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Publication Literacy: Editors' Advice on the Successful Submission and Acceptance of a Journal Article

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the growing practice of publication literacy and presents guidelines on how publication literacy can develop both *writing skills* and *managing article submissions to a journal.* "Publication literacy" refers to editors' contributions to a growing body of knowledge on writing for publication and the accompanied review and publication value chain. It covers the submission, review, and publication processes and confirms whether "threshold standards" of a journal are met. The advantage of this approach is that it guides essentially what good writing is all about. Content analysis was used to code the review records of 152 articles submitted to a journal over five years. *Conventional* content analysis was used as the coding categories originated directly from the text data. The data was derived from the two review processes of the journal, namely the *editorial review* and *peer review*. The results suggest that publication literacy is a neglected approach in educating and training in science writing. Ignorance of any of these aspects will result in an article not being submitted for peer review, the rejection of an article for publication or the delay in the publication itself. The application of publication literacy within the research education curriculum is suggested based on three core stages.

Keywords: Publication literacy; editorial review; peer review; research education curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing for publication workshops, modules, and programmes has become a valued research activity for postgraduate students and emerging researchers as novice authors. The focus of *writing for publication* support is to guide (novice) authors on successfully writing and submitting an article for publication. These activities are essential for any research education or postgraduate research curriculum, as writing skills are an essential learning outcome of senior degree research qualifications as defined by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2012).

This article focuses on a neglected contributor to publication writing skills, namely the journal editor. Journal editors contribute to the advice and guidance offered to authors. The importance of the editors' contributions is that they are not co-authors of the article under review. Instead, they are the people who offer comments on the *readiness of an article for publication.* Sharma (2016:254) remarks that "the editor is the leader who sets the vision and personality of the journal". On completion of the review, they communicate to the authors which *parts of the article* the reviewers raised questions on. Editors are also familiar with the challenges that most authors struggle with, as they have the proverbial "helicopter view" of the lifecycle of articles submitted to a journal. Their contribution to publication is well recorded by Moss (2018:6-7), who says that an editor notes "patterns of omission and problem areas that are consistently noted across reports." Equally so can an editor identify common elements shared by successful articles.

This article wants to build on Moss' comment with the question: *What are the requirements for a successful article based on editors' views*? Although the focus in this article is on journal articles, the recommendations should be equally applicable to books, book chapters and conference proceedings. Shokeir (2014:72) advises on basic requirements that should be evident in an article. His reference to the "'basic triad' of an original article" implies that these requirements, namely the subject, knowledge of an article and good writing, should seemingly be part of an article. It is therefore not only about the content of the research but also about how the research is presented.

The above comments already imply that writing a successful article requires much more than reporting on the research only. To support this comment, "publication literacy" is recommended to guide authors to be successful in publishing an article.

"Publication literacy" refers to editors' contributions to a growing body of knowledge on writing for publication. Editors use their combined experience as researchers, reviewers, and editors to maximise the opportunity to get published (Sharma, 2016:254; Marušić & Marušić, 2022:6 & Cnossen et al., 2024:3). They also offer tips on what can be regarded as *best practice* in writing for publication. Coleman (2014:404) summarises the editors' contribution well with the comment that they can correct unrealistic expectations for publication "with a fuller understanding of the submission, review and publications process". He continues to say that editors also offer advice on, for example, when an article based on a thesis is suitable for publication. It may be sufficient for a study to focus on a local problem, but a journal might not find this valuable because of the scope and readership (Coleman, 2014:405). He summarises the role of an editor well by saying that the "decision to send for review may be taken with enthusiasm or with resignation" (Coleman, 2014:407). Sometimes an editor doubts whether the article will pass the review process, but the feedback can be valuable to the authors. An important function of editors' comments is whether the "threshold standards" of a journal are met (Saver & Nicoll, 2019:898). Nicoll (2019:1) comments that as editor, she was contributing to the *review* of an article and *sharing* what good writing is all about. Based on these comments, the observation is that various responsibilities and contributions by editors are useful for building publication literacy.

Article writing can be daunting as it requires an array of competencies expected from researchers. These competencies range from identifying a real problem to employing applicable scientific methods and approaches to address a research problem. Apart from a large dose of critical-analytical reasoning, it is also expected from researchers to articulate the problem, identify relevant literature, formulate findings, and draw conclusions in a structured

and scientific manner. Technical skills like grammar, concord, and style issues are also pertinent. The importance of cultivating publication literacy is therefore important.

