

Editorial

Journal editing: making an impact

Each June, Thomson Reuters unveils the new edition of the most popular set of journal impact indicators, as listed in the Journal Citations Reports® (JCR). These have tremendous importance globally, despite a growing demand for more intelligent use of such metrics. This issue of *European Science Editing* contains an interesting essay by R. Grant Steen,¹ who comments on the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)² and highlights the need to complement the journal impact factor (JIF) with alternative metrics. The European Association of Science Editors (EASE) published its own statement on inappropriate use of impact factors several years ago³ and is one of the signatories of the Declaration.

One problem with JIF is that not all journal editors understand the currently available impact measures⁴ and, even if they do, most journals do not display complementary metrics on their websites. A good and rare example is set by Dove Medical Press (New Zealand), which gives Scopus-based citation metrics along with the JIF values.

The latest edition of JCR ranks approximately 12,000 journals and conference proceedings from more than 3,300 publishers in over 60 countries.⁵ Interestingly, 66 journal titles were suppressed owing to “anomalous citation patterns resulting in a significant distortion of the Journal Impact Factor”.⁵ These journals will now be closely monitored by JCR staff and restored to a future edition of the JCR “when the problem of citation concentration has been resolved.” While this excludes journals that probably had an unusually high level of self-citation, there are other ways to play the system quite legitimately. It is much easier to achieve a high impact factor with a small journal: an extreme example is *CA: A CancerJournal for Clinicians*. This journal received 13,722 total cites with just 25 published items in 2012, and reached the skyrocketing JIF of 153.459! Such distortions highlight the importance of tight quality control at all stages of journal editing and publishing.

Exerting such quality control becomes an uphill task as editors face an unprecedented increase in the number of submissions and conflicting demands on their time. They are required to solicit high quality articles, evaluate each part of the manuscript, obtain reviews, balance the reviewers’ and authors’ points, then make decisions relying on their professional knowledge and the expectations of their readers. They are also required to promote their journal’s contents and thereby increase its readership.

One activity that may improve all aspects of a scholarly paper and thereby its readability and citability is substantive editing. Such work includes validation of all facts, terms and citations, as well as correction or even re-writing of some or all sections of the manuscript, starting with the title. A clearly written, informative abstract can certainly improve the impact of an article, since for subscription journals this may be the only part of the paper that can be

read by many, and even for readily accessible articles the abstract may often be the only part that is read. Clarifying the presentation and interpretation of statistical tests may increase chances of the re-use of original data in future systematic reviews and meta-analyses, thus increasing citations and, more importantly, furthering the course of science. Finally, proper assessment of the correctness and relevance of reference lists may improve the validity of this important section. Unfortunately, as the scope of the journal editor’s activities expands, coupled with a trend in increased submissions and tightening of publishers’ budgets, substantive editing is a threatened occupation, and not many journals practise it.

The latest EASE-forum digest (this issue)⁶ reflects the fact that editorial tasks widely vary across Anglophone and non-Anglophone countries and tend to expand globally. Surprisingly, there is still no universal definition of editor and editing, although all experts agree that editing is not limited to copyediting and proofreading.

The quality, readability and even citability of both a paper and a journal may be enhanced by substantive editing. Although it requires deep knowledge in science communication and takes time and effort, substantive editing remains largely unappreciated not just by editors and publishers, but also by authors, who often look for short and quick ways of publishing their precious papers.

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- 4 Marx W, Bornmann L. Journal Impact Factor: “the poor man’s citation analysis” and alternative approaches. *European Science Editing* 2013;39(3):62–63.
- 5 Journal Citation Reports® Notices. Available at http://admin-apps.webofknowledge.com/JCR/static_html/notices/notices.htm [Accessed 1 July 2013].
- 6 EASE-Forum Digest: March to June 2013. *European Science Editing* 2013;39(3):74–75.