

# Session 3: Editorial Processes

## Why Papers are Rejected?

**Prof. Dr. Zainal Salam,**  
Centre of Electrical  
Energy Systems,  
UTM Johor Bahru,  
Malaysia

**Workshop on  
Publishing in High Impact  
Journals**

Ecole Nationale Polytechnique  
Algiers, Algeria  
Nov 2018





# EDITORIAL PROCESSES

# Peer Review

## What is peer review?

An evaluation of the manuscript for competence, significance and originality by qualified expert in the same field

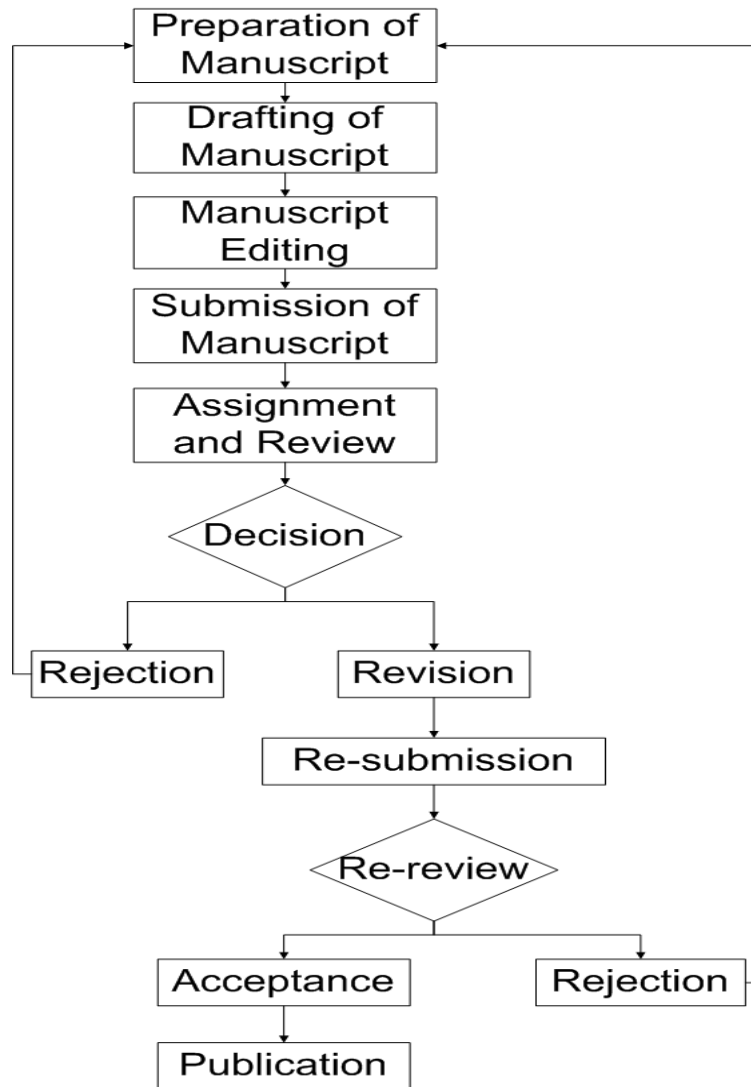
All ISI journals are peer-reviewed by at least two or more expert.