By using editorial insights from a single South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) accredited journal, the objective of this article is to guide authors on improving their publication proficiency. Data was gathered using conventional content analysis, as reviewers' reports from all articles that were reviewed by the journal in five years (2019-2023) were considered. The findings identify guidelines to enhance publication literacy. The identification of the relevant journal is purposely undisclosed.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF AN ARTICLE

Authors often ask for examples of an article successfully submitted and reviewed for publication.

This sparked the question of whether there is something like an "ideal article"? If the "guidelines" are followed, will success be guaranteed? The temptation is to answer "yes", but with a condition: *if the "architecture" of an article is evident.* This architecture is best presented by the well-known questions: *Why are you writing this article? Was the reason for writing the article addressed? What difference does this article make towards the existing knowledge base?* If the article was never written, let alone published, will it make any difference to the science community, and if yes, to what extent? In "article language", these questions mean: *What was the research problem? What methods and methodologies were used to address the problem? What are the solutions to the research problem?* A random selection of scholarly journals peer-reviewed by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf, 2011a & 2011b) identifies a common structure for articles as *Background, Method, Results, Discussion, and Conclusions*. This structure communicates in another way the questions above: *What was the research about? How was the research performed? What were the results of the research?*

Two more additions to the general structure of an article can be added, namely the *reference list* and *declarations*. It is a limitation to regard the reference list as giving credit to authors or avoiding plagiarism only. A reference list is also an indicator of schools of thought, trends in the debate, outline of discourse, context for the research, relevance and connectedness of the research topic, internet resources versus hard copy resources, and standing of cited journals in the science community (for example, reputation, impact factor and more). The declaration tells something about networks, ethical approval, collaborators, support (for example, statistical analysis), the purpose of the research (for example, a thesis) and funding for the research. With this said, it is not only a matter of whether *there is an evident architecture in the article, but also what contributes towards the architecture of an article.*

Three important observations from the architecture of an article are that (a) there is a systematic and logical way when writing for publication, (b) articles cannot go without the basic architecture relevant to an article, and (c) an article is reflective of quality research supported by evidence.

The above observations support editors' contribution to writing for publication as confirmed by authors such as Coleman, Dreyfuss and Ryan, Saver and Nicoll and Nicoll. Editors guide whether the threshold standards of a journal are met (Saver & Nicoll, 2019:898). Coleman (2014:407) remarks that as much as 50% of articles never go out for review for reasons such as not meeting the basic requirements of an article or because of a *lack of significance*. Many authors confirm that identifying the scope and focus of a journal is critical before submission (Saver and Nicoll, 2019:5). Dreyfuss and Ryan (2018) offer twenty tips for writing. These tips are interwoven with the architecture of an article. It is not about the "twenty" tips but guidance on what an article should look like before submission to a journal. Staller's observation (2019:897-898) is equally informative. Editors' advice is not to take over the function of developing novice authors, although their advice can be useful, given the insight into the challenges novice authors struggle with. There are lessons to be learnt, such as the reasons for "desk rejections", but also trends such as that desk rejections are more common amongst student authors. The purpose of the editors'

comments is not to rewrite the article for the author but to anchor challenges with an article in the broader context of article writing.

Editors are also the bearers of good or bad news. Reviewer comments are normally shared as they are with the editor, trying to mediate between opposing reviews or emphasising what should be addressed based on the peer review. Whilst the expert voice of the reviewer should not be ignored, an editor is mindful that this may be an article from a novice author who should then be guided in understanding the feedback received on the article (Coleman, 2014:408; Hwang, 2013:664 & Marušić & Marušić, 2022:3).

Editors are also responsible for the integrity of the research process, the reputation of the journal and the accessibility of a journal (Coleman, 2014:210). Novice authors are often the victims of predatory journals. No one will like the idea that good research is going to waste when published in a questionable journal. Editors can provide useful comments, such as that referencing predatory journals should be avoided as this may raise questions about the integrity of the article (Nicoll, 2019:7-8).

A two-fold review process of a single DHET-accredited journal will contribute towards identifying guidelines for publication literacy.

METHODOLOGY

Content analysis was used to code the occurrence of words and phrases from the review records of 152 articles submitted to the journal in a five-year cycle (2019-2023). This number of articles excludes articles submitted for dedicated editions in 2019, as the editorial review was dealt with independently by the guest editors before the articles were presented for review.

Content analysis is a technique for making objective and systematic inferences about already recorded information, in this case, review records. As content analysis analyses content and its features, it allows for the quantification of qualitative data (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2005). This chapter used *conventional* content analysis as the coding categories originated directly from the text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Kleinheksel, Rockich-Winston, Tawfik and Wyatt (2020) comment that content analysis is useful where there is a large amount of unanalysed data. The data analysed presents salient concepts that can explain a particular phenomenon. This approach is in line with the outcome of this article.

