

How to Prepare a Really Lousy Submission

By [Water Resources Research Editorial Team](#)

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Here are some tips for making journal submissions that almost certainly will have a fast track to rejection.

1. **Title:** Make the title long and descriptive instead of brief and conceptual. Better still, use (parenthesis) to explain new terms within the title.
2. **Authorship:** Don't bother to include as authors all who have contributed to the work. Also, don't take the time to consult all the included authors to get their approval prior to submission. After all, everyone will appreciate the details after the paper is published.
3. **Use of Data:** Feel free to use other people's experimental or field data without permission and acknowledgement. If you were able to get it, then they must not care about who uses it.
4. **Language:** Don't take the time to check and correct for spelling, language, structure and organization, comprehension, brevity, illustration, clarity, completeness, accuracy, fallacies etc. The reviewers can fix these details. Moreover, if they send you detailed grammatical suggestions, it means that they read the submission carefully. They wouldn't volunteer if they didn't want to help, and they are picked for their skill in copy editing anyway.
5. **Abstract:** Don't make the effort to focus upon the essential contributions of the paper or the implications of the results. After all, if readers are *really* interested to know what the paper is about, they'll filter out the wheat from the chafe.
6. **Introduction:** This is all about how important your previous work is: a great way to run up your citation index. After all, if you don't, no one else will! Steer clear of the scientific context or how recent literature illustrates that this would be a novel and important contribution. The chances are that nothing interesting has been published since you began this research two years ago; so don't bother checking for recent articles. Again, this is a great use of reviewer's time – they don't have much else to do. Finally, do not waste space describing the motivation for the problem – readers can figure it out.
7. **Borrow Text:** Hey, this stuff already passed peer review, so it must be good! Ethical standards for publication? Fussing details. Feel free to use verbatim material from your own or other people's prior publication and don't bother with attribution. If you must cite other work, do not place quotes around quoted material. Better still, use the same introduction and/or conclusions you used in your last paper. Even better, try to get away with using slightly modified text from a previous paper: slap on a new title and abstract and you are all set. If they were good enough to get published before, they'll do the job this time as well.
8. **Acronyms:** Use lots of acronyms. Jargon shows how "in" you are in the field, and keeps the community from stealing your ideas by understanding what you are saying. Better still, do not define acronyms anywhere and see if the reader can figure them out. Just think of the fun your readers are having endlessly searching for what "ZYK" means. No pain, no gain. Soon they too will be writing like you do!
9. **Figures:** Make sure that the figures are poorly legible – can't these people be satisfied just reading the text for Pete's sake? Some tips: use small, difficult to read fonts (nothing over 8 point), clustered graphics, missing labels, data markers that make the cloud of points look like you spilled a bottle of ink, no units (anywhere), start the axis at a random number, have axis labels with lots of extra zeros on the numbers 'cause that is how Excel spits them out, and have multiple unlabeled panels. Cite figures and panels in random order – after all they *are* numbered. Further, since figures and tables are self-explanatory, it's redundant to mention their main points or provide any interpretation in the text.

Remember, if one figure is good, then 10 are great. You took the time to collect the data, so plot it *all* for the world to see.

10. **Methods:** Just stick to the cool expensive instruments; do not properly or completely describe experimental or methodological details and data. After all, who would be interested in reproducing the results or their verification? It's all about trust.
11. **Conclusions:** In the conclusions, don't discuss the role of assumptions, experimental or data limitations, uncertainties, alternative or competing explanation, limitations of the research, how the results relate to previous publications, etc. After all, why should you point out the limits of applicability of the research? That is for others to find out.
12. **Bibliography:** Don't worry about missing or inappropriately cited references. Who would want to look them up? And, anyway, the technical editors will take care of that sort of thing.
13. **Distillation:** Don't bother to distill and concisely explain material that is already available as a thesis or report. After all, it is the responsibility of the reader to pore through the details to figure out the main points. Once again, this is a great way to make use of the review process to figure out what can be cut out of the article.
14. **Responding To Review Comments:** After the reviews are received, criticize the intelligence and knowledge of the reviewers, associate editor, and editor instead of addressing the comments. After all, the reviewers are generally biased, usually incompetent, and should have been able to read the author's ideas as written "between the lines" instead of sticking to the actual written material. Above all, resist making significant changes to your manuscript – argue with the reviewers in your responses to their comments, and avoid assimilating those arguments into the text of the manuscript. And don't think of thanking them in the acknowledgements -- it only encourages them to be pickier next time.
15. **Dual Submission:** You may never again have an original idea. Be opportunistic and submit the same material, perhaps with slightly modified title and introduction, possibly with a slightly different case study, to different journals. If the papers are in review together, no one will find out. Tip: use the "reviewers to exclude" strategically.
16. **Least Publishable Unit:** Spread out your research over several manuscripts so that each contains the least amount of information that can be published. This can be achieved by slicing the concepts, or the data so that many pieces can be presented through different avenues. The readers can assemble all the related papers to develop a comprehensive understanding. Remember: administrators can count, but not read. This is also a great way to stretch your research dollars.
17. **The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Oil!** Don't accept responsibility for not having carefully looked at the formatting and other instructions before submission. Get right on the editors and the review team. You know they are a lazy bunch, who are just letting your manuscript gather dust. So send them repeated reminders to ensure that the paper is being attended to. After all, if it took two years to perform the research and write the manuscript, it should be exciting enough that the reviewers will drop everything else to immediately read the paper, and recommend acceptance with only some mild comments.

On a more serious note, having handled well over 3000 new submissions, we have seen instances of all the above, which create significant challenges during the review, decision and post-publication stage. We will all be better served by authors taking a little extra care in manuscript preparation prior to submission. Language services are available through AGU (<http://www.agu.org/pubs/authors/>) to ascertain that reviewers can focus on the scientific essence of the papers. Electronic screening of submitted manuscript is already resulting in rejections where there is significant overlap of previously published material (see <http://www.agu.org/pubs/crossref/2011/2011EO130008.shtml>).

The above is written with the hope that we will all pause and spend a little extra time to ensure that everyone has a pleasant experience as we communicate important and exciting science to our peers and to society.