findings. Unless these are present, authors are advised not to submit to journals with a high impact factor or low acceptance rate as there is less chance of being published: what authors want to know is what their chances are of getting their manuscript into a particular journal.

Impact Factor

Impact factor is the most frequently used metric in journal publishing. It is seen by many as indicating the standing and quality of a journal. This may be used by editors and publishers in evaluation and comparison with other journals. Not all publishers calculate or use the impact factor and there are arguments against its use. Impact factor is conventionally based on a 2-year citation window, which is usually given more credence than the parallel 5-year window. Where impact factor is used or referred to, we recommend that the 5-year window be used. Impact factor is a journal level measure.

The impact factor is essentially a measure of how many citations a journal receives in other academic journals. For some journals, the impact factor only counts citations of research and review articles. This does not represent the totality of journals' content: editorials, letters and other articles that don't fall into these categories are not always counted. For other journals, editorials and commentaries may be included in calculations of their impact factor.

The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA - <https://sfedora.org/>) advises that Journal Impact Factor has a number of well-documented deficiencies as a tool for research assessment. These limitations include: a) citation distributions within journals are highly skewed; b) the properties of the Journal Impact Factor are field-specific: it is a composite of multiple, highly diverse article types, including primary research papers and reviews; c) Journal Impact Factors can be manipulated (or "gamed") by editorial policy; and d) data used to calculate the Journal Impact Factors are neither transparent nor openly available to the public. ISAJE is a signatory to the Declaration, which can be found at <https://sfedora.org/read/>

Impact factor is not a reliable way to compare disciplines, but may be useful in making comparisons within disciplines.

Impact factor may be one of the considerations influencing authors' thinking when considering a journal for submission of a paper.

The parallel almetric measure –<https://www.altmetric.com/>– is an article level measure. This measure can be misleading when a paper or article receives coverage in mainstream media, where news-worthiness can obscure accuracy and quality of content.

See too Chapter 3, pages 59-61, in *Publishing Addiction Science*, 2017.

ISAJE supports the DORA recommendations for improving the way in which the quality of research output is evaluated. These focus primarily on practices relating to research articles published in peer-reviewed journals but can and should be extended by recognising additional products, such as datasets, as important research outputs. These recommendations are aimed at funding agencies, academic institutions, journals, organisations that supply metrics, and individual researchers.

An additional measure for assessing the reach of a journal is to use reading and download statistics.

Rejection and Acceptance rates

Acceptance rate is calculated as the proportion of papers submitted which are accepted. Journal acceptance rates as calculated by different journals can vary between 15% and 90%. (See *Publishing Addiction Science*). For some journals, the acceptance rate is based on all papers received by the journal, for others, papers that have been subject to peer review. Journals and editors will triage papers as they are submitted.

Rejection rate is the proportion of all papers submitted which are rejected, whether or not sent for peer review. Desk rejection is made when, based on their experience and knowledge of the field, editors have sufficient information of a paper to make a decision without sending it to peer review and is generally considered to be included in the accept/reject metric. This is because a desk reject involves internal review of a submitted paper, followed by discussion within the editorial team. On this basis, desk review and reject should be reflected in journal metrics.

A Reject decision at desk review could be because the subject is unsuitable for the journal; the paper is not of sufficient quality or standard; or for some technical reason where commonly the author has not followed Guidelines for Contributors. Some rejected papers might be resubmitted where faults have been corrected. For example a paper of 10,000 words submitted to a journal which has a word limit of 5,000 words may be resubmitted after a rewrite and reducing the word count. This raised the question of whether such papers are included in Acceptance/Rejection rate. If these papers are resubmitted and have a different ID number is this two papers, one of which has been rejected; or is it two versions of the same paper – i.e. one paper?

Once papers have gone through triage and go to peer review there will be an editorial decision, usually Minor Revisions, Major Revisions or Reject. This raises a similar question of how submitted, revised and re-submitted papers are counted, as in the paragraph above.

Editors' calculation of papers received and rejected may differ from publishers' calculations, as shown on journal web-sites, which may show a different figure. Along with impact factor, where publicised, rates of acceptance are important for potential authors.

This leads to three considerations:

1. Should the rejection rate be based on all papers received before they go through triage?
2. Should the acceptance rate be based on all papers that go to peer review?
3. Do we count papers that have been rejected and resubmitted as 1 paper or 2?

In summary:

1. Journal metrics are used variously to assess the reach of a journal and the likelihood of a journal accepting submitted papers.
2. There are declarations - e.g. DORA - and statements which can assist editors and authors in assessing ways in which journals can be regarded and reach and audience defined.
3. Impact Factor to evaluate has many deficiencies and it should not be used as a sole measure of journal quality
4. Editorial discretion and autonomy, based on subject knowledge and editorial experience, should be exercised and valued alongside formal metrics in line with journal aims and scope.

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