The is are derived from the two review processes of the journal, namely the *editorial review* and *peer review*. The purpose of the two-fold review process is to assess the readiness of an article for review and subsequent publication. The readiness is assessed on two levels. *Firstly*, if articles comply with the requirements set for the journal. *Secondly*, if the articles meet the threshold standards for publication.

The editorial review presented in this paper is based on seven indexes that are grouped around the case journal's requirements and are performed to verify readiness for peer review (As mentioned in paragraph 1, the identification of the relevant journal is purposely undisclosed). This review is also known as a "desktop" review. The indexes used for this category of review are word count, reference method, abstract, keywords, alignment between introduction and conclusion, similarity detection and cover page. An eight-category, "other", is also used where relevant. This index's purpose is to raise matters such as the relevance of the article for the journal, fit with the scope of the journal and recurring articles from the same author(s) on the same topic. This article does not report on this index due to the small data size available for this index.

The submission of a cover page is important for three reasons: Firstly, it contains biographic information such as the corresponding author and institutional affiliation. Secondly, for record-keeping on DHET requirements, such as the 25-75% rule[4]. Lastly, it contains information requested, such as identification of

[4] The South African DHET Research Outputs Policy, 2015, Paragraph 5.10 (c) states that at least 75% of the contributions published in a journal must emanate from multiple institutions (Republic of South Africa, 2015).

the research problem, what new knowledge is produced, and the alignment with the scope of the journal can be used by the author(s) as self-review on an article's suitability for the journal.

The inclusion of an "abstract" index is to identify if there is an abstract and what the purpose of the research is. The index on alignment between the introduction and conclusion is to verify the link between various parts of a paper.

Peer review assesses the scientific content and whether new knowledge was added. Ten indexes were used to capture the review comments used in this article. The indexes used, are title, abstract, literature review reflective of the most recent debates on the topic, methodology, results, discussions, conclusions, references, either outdated or additional required, technical matters and language editing. Technical matters refer to relevance for the world of work, layout, data sheet references and more. The summative feedback to authors is based on four categories, namely (a) accepted without revision, (b) accepted with minor revision, (c) update required based on revision and (d) not suitable for publication. For developmental purposes, authors with "update with revision" are encouraged to update the article for another review process.

The grouping of the articles is based on the six publication categories of the DHET, namely: Agricultural Sciences, Engineering and Applied Technologies, Health Sciences, Humanities, Natural Sciences and Management and Social Sciences. These groupings are representative of articles submitted to the journal as an inter- and multi-disciplinary journal.

The data sampled and the information constructed from the data was aggregated into guidelines for publication literacy.

RESULTS

Editorial review

For 2019, 29 articles were submitted to be considered for publication. These articles fit in all the DHET journal groupings except Agricultural Sciences. Submissions to the Humanities and Management and Social Sciences groupings represented 62% of the submissions.

The comments for this year and the other years are based on observations where the basic requirement for an index was not met.

The results of the editorial review of the submissions for 2019 are reported in Table 1. The percentages in all tables are rounded to the first decimal place.

Table 1. *Submissions to the Journal in 2019*

	Engineering and Applied Technologies (n=5)		**Health Sciences (n=3)**		**Humanities (n=10)**		**Natural Sciences (n=3)**		**Management and Social Sciences (n=8)**		**Total (n=29)**	
Editorial Review Indexes	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Word count	5	100%	1	33%	8	80%	3	100%	5	62%	**22**	76%
Reference method	1	20%	0	0%	3	30%	1	33%	0	0%	**5**	17%
Abstract	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	**0**	0%
Keywords	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	25%	**3**	10%
Intro / Conclusion	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%	0	0%	3	38%	**4**	14%
Cover page	4	80%	0	0%	4	40%	1	33%	4	80%	**13**	45%
Similarity detection	3	60%	1	33%	7	70%	1	33%	7	88%	**19**	66%

Table 1 confirms that the word count (76%) and similarity indexes (66%) attracted the most comments. Articles were either under or over the required word count. For 2019, articles with a similarity greater than 15% were viewed as a concern. The benchmark was set at 15% as this is regarded as acceptable in similarity when formulas, concepts, phrases and generally known facts are taken as the core of the similarity detection. However, this percentage does not include any similarity based on previously published work without the resource being referenced. Similarity detection was evident in all journal groupings. The absence of a cover page was observed in 45% of the submissions. The reference style was evaluated against the abridged Harvard referencing method and resulted in 17% comments. The absence of keywords was reported in 10% of the submissions. The inclusion of an abstract was considered, but not the contents of abstracts.