Normally IEEE has three or more

IEEE Transactions has very low acceptance rate

Peer review is a process

# Flow Chart of Peer Review System

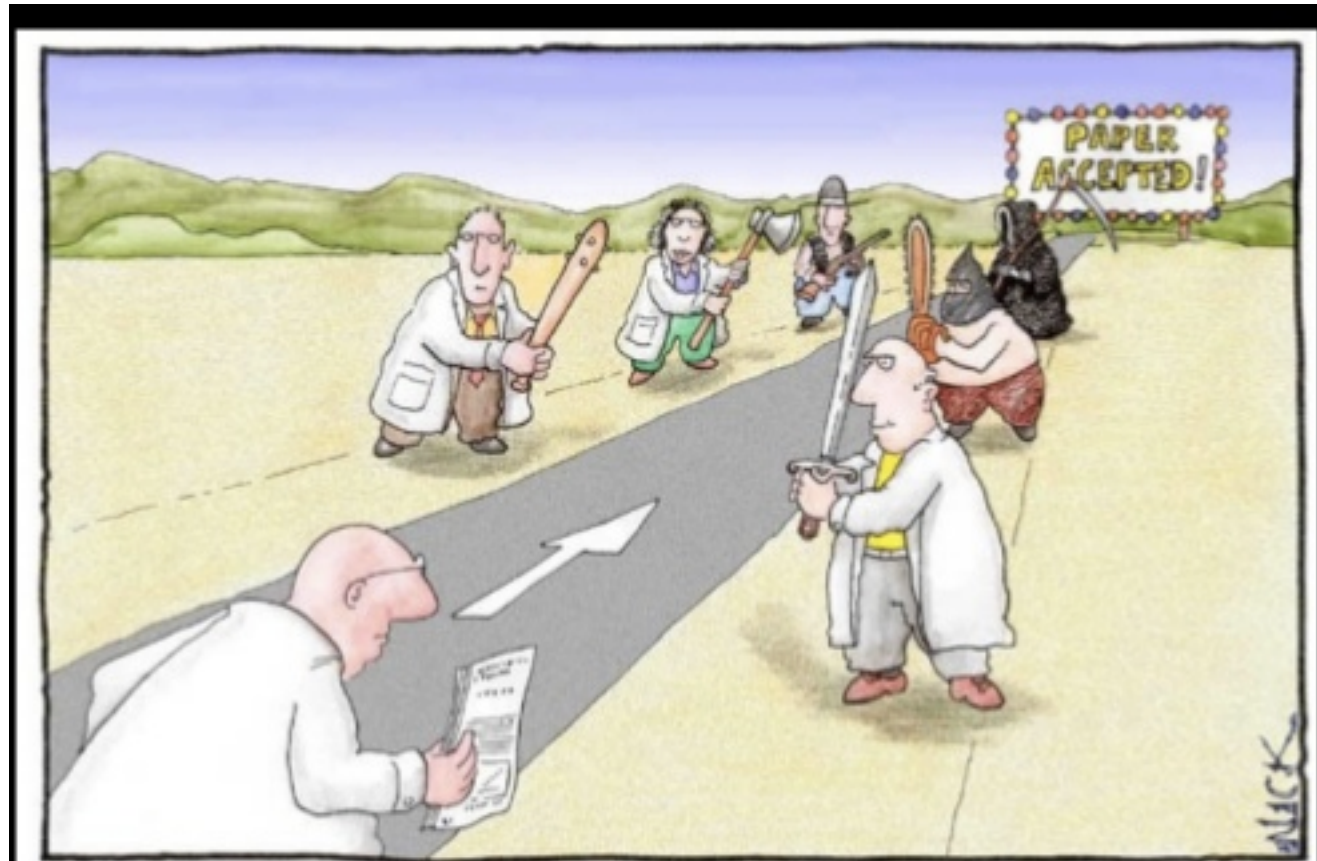


Nowadays, many Journal practices “pre-editorial” process:

Paper with insufficient quality (poor language, “cold topic”) is rejected without being considered for review.

Letter to Editor is now mandatory for certain journal:  
Why your paper should be considered for review?

# Review Aim?



Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as 'quite an improvement.'

# Review Process

- In most cases, **double blind** review process is practiced (both authors and reviewer are unknown to each other).
- However, IEEE journals are mostly **single blind** (authors are known to reviewers but not the other way around).
- Editor may send many invitations, but normally few will response or agree.
- Many of the agreed reviewers failed to send review results despite consistent reminders.
- That explains why decision sometimes take a very long time.

