
Ronald T. Brown, PhD
Medical University of South Carolina

The Journal of Pediatric Psychology aims to publish high-quality, original research; integrated reviews of the literature; case studies; and commentaries that are associated with the theory, research, and professional practice in pediatric psychology. In this effort, it is my goal as well as that of the Associate Editors to improve the readability and quality of submitted manuscripts and to enhance the peer-review process. This editorial offers suggestions to authors on writing for the Journal of Pediatric Psychology, reporting statistical information for the Journal, and responding to reviewers' comments on articles that already have been submitted and have made it through the first stage of the review process. Much of this editorial contains anecdotal information that I have gleaned from my service as an Editorial Board member for this journal as well as several others in our field, the mentoring of numerous graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty in the writing process, and finally during my tenure as Editor of this journal as well as another journal in the field. Thus, I wish to point out that my words of advice are based on case study and clinical wisdom, as well as recent published literature in the area, rather than on empirical data. There are available to the interested reader some worthwhile sources (Browner, 1999; Cummings & Rivara, 2002; Drotar, 2000a, b; Kazdin, 1995; Williams, 1999), including the venerable Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, fifth edition (American Psychological Association, 2001), which I always recommend for review to any author regardless of the author's experience with manuscript preparation.

Initiating the editorial process, your manuscript arrives at the editorial office and you as the corresponding author are notified of its arrival and assignment to reviewers. We attempt to have a manuscript reviewed by at least three reviewers, one of whom must be on our Editorial Board. Manuscripts are always read blind: The reviewers do not know the identity of the author and the author does not know the reviewers. It should be noted that a primary intent of the review of a manuscript is to enhance the quality of the work and to provide helpful and constructive advice to authors. The reviewer is asked to return a written critique to the Editor as well as a recommendation on the suitability of the manuscript for publication in the Journal of Pediatric Psychology within approximately one month after receipt of the manuscript. Finally, either the Editor or the Associate Editor collates the reviews and makes a final decision with regard to the disposition of the manuscript, and a detailed letter is prepared for the author. Reviewers of the Journal are not compensated financially for their efforts, and given the extensive time involved in this process, I have always been impressed with the meticulous and detailed reviews that are provided to authors by members of our Editorial Board as well as from our esteemed colleagues who serve as ad hoc reviewers. Authors can learn much from the peer review process that may frequently provide them with significant insights into refining their research or launching the next stage of a program of research. It is a process that I have come to value and respect over the years in my roles as a reviewer, author, and more recently editor.

Mechanics of a Manuscript

The soundest advice that I received during my graduate school training is that the best studies focus on one or two issues or questions. As Lilienfeld (2003) has astutely observed, a “clear take-home message” is critical in eventual acceptance of a manuscript (see Table I).
The Introduction

Given its importance, make certain that the take-home message in your introduction is clear and that you address how the article is novel and why it makes a contribution to the extant literature (Lilienfeld, 2003). Many editors prefer that the last paragraph of the introduction explicitly state the primary questions or hypotheses that drive the design of the investigation.

Multiple drafts of a manuscript also are critical in arriving at a polished product. Our profession has always underscored the importance of peer consultation, and the publication process is no exception. Seek out peer consultation, urge your peers to be critical, and remember that you should integrate comments so that the manuscript reads as a coherent whole. In essence, your manuscript should tell a coherent story. Please also remember that brevity is critical. While the Journal has had a long-standing policy of a maximum of 25 typed pages per manuscript, nearly 50 percent of the submissions are manuscripts that are over 30 typed pages. As Cummings and Rivara (2002) have pointed out, most complex studies are typically published with 3500 words or 14 typed manuscript pages, although this does not always apply to psychology journals. I would also like to point out that many disciplines vary in philosophy regarding the necessary background of information to “set the stage” of your report. For example, a highly respected journal in our field, Child Development, often includes articles with very lengthy introductions coupled with elaborate and detailed reviews as well as extensive justifications for the investigation. By contrast, many pediatric journals often demand terse introductions, with some excellent medical journals limiting the introduction to no greater than one and a half typed manuscript pages.

Most importantly, you should always proofread for grammar and spelling errors. As Lilienfeld (2003) has observed, an article that is not proofread and contains grammar and spelling errors represents one of the top ten reasons for rejection (see Table I). In reviewing articles with grammar and spelling errors, both the reviewers and the Editor begin to believe that careless preparation of a manuscript may signify a careless investigation.

Methods

In describing the methodology of the investigation, make certain that the study population is clearly defined, and that the reader is familiar with the time interval of the investigation (Rivara & Cummings, 2001). In addition, it is important to inform the reader of the procedures used for sampling as well as the representativeness of the sample for the population in which you are attempting to generalize. Thus, the reader should be informed about the number of participants who declined consent as well as attrition from the investigation, particularly for clinical trials. It also is important to carefully describe assessment techniques as well as the dependent and independent variables. Many editors request that the author provide an estimate of the power of the study to detect the expected effect from the design (e.g., 80% probability to detect an IQ loss of >10 points at $\alpha = 0.05$).