From the 2019 administrative records, it was observed that six papers were turned down for peer review. The rejection represents 21% of the papers submitted to the journal. The main reasons for rejections were *word count, reference style and similarity*.

For 2020, 36 articles were submitted for possible publication. These articles fit in all the DHET journal groupings except Agricultural Sciences. Submissions to the Humanities and Management and Social groupings represented 69% of the submissions.

The results of the editorial review of the submissions for 2020 are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. *Submissions to the Journal in 2020*

	Engineering and Applied Technologies (n=5)		**Health Sciences (n=3)**		**Humanities (n=9)**		**Natural Sciences (n=3)**		**Management and Social Sciences (n=16)**		**Total (n=36)**	
Editorial Review Indexes	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Word count	3	60%	3	100%	5	56%	2	67%	9	56%	**22**	61%
Reference method	2	40%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	2	13%	**5**	14%
Abstract	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	**0**	0%
Keywords	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	13%	**2**	6%
Introduction/ Conclusion	2	40%	1	33%	0	0%	2	67%	1	6%	**6**	17%
Cover page	1	20%	3	100%	5	56%	2	67%	7	44%	**18**	50%
Similarity detection	2	40%	3	100%	5	56%	2	67%	10	63%	**22**	61%

Table 2 confirms that the word count (61%) and similarity (61%) indexes invited a high percentage of comments. Articles were either under or over the required word count. The similarity detection in 2020 was based on concerns identified in the reports. An additional concern was although a low similarity, text references were missing.

The absence of a cover page attracted 50% comments. These challenges were evident in all journal groupings. The reference style was evaluated against the abridged Harvard referencing method and resulted in 14% comments. The absence of keywords was reported in 6% of the submissions. The presence of an abstract was considered and not the contents of abstracts.

Five papers were not approved for peer review. The rejection represents 14% of the articles submitted. The main reasons for rejections were *word count, reference style and similarity.* Authors also withdrew six articles (17%) due to the editorial review. Another 17% of the articles were archived as no response was received based on the editorial review. As a result, only 19 articles could be presented for peer review. This number represents 52% of the articles originally submitted to the journal.

For 2021, 30 articles were considered for the editorial review. These articles fit in all the DHET groupings except Natural Sciences. Submissions to the Humanities and Management and Social categories represented 77% of the submissions.
The results of the editorial review of the submissions for 2021 are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. *Submissions to the Journal in 2021*

	Agricultural Sciences (n=1)		Engineering and Applied Technologies (n=3)		Health Sciences (n=3)		Humanities (n=7)		Management and Social Sciences (n=16)		Total (n=30)	
Editorial Review Indexes	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Word count	1	100%	2	67%	1	33%	3	43%	6	38%	**13**	43%
Reference method	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%	1	14%	3	19%	**5**	17%
Abstract	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	14%	0	0%	**1**	3%
Keywords	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%	1	14%	0	0%	**2**	6%
Introduction/ Conclusion	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	**0**	0%
Cover page	0	0%	2	67%	0	0%	5	71%	8	50%	**15**	50%
Similarity detection	0	0%	2	67%	3	100%	4	57%	12	75%	**21**	70%

Table 3 confirms that the word count (43%), similarity (70%) and cover page (50%) indexes remain challenging. The interpretation of the similarity detection in 2021 was like 2020. The reference style was evaluated against the abridged Harvard referencing method and resulted in 17% comments. The absence of keywords was reported in 6% of the submissions. Surprisingly, one article had no abstract (3%).

One paper was rejected upfront, which represented 3% of the submissions to the journal. The main reasons for rejection were *word count, reference style and similarity.* The authors also withdrew 3 articles (10%) after the editorial review. Another six articles (20%) were archived as no response was received based on the editorial review. As a result, only 20 articles could be presented for peer review. This number represents 67% of the articles originally submitted to the journal.

For 2022, 23 articles were considered for the editorial review. These articles fit in four of the DHET groupings. Submissions to the Humanities and Management and Social categories represented 78% of the submissions. The results of the editorial review of the submissions for 2022 are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. *Submissions to the Journal in 2022*

	Health Sciences (n=3)		Humanities (n=15)		Natural Sciences (n=2)		Management and Social Sciences (n=3)		Total (n=23)	
Editorial Review Indexes	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Word count	1	33%	2	13%	2	100%	2	67%	7	30%
Reference method	3	100%	4	27%	1	50%	1	33%	9	39%
Abstract	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%
Key words	0	0%	3	20%	0	0%	0	0%	3	13%
Introduction/ Conclusion	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Cover page	3	100%	3	20%	1	50%	0	0%	7	30%
Similarity detection	3	100%	1	7%	2	100%	3	100%	9	39%

Table 4 confirms that the word count (30%), similarity (39%) and cover page (30%) indexes remain challenging, although the numbers were lower in the reporting year. The reference style was evaluated against the abridged Harvard reference method and resulted in 39% comments. The absence of keywords was reported in 13% of the submissions. One article had no abstract (4%).