# How Reviewer is Selected

- ❖ Normally the journal's **Editor-in-Chief** has a team of **Editors** (or associate editors) in specific fields within the journal scope.
- ❖ When a paper is being considered for review, he assigned one editor (most relevant) to handle the peer review process
- ❖ Since the field is somewhat familiar to the Editor, he may quickly recognizes the experts and send invitation emails as potential reviewers.
- ❖ Alternatively, Editor may browse the reference list and make the invitation.
- ❖ Some journals/Editors keep database of reviewers

# Why people want to review papers?

- It's a difficult and time-consuming task with no direct compensation. But still there are willing persons to do it.
- Personal Reasons
  - Self-esteem. You are recognized as expert in the field.
  - Close friend of Editor (doing favor)
  - Expanding CV and networking
  - Has personal ambition to be Editor one day (?)
- Knowledge
  - He wants **first hand information on new research** done by others (Note: the final paper may not be published in the near future, or may not be published at all)
  - Ensure his students are still “competitive”.



# What the Reviewer is looking for?


- ❖ **Does the paper contain sufficient new material?**
- ❖ Within the scope of the journal?
- ❖ Writing well organized?
- ❖ Methods presented in the way that they can be replicated again?
- ❖ Adequate results?
- ❖ Discussion: relevant and concise
- ❖ Conclusions: supported by the data presented?
- ❖ Others:
  - ❖ language acceptable?
  - ❖ Figures, tables ok?
  - ❖ References cited in the text included in the references list?



# HANDLING REVISIONS


# Recommendations and Decision

- Once sufficient review is returned (normally two or more), Editor will write **recommendations** to the Editor-in-Chief.
- The recommendation is weighted based on the reviewers **comments**.
- The Editor-in-Chief almost totally dependent on the Editor's recommendation to come up with the **decision**.
- The Editor-in-Chief communicates the decision directly (via e-mail) to the authors.
  - The decision can be: Accept, Minor Correction, Major Correction, Reject and Resubmit, Total Reject.
- **The decision e-mail is the D-day for the authors!**

- 
- **Very rarely** Editor-in-Chief disputes his Editor's recommendation.
  - What happen when comments from two reviewer's contradict each other?
    - The Editor-in-Chief may instruct Editor to look for more reviewers.
    - The Editor himself can be a reviewer

# Meaning of decision

- **Accept as it is:**  
Very rarely for first submission of manuscript.
- **Minor revision**  
“Yes, we definitely want your paper”
- **Major revision**  
“We like your paper. It has merits and worth to be published, but do as what being told by reviewers”
- **Reject and Resubmit**  
“OK, we are still interested but please get the paper into the the right context of this journal. Add more things and we will see what we can do.”



**Total rejection** means “Its not that your paper is not good, **but is not suitable for our journal. Please send your paper to some other place.**”

**SO, NO MANUSCRIPT SHOULD BE WASTED.  
THERE IS A JOURNAL OUT THERE THAT MAY BE  
WILLING TO ACCEPT YOUR PAPER!**

# How to handle Revisions

- ❖ If the Editor allows for revision (major or minor), there is a **great hope for acceptance** at the end.
- ❖ Read the comments carefully
  - ❖ Try to understand what are the issues raised
  - ❖ Sometimes the comments can be confusing
  - ❖ Think first: what the reviewer really want you to do

# Responding to Comments

- ❖ Provide a **point-to-point** response
  - ❖ Acknowledge the comment is VALID
  - ❖ Give clear answer
  - ❖ Indicate the changes made to the article (highlighting).
- ❖ If you rebut (challenge) the comments
  - ❖ Justify your arguments clearly.
  - ❖ Cite established reference to support your case.
- ❖ ***Do Nothing is NOT an option***



## Be Diplomatic in Answering

- Be polite and diplomatic in your answers even you disagree with the comments.
- Remember, they have done painstaking job to read your manuscript for FREE.
- Give respect to the reviewers contributions:
  - “First, we would like to thank the reviewers for their meticulous effort in reading our paper to improve its readability...”
  - “We appreciate the comments made by the reviewer...”
- **But don't OVERDO the praises!**


# Don't Argue with Reviewers

- If there are issues that you don't agree, don't start a debate:
  - Debate will prolong revisions (Rev 2, 3 etc)
  - Just state the facts as best as you can
- Don't question the reviewer integrity:
  - “We are of the opinion that the reviewer is not competent to review our paper...”