Communicating Results

Information pertaining to the statistical analyses is best placed in the Methods section, whereas a description of findings is most appropriately placed in the Results section. The primary data analyses and the results from them should flow directly from the main question or hypothesis that drives the design of the investigation. Other exploratory analyses should be clearly labeled as such.

The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, fifth edition (American Psychological Association, 2001), as well as the recent CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) guidelines for clinical trials, which were reviewed in earlier articles (McGrath, Stinson, & Davidson, 2003; Stinson, McGrath, & Yamada, 2003), indicate that effect-size statistics should be reported in addition to the traditional statistical analyses. Thus, I am now requesting that effect sizes be reported for all studies published in the Journal, a policy consistent with the leading journals in the field.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I. Top 10 Journal Submission Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Selecting the wrong journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Not explaining why the article makes an important contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Too much or too little background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Making inferential leaps in logic that are unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Confusing explanatory with confirmatory data analyses (misrepresentation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Presenting too much information and overanalyzed data sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Omitting effect-size information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Glossing over design limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Not having a clear take-home message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Article not proofread (for grammar and spelling errors)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

including the majority of medical journals (Moher, Schulz, & Altman, 2001) as well as top-tier journals in health psychology (Stone, 2003). Tables and figures are frequently convenient for the purpose of displaying the results of a study, and the text may then be succinct in pointing out specific findings of the investigation that can be easily supported in the tables and figures.

Finally, I have been dismayed by the number of manuscripts we receive that have meticulous study designs yet frequently have overanalyzed data sets. Where there are numerous statistical analyses, it is always incumbent upon the investigator to control for such analyses to protect against the possibility of Type I error. There do exist methods for the purpose of reducing the possibility of Type I errors through specific correction procedures (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Not surprisingly, Lilienfeld (2003) notes that overanalyzed data sets score within the top ten of journal submission errors (see Table I). An overanalyzed data set typically gives the Editor and the reviewer the distinct impression that the author is “fishing” for findings and creates an aura of doubt and uncertainty for reviewers that may lead to ultimate rejection of a manuscript.

Discussing Your Findings
Preparation of the Discussion is typically a formidable task even for the most seasoned author. The discussion is best started with a paragraph summarizing the purpose as well as the key findings of the study. Again, it is important to note why the article has made an important contribution to the literature. It is noteworthy that many excellent manuscripts frequently fail to note how the research has made a unique contribution to the extant literature. Similar to filing your income taxes, however, it is important for the author not to state more than what is actually supported. Lilienfeld (2003) suggests that inferential leaps in logic coupled with attempts to explain information with confirmatory data analyses are major pitfalls in the preparation of Discussions for many articles that are eventually rejected for publication in the Journal (see Table I). It is important to interpret data in accordance with the specific hypothesis of your investigation, yet at the same time to be modest with regard to your findings and how these findings actually contribute to the extant literature. It is also important at this point in your manuscript to describe the limitations of your investigation and how these may have influenced your results. Humility is essential to give your study credibility, which is best accomplished by frankly acknowledging design limitations and noting how future studies might proceed given such limitations. While humility is important, authors must also make certain not to indict themselves by readily acknowledging too many weaknesses of a particular investigation so that it reads like an apology rather than a scholarly analysis. There seems to be an “art” to the publication process, which cannot simply be taught but must be practiced over time to derive the perfect balance between claiming what the study accomplished and taking only credit rightfully due the author.

What Happens Next?
After your manuscript has been sent to the editorial office, there is a letter of disposition forwarded to the author; as most of our editorial board is well aware, we typically strive to have a disposition to authors within 6 weeks after the receipt of the manuscript. A disposition is typically coded into four categories: (1) acceptance of the manuscript in its current form; (2) acceptance of the manuscript with minor revisions; (3) rejection of the manuscript, although a resubmission is invited; and (4) rejection of the manuscript. Given that the rejection rate of the Journal is fairly high (we are simply unable to publish many solid manuscripts due to space limitations), if your manuscript falls into the first two categories, this is a rare occurrence and you may consider yourself to be one of those fortunate scholars who have published in the Journal of Pediatric Psychology. In fact, since I assumed the role of Editor of the Journal, there has been no manuscript either solicited or unsolicited that has fallen within the first two categories! While there have been a number of rejected manuscripts for the various aforementioned reasons, many articles that eventually make the pages of the Journal are frequently initially rejected with an invitation to revise and resubmit the manuscript in accordance with the recommendations as made by each of the reviewers. I always urge authors to both read and study critiques carefully. Even if a manuscript is recommended for rejection, the critiques can be helpful for a submission to another journal or perhaps for designing future research studies. While a rejection is always painful, experienced authors also develop “thick skins” as they continue to publish their work in other venues (Cummings & Rivara, 2002). Typically, appeals to most editors for reconsideration when a manuscript is rejected are unsuccessful and in our field such appeals are often considered “politically incorrect.” However, on occasion, I do make errors, as do my peers, and at times it
may be appropriate to let me know of a glaring error or a misinterpretation of a review.

Revise and Resubmit

Frequently, manuscripts that are submitted to the Journal fall into the third category of rejection, although with an invitation from the Editor to revise and resubmit the manuscript. As Cummings and Rivara (2002) have noted, this provides the author with a foot in the door and potential for publication. Depending on the manuscript, there is extraordinary variation in both the nature and depth of what reviewers may recommend to improve it. Some of these suggestions, particularly those that involve issues concerning presentation of material, may be easily accomplished, while other suggestions may be much more difficult to remedy, particularly if they involve the design of the study. Regardless, it is imperative that the author be responsive to the critiques that have been raised and to revise the manuscript accordingly. This is clearly not the time to be argumentative or defensive about your work; rather, this is an opportunity to incorporate the reviewers' suggestions to improve upon the text or data. Rather than viewing the review process as merely an obstacle to overcome, look upon it as a didactic experience or pro bono consultation for the purpose of enhancing your research and published work (Cummings & Rivara, 2002).

A critical element in any revise-and-resubmit manuscript is a detailed letter to the Editor outlining how you have responded to each change that has been recommended by each of the reviewers. It is important that you order your responses in accordance with the suggestions of each reviewer (e.g., Reviewer A, Reviewer B, Reviewer C) and that you number each of the responses in accordance with how the target element is identified in the individual critiques. If you choose not to make a specific change as suggested by a particular reviewer, it is strongly recommended that you provide a compelling and polite rationale for this. At times, there may be conflicting suggestions from the various reviewers, and it is your task to decide which critique is most valid. Please note that tactfulness is imperative, as the reviewers are typically provided with a copy of your letter, although all identifying information is removed. As Cummings and Rivara (2002) have astutely observed, reviewers of most journals are not paid for their efforts and labors and they are gratified when authors appreciate their suggestions. In the invitation to revise and resubmit their manuscript, authors are always informed that there is no obligation on the part of the Journal to accept the revised paper. Typically, most editors do not wish to waste authors' valuable time, and I am usually able to discern those manuscripts that will not make it through a second review. However, on occasion an author may not be sufficiently responsive to the reviewers' concerns, or the study may have so many methodological difficulties that a revised manuscript makes this issue even clearer, thereby precluding publication. I do believe, however, that the Editorial Board and I are proficient in preventing the latter, although on occasion the most heroic efforts on a carefully crafted and conscientious revision are of no avail and the manuscript is still rejected.

Authors are frequently confused when they receive extensive reviews of their manuscript and are asked to respond to a number of issues, thereby extending the text of their manuscript. Given the page limitations of each of the articles for the Journal, this often poses a significant dilemma. I generally suggest that authors attend to the reviewers' concerns and note these changes using a special text highlighter on their computer. Subsequently, I recommend that the author go back and edit text that may not be critical to the manuscript. At times, some distance from the manuscript and assistance from peers are often helpful in this process, particularly when cutting text is difficult for the author.

Future Directions

Beginning in January 2004, all manuscripts for the Journal of Pediatric Psychology must be submitted electronically, and authors will be provided letters of disposition electronically. We anticipate that this will diminish the time that it takes to receive a disposition of your manuscript and that ultimately it will allow for more rapid publication of information in the pages of the Journal. We will continue to publish high-quality, full-length manuscripts of original research related to the psychological functioning and development of children, adolescents, and other systems (e.g., communities, families, schools) and specific issues related to pediatric health and illness. We will continue to use the brief report (12 typed-page limit) format for studies with novel methodology even where there may be specific design limitations (Brown, 2003) as well as case studies that exemplify intervention strategies. In volume 29 of
the *Journal*, we will begin to publish integrated reviews of the literature and meta-analyses related to various diseases, approaches, and interventions in pediatric psychology. Finally, we encourage Commentaries on manuscripts and also will solicit them from time to time, particularly when manuscripts warrant additional discussion from expert researchers and clinicians in the field.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the esteemed Associate Editors, the Editorial Board, and our many pediatric colleagues who have served as ad hoc reviewers for the *Journal* over the past 2 years. Finally, to the authors who have tolerated rewrite after rewrite and revision after revision, I am also especially grateful. Again, I look forward to your comments about topical areas that you may wish to see published, the review process, or special issues that will appear periodically in issues of volume 29.

**Acknowledgments**

The author gratefully acknowledges Maureen Black, PhD, Dennis Drotar, PhD, Grayson Holmbeck, PhD, and Raymond Mulhern, PhD, for their reviews of this article and their excellent suggestions in earlier drafts of this manuscript.

Received August 28, 2003; revisions received September 15, 2003; accepted September 16, 2003

**References**