One paper was rejected upfront, which represented 4% of the submissions to the journal. The main reasons for rejection were *word count, reference style and similarity.* Six articles (26%) were archived as no updated articles were received from the authors after the editorial review. One article (4%) was withdrawn after the editorial review. As a result, only 16 articles could be presented for peer review. This number represents 70 % of the articles originally submitted to the journal.

For 2023, thirty-four (34) articles were considered for the editorial review. These articles fit in all the DHET groupings, except Agricultural Sciences. The results of the editorial review of the submissions for 2023 are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. *Submissions to the Journal in 2023*

	Engineering and Applied Technologies (n=7)		**Health Sciences (n=3)**		**Humanities (n=7)**		**Natural Sciences (n=2)**		**Management and Social Sciences (n=15)**		**Total (n=34)**	
Editorial Review Indexes	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Word count	5	71%	1	33%	5	71%	1	50%	10	67%	22	65%
Reference method	5	71%	1	33%	2	29%	1	50%	7	47%	16	47%
Abstract	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	20%	3	9%
Key words	0	0%	0	0%	1	14%	0	0%	4	27%	5	15%
Introduction/ Conclusion	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Cover page	1	14%	1	33%	3	43%	1	50%	11	73%	17	50%
Similarity detection	7	100%	1	33%	4	57%	1	50%	9	60%	22	65%

Table 5 confirms that the word count (65%), similarity (65%) and cover page (50%) indexes remain challenging, and are higher compared to the previous year. The reference style was evaluated against the abridged Harvard referencing method and resulted in 47% comments. The absence of keywords was reported in 15% of the submissions. Three articles had no abstract (9%).

Three papers were rejected upfront, which represented 9% of the submissions to the journal. The main reasons for rejection were *word count, reference style and similarity.* Thirteen articles (38%) were archived as no updated articles were received from the authors after the editorial review. One article (3%) was withdrawn after the editorial review. As a result, only 18 articles could be presented for peer review, representing 53% of the articles originally submitted to the journal.

The combined results of the editorial review of the submissions for 2019 - 2023 are reported in Table 6.

Table 6. *Total submissions to the Journal in 2019 – 2023*

	2019 (n=29)		2020 (n=36)		2021 (n=30)		2022 (n=23)		2023 (n=34)		Total (n=152)	
Editorial Review Indexes	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Word count	22	76%	22	61%	13	43%	7	30%	22	65%	86	57%
Reference method	5	17%	5	14%	5	17%	9	39%	16	47%	40	26%
Abstract	0	0%	0	0%	1	3%	1	4%	3	9%	5	3%
Key words	3	10%	2	6%	2	6%	3	13%	5	15%	15	10%
Introduction / Conclusion	4	14%	6	17%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	10	7%
Cover page	13	45%	18	50%	15	50%	7	30%	17	50%	70	46%
Similarity detection	19	66%	22	61%	21	70%	9	39%	22	65%	93	61%

From the combined results in **Table 6,** it is evident that word count (57%), similarity detection (61%) and the absence of submitting a cover page (46%) were challenges across the five years. The correct reference style attracted 26% comments over the reporting period, and the absence of keywords 10%. Only 3% of articles was submitted without an abstract. Articles reflected in general an alignment between the abstracts and conclusions. The alignment between the introduction and conclusion raised 7% of comments.

Peer review

From the 2019 article submission, 23 (79%) articles were subjected to peer review. These articles represent 79% of the articles originally submitted to the Journal. Review reports were submitted to the corresponding authors. Feedback to authors fits broadly into the four categories as indicated in paragraph 3. No article was accepted without at least a minor revision. Submissions for peer review were representative of five journal groupings. In reaction to the review reports, one paper was withdrawn. The reason provided for the withdrawal was that the article had already been published by another journal.

The comments for this year and the other years are based on comments on either concerns or how an article can be updated.

The results of the peer review of the submissions for 2019 are reported in Table 7.

Table 7. *Peer review results for the 2019 article submission*

	Engineering and Applied Technologies (n=4)		Health Sciences (n=2)		Humanities (n=6)		Natural Sciences (n=3)		Management and Social Sciences (n=8)		Total (n=23)	
Peer Review Indexes	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Title	2	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2	67%	4	50%	**9**	**39%**
Abstract	1	25%	1	50%	1	17%	0	0%	1	13%	**4**	**17%**
Literature	3	75%	2	100%	4	67%	2	67%	7	88%	**18**	**78%**
Methodology	3	75%	2	100%	3	50%	0	0%	6	75%	**14**	**61%**
Results	4	100%	2	100%	5	83%	2	67%	3	38%	**16**	**70%**
Discussion	2	50%	2	100%	3	50%	2	67%	4	50%	**13**	**57%**
Conclusion	1	25%	1	50%	3	50%	0	0%	2	25%	**7**	**30%**
References	1	25%	0	0%	2	33%	2	67%	6	75%	**11**	**48%**
Technical matters	2	50%	2	100%	2	33%	3	100%	7	88%	**16**	**70%**
Language editing	2	50%	0	0%	2	33%	3	100%	6	75%	**13**	**57%**

According to **Table 7,** the literature (78%), methodology (61%), results (70%) and technical (70%) indexes raised high percentage comments. The 70% technical comments are indicative of the structure and presentation of an article, and the 48% comments in the reference index refer to outdated resources used or additional resources required for the article. The discussion and language editing indexes each attracted 57% of comments. Suggestions were offered on how articles can be approved, as indicated by the title (39%) and abstract (17%) indexes.

From the 2020 article submission, 20 (67%) of the articles received, were subjected to peer review. Review reports were submitted to the corresponding authors. Feedback to authors fits broadly into three categories as indicated above (paragraph 3). No article was accepted without at least a minor revision. Submissions for peer review were representative of three journal groupings.

The results of the peer review of the submissions for 2020 are reported in Table 8.

Table 8. *Peer review results for the 2020 article submission*

	Engineering and Applied Technologies (n=3)		**Humanities (n=5)**		**Management and Social Sciences (n=12)**		**Total (n=20)**	
Peer Review Indexes	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Title	0	0%	1	20%	3	27%	4	20%
Abstract	0	0%	2	40%	1	9%	3	15%
Literature	3	100%	5	100%	11	100%	19	95%
Methodology	0	0%	2	40%	8	73%	10	50%
Results	0	0%	3	60%	10	91%	13	65%
Discussion	0	0%	5	100%	8	73%	13	65%
Conclusion	0	0%	1	20%	8	73%	9	45%
References	1	33%	3	60%	7	64%	11	55%
Technical matters	3	100%	0	0%	6	55%	9	45%
Language editing	1	33%	1	20%	4	36%	6	30%

According to **Table 8,** the literature, results and discussion indexes attracted more than 60% comments. The literature index resulted in 95% comments, whilst the methodology index resulted in 50% comments. Although the reference index attracted 55% comments, this index must also be interpreted against the 95% comments in the literature index. The conclusion index requires improvement, as suggested by the 45% comments. Comments on the title (20%) and abstract (15%) indexes are indicative of how articles can be improved. The 45% technical comments suggest that the structure of an article may not be well understood. The comments passed on language editing are 30%, suggesting that the articles need to meet basic language and grammar standards.

From the 2021 article submission, 19 (66%) articles received, were subjected to peer review. Completed review reports were submitted to the corresponding authors. Feedback to authors fits broadly into three categories as indicated above (paragraph 3). No paper was accepted without at least a minor revision. Submissions for peer review were representative of four journal groupings.

The results of the peer review of the submissions for 2021 are reported in Table 9.

Table 9. *Peer review results for the 2021 article submission*

	Agricultural Sciences (n=1)		Engineering and Applied Technologies (n=2)		Humanities (n=6)		Management and Social Sciences (n=10)		Total (n=19)	
Peer Review Categories	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Title	1	100%	2	100%	4	67%	7	70%	14	74%
Abstract	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%	1	5%
Literature	1	100%	0	0%	5	83%	8	80%	14	74%
Methodology	1	100%	1	50%	5	83%	8	80%	15	79%
Results	1	100%	2	100%	3	50%	8	80%	14	74%
Discussion	1	100%	1	50%	3	50%	6	60%	11	58%
Conclusion	0	0%	0	0%	3	50%	2	20%	5	26%
References	1	100%	0	0%	3	50%	2	20%	6	32%
Technical matters	1	100%	1	50%	4	67%	8	80%	14	74%
Language editing	1	100%	0	0%	4	67%	9	90%	14	74%

According to **Table 9,** the literature (74%), methodology (79%), results (74%) and discussion (58%) indexes raised high percentages of comments. The 74% technical comments are indicative of the structure and presentation of an article, and the 74% language editing index indicates the scientific language proficiency of authors. The 32% comments in the reference index refer to the resources used for the article. Suggestions were offered on how the article can be approved based on the comments on the revision of the title (74%). Some comments were offered to the conclusion category (26%), and minor comments were offered to the abstract category (5%).

From the 2022 article submission, 17 articles were subjected to peer review. Review reports were received for all the articles. Review reports were submitted to the corresponding authors. Feedback to authors fits broadly into three categories as indicated above (paragraph 3). No paper was accepted without at least a minor revision. Submissions for peer review were representative of four journal groupings.

The results of the peer review of the submissions for 2022 are reported in Table 10.

Table 10. *Peer review results for the 2022 article submission*

	Health Sciences (n=2)		Humanities (n=12)		Management and Social Sciences (n=3)		Total (n=17)	
Peer Review Categories	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Title	1	50%	2	17%	1	33%	4	24%
Abstract	0	0%	2	17%	1	33%	3	18%
Literature	1	50%	9	75%	2	67%	12	71%
Methodology	1	50%	6	50%	1	33%	8	47%
Results	1	50%	3	25%	2	67%	6	35%
Discussion	0	0%	9	75%	2	67%	11	65%
Conclusion	1	50%	4	33%	1	33%	6	35%
References	0	0%	4	33%	1	33%	5	29%
Technical matters	1	50%	5	42%	1	33%	7	41%
Language editing	2	100%	0	0%	2	67%	4	24%

According to **Table 10,** the literature (71%), methodology (47%), results (35%) and discussion (65%) indexes raised high percentages of comments, especially the

literature index is a concern. The 41% technical comments are indicative of the structure and presentation of an article. Although the language editing (24%) is lower than the previous year, the implied scientific language proficiency of authors is a challenge. The 29% comments in the reference index refer to the resources used for the article. Suggestions were offered on how the article can be approved based on the comments on the revision of the title (24%). Some comments were offered to the conclusion category (35%), and minor comments were offered to the abstract category (18%).

From the 2023 article submissions, 15 final reports have been received. Review reports were submitted to the corresponding authors. Feedback to authors fits broadly into three categories as indicated above (paragraph 3). No paper was accepted without at least a minor revision. Submissions for peer review were representative of four journal groupings.

The results of the peer review of the submissions for 2023 are reported in Table 11.

Table 11. *Peer review results for the 2023 article submission*

	Engineering and Applied Technologies (n=3)		**Health Sciences (n=2)**		**Humanities (n=3)**		**Natural Sciences (n=1)**		**Management and Social Sciences (n=6)**		**Total (n=15)**	
Peer Review Indexes	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Title	0	0%	1	50%	0	0%	1	100%	1	17%	**3**	20%
Abstract	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	33%	**2**	13%
Literature	3	100%	2	100%	3	100%	1	100%	5	83%	**14**	93%
Methodology	1	33%	2	100%	2	67%	1	100%	5	83%	**11**	73%
Results	2	67%	1	50%	1	33%	1	100%	2	33%	**7**	47%
Discussion	1	33%	1	50%	3	100%	0	0%	3	50%	**8**	53%
Conclusion	1	33%	0	0%	2	67%	0	0%	1	17%	**4**	27%
References	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	17%	**1**	7%
Technical matters	3	100%	1	50%	2	67%	1	100%	3	50%	**10**	67%
Language editing	3	100%	1	50%	3	100%	1	100%	3	50%	**11**	73%

According to **Table 11,** the literature (93%), methodology (73%), results (47%) and discussion (53%) indexes raised high percentages of comments. The literature index, however, is a surprise. The 67% technical comments are indicative of the structure and presentation of an article. The 73% language editing (24%) is alarming as it suggests that by far most authors are not in command of scientific language proficiency. The 7% comments in the reference index refer to the resources used for the article. This is lower than in previous years. Suggestions were offered on how the article can be approved based on the comments on the revision of the title (20%). Some comments were offered to the conclusion category (27%), and minor comments were offered to the abstract category (13%).

The combined peer review results for the submissions between 2019 - 2023 are reported in Table 12.

Table 12. *Combined peer review results for 2019 – 2023*

	2019 (n=23)		2020 (n=20)		2021 (n=19)		2022 (n=17)		2023 (n=15)		Total (n=94)	
Peer Review Indexes	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**	**(n)**	**(%)**
Title	9	39%	4	20%	14	74%	4	24%	3	20%	34	36%
Abstract	4	17%	3	15%	1	5%	3	18%	2	13%	13	14%
Literature	18	78%	19	95%	14	74%	12	71%	14	93%	77	82%
Methodology	14	61%	10	50%	15	79%	8	47%	11	73%	58	62%
Results	16	70%	13	65%	14	74%	6	35%	7	47%	56	60%
Discussion	13	57%	13	65%	11	58%	11	65%	8	53%	56	60%
Conclusion	7	30%	9	45%	5	26%	6	35%	4	27%	31	33%
References	11	48%	11	55%	6	32%	5	29%	1	7%	34	36%
Technical matters	16	70%	9	45%	14	74%	7	41%	10	67%	56	60%
Language editing	13	57%	6	30%	14	74%	4	24%	11	73%	48	51%