**REMEMBER: EDITOR BELIEVES THE  
REVIEWER MORE THAN YOU  
(no matter how correct you are!)**



# WHY PAPERS ARE REJECTED?



Don't worry about rejection...  
Nobel Prize Winners  
had their papers rejected too!

# Novelty is Not Clearly Mentioned

- What is the novelty of your work? (**Idea**)
- What is the principle behind it? (**How**)
- How is it different from other related work? (**Unique**)
- What's so special about your idea? (**Merit**)

# Literature review is not adequate

- Not **thoroughly** done
  - As a result, research gaps are wrongly defined/not unique
  - Repeat of previous work, no new contribution
- Question: It is not possible to review everything, so how to be adequate?
  - Answer: Narrow down the scope (focus).

# Overstating your Achievement

- **Insufficient Evidence** for the claims
- Unjustified **self glorification**
  - “Our work is the best in the field...”
- **Over criticizing** (putting down) other works
  - We found the work in [1] is too primitive...”
- **Lack of Modesty** (sounds arrogant)
  - “This paper present a newly found theory, which has never been discussed elsewhere...”
  - “This is the first time that anyone has discover
- **Not open** to ideas/comments (from reviewer, editor, peer)

# A bit of modesty may be more attractive...

- You don't have to be arrogant to claim superiority
  - “To the best of our knowledge there seems to be an inadequate...”
  - “Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that this is the first attempt to...”
- But don't be too apologetic
  - Shows lack of confidence in your own work
  - “We are not certain (unsure) if our work is the first...”



# Ambiguous and Inconsistent

- **Ambiguous: Meaning:**
  - (1) has several possible meanings or interpretations;  
*an ambiguous answer.*
  - (2) lacks **clearness** or **definiteness**; **obscure**; **indistinct**
- **Remember that:** the reader cannot read your mind, they can only read what you have write.
- **Consider this:** The material is already difficult enough to understand, don't let the readers scratch their head to think what are you trying to say!

# Subjective Writing

- Technical paper should be very **objective**
- Readers should not be allowed to interpret. **You must tell exactly what it means.**
  - “**The result** shows that **our experiment** is **superior** than the work published in [1]
  - “**From Fig. 1**, there is a **15% increase** in the **output power**, in comparison to [1]...”
- Another Example
  - “**The simulation** is in excellent agreement with the **theoretical prediction...**”
  - “**There is only 0.1% discrepancy** between the **simulation** and the **theoretical prediction**; thus...”

# Not Respecting Previous Publication

- Plagiarism
- Repeating others work (no novelty)
- Citing incorrectly (improper referencing)
- Dismissive statement (harsh criticism)

Note: Citing others does not reduce novelty of your work. **On the contrary**, it's a proof of authors awareness of other work and show his ability to define new contribution

## Other Possible Issues

- Too many spelling (typo) errors
- Grammar
- Figures, graph, tables not clear
- Sentence structures are problematic

Need proof reader/editing services

Do not copy/paste diagram. Redraw them

**Revise! Revise! Revise! (x10)**

# Final Notes

- Cherish your own work – if you do not take care, why should the journal?
- There is no secret recipe for success – just some simple rules, **dedication and hard work.**
- Editors and reviewers are all busy scientists, just like you. Make things easy to save them time.



[zainals@utm.my](mailto:zainals@utm.my)

