

JMD's Three-Month Review Policy Pledge

An archival publication is one that stands the test of time: We will read it ten or twenty years after its initial publication and we will still find it informative, useful, and relevant. From time to time, I will ask my graduate student to study a paper published twenty or thirty years ago and I can see his slight rolling of the eyes or feel her Bluetooth brain-wave question floating over: “Is he really getting that old?” Other times, I will chide my graduate student for referencing a paper that appeared last year retelling a theory or technique developed two decades before but missing the original reference altogether.

The recent emphasis on journal impact factors with two-to-five year cycles is rather damaging to archival research the way I am thinking of it above. Which paper has more archival value—one cited twenty times in one year and never again or one gone unnoticed but then cited twenty times twenty years later? This may be an extreme example but it exposes a certain intellectual laziness and misplaced commercialization by the impact factor “users.” Laziness because we replace judgment with counting thus avoiding responsibility and misplaced commercialization because we adopt the commercial sector’s mantra “faster, better, cheaper” pushing the “faster,” forgetting the “better” and getting the “cheaper.” This is why all high-quality, respectable academic institutions have shunned use of impact factors and citation indices in evaluating the performance of their researchers.

Be that as it may, my commitment as editor is to get your work—your best archival work!—published as fast as possible. Starting in January 2012, our pledge at JMD is to pursue a three-month review cycle policy as a target that will replace our current six-month target pledge. This means that we pledge to review your work and reach a publication decision within three months from submission.

There are a couple of caveats in our ability to meet this target. Authors must manage their papers so that they do not generate unnecessary delays, as discussed further below. Reviewers must conform to our requests for speedy reviews, typically within four weeks. I will be contacting all JMD reviewers and authors to ask them to support our three-month review pledge. Our success in meeting this target will take some time and it will largely depend on support from authors and reviewers.

Meeting this pledge will have some significant implications for our reviewing process.

I expect that I will be rejecting more papers without sending them for peer review, and requesting significant rewriting prior to resubmission. Our editorial board, myself as chief editor and in consultation with our associate editors as needed, will assess the likelihood the reviewers will accept the paper without very significant revisions. The two most common sources of delays and required major revisions are poor language and poor referencing. While these appear merely cosmetic, they have strong impact on the review and I have written specific editorials about them in the past, see <http://asmejmd.org/editorials.php>.

Poor English language usage often makes statements unclear, detracts from the substance, and irritates the reviewers. Poor language is also a major source of delays after a paper has been reviewed and the material has been deemed worthwhile of publication *provided* the English language usage is corrected. Reviewers and associate editors often leave this up to me. Thus, I have to run an occasionally excruciating marathon with the authors to try and get the paper in good enough language shape to publish it. In the new policy, such papers will likely be rejected with a request for resubmission after correcting the English language usage.

Poor referencing indicates that the author is not familiar or does not care for the community to which he or she addresses the work. Good referencing shows how the work fits into the extant literature whether published in JMD or in related journals, how it builds on it and improves it. Thus, it helps to establish the intellectual contribution of the paper. Good referencing includes both recent and seminal papers. Good referencing includes references predominantly in English since that is the language of JMD and its readers—important non-English references are welcome but they cannot be the dominant majority.

I also expect that there may be fewer “major revisions” requests made by the associate editors and more rejections with encouragement to resubmit. This is another area where significant delays occur. Major revision requires often months of delays while the authors collect more data or develop certain parts of the paper, then the reviewers have to rereview it sometimes asking for another round of revisions. In the new policy, the associate editors will have to judge whether the revisions requested by the reviewers can be reasonably done in a short time, say 2–4 weeks, and it a way that will likely satisfy the reviewers. Otherwise, they will probably recommend to me rejection and resubmission after the authors had enough time to perform the requested changes.

The reviewers will also have to embrace this policy and return their reviews promptly. There are two incentives for that. One incentive is that many JMD reviewers are also JMD authors, so hopefully they handle the papers of others as they would like their own papers to be handled. The second incentive is that the papers they get to review will hopefully have good quality language and referencing, thus allowing them to concentrate quickly on the substance. As I mentioned above, I will be communicating this new pledge to all JMD reviewers and ask for their cooperation.

The three-month review cycle is of course a pledge. I cannot guarantee that we will be able to meet our target for all submissions all the time but we will try. Our editorial board is committed to do their best for “faster” and “better” but not for “cheaper!” We are a nonprofit volunteer group anyway, so our time is priceless!

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Editor