Table 12 confirms the high number of comments attracted over the five years in the literature (82%), methodology (62%), results (60%) and discussion (60%) indexes. The literature index was consistently high, ranging from 69% to 95% of comments. References are based on the literature review. The average of 38% comments over five years should be read in conjunction with the 82% literature average over the same period. The results and discussion of the results range between 60% and 62% comments and should be aligned with the 62% comments attracted by the methodology index over five years. For 2022, comments on the methodology category were below 50% and for the remaining periods of review varied between 61% and 75%. Comments on language editing differ over time, with a moderate 30% (2020) to a high 74% (2021) of comments. Attention to technical matters remains high, with a summative 60%, as this category is based on the completed research submitted for publication. The conclusion index is high (33%), given that no new information is provided in this section of the article. The average 14% comments in the abstract index and 36% comments in the title index provide advice on the improvement of an article.

DISCUSSIONS

From the results based on the editorial review and peer review emerged the following discussion.

Editorial discussion

The purpose of the editorial review is to assess the readiness for peer review. Embedded in this process is an opportunity for authors to employ self-review in determining the *suitability* and *readiness* of the article for submission to a journal. The almost 50% absence of the required cover page suggests that authors do not read the requirements for article submission and may not orient themselves as to the scope of the journal. That the articles are not ready for peer review is further confirmed by only 65% of the original submissions (152 articles) that were subjected to peer review. The reason for 35% not being subjected to peer review is based on rejection of articles after the editorial review (10%), authors who withdrew articles before peer review (6%), and the archiving of articles (19%) for which no responses were received after the editorial review. The high number of articles not progressing to peer review supports the observation that authors should familiarise themselves with the scope and requirements of a journal and the self-assessment of an article before submission. The readiness of submissions also includes basic article writing requirements, such as word count and similarity, aspects that need to be adhered to by authors. Although similarity detection software is normally associated with plagiarism, the Editorial Board takes a more positive stance in that novice authors may not always know when and how to cite or the difference between the active and passive voice in article writing. Similarity detection is, in most cases, the result of poor academic writing.

Almost 82% of the article submissions were referred to authors to update the article and/or to comply with technical requirements. The importance of this observation is twofold: firstly, the corresponding authors do not attend to the basic requirements of the journal. This means that authors may not be familiar with important aspects to secure successful publication, such as identifying the correct journal or meeting the scope of the journal. Secondly, manuscript preparation is as important for acceptance for publication as the content itself.

Another important observation is that novice authors should be skilled in similarity detection and how to present research results concisely. This is especially relevant for postgraduate students who base their articles on their (completed) studies.

Peer review discussion

The peer review results suggest that authors experience challenges with one or more of the ten indexes identified for peer review. The literature, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion indexes are regarded as the core of an article's architecture. If the five years' summative results are considered, then challenges with the literature review, methodology, results, and discussion indexes were revealed. This observation points towards the structure of an article. One conclusion from this observation is that understanding the structure of an article is important for (novice) authors. Challenges with the literature review and accompanying methodology also raise the concern that (novice) authors do not have sufficient comprehension of the literature, which implies that the research problem and context of the research are not well understood. For methodology, the indication is that either the wrong methodology was identified for the research, or the methodology was not correctly applied to the research.

The article published whilst under review with this journal points to submission misconduct and questions the integrity of the submission process.

From the narrative review reports, the following summative comments were also recorded:

- **Research problem**: The aims and objectives of the research are not clearly stated or unpacked. Research problems are not always identified or clarified in the articles. Articles based on studies in progress or completed are too much presented as a study and not as the results of a study.
- **Data collection**: The sample size is often too small to lead to meaningful conclusions. Observations are often generalised.
- **New knowledge created**: Articles do not always present new knowledge on a topic. Research results are often a confirmation of what is already evident in the scientific domain. Occasionally, the relevance of the research is not identified.
- **Absence of evidence:** The results and discussions in an article are not well supported by evidence derived from the completed research.
- **Language matters:** Apart from challenges with writing style, grammar, and concord, are the naming of tables and figures not always correct.
- **Alignment:** The research results, discussions and conclusions are not sufficiently aligned with the research problem.

PUBLICATION LITERACY GUIDELINES FOR JOURNAL SUBMISSION AND PUBLICATION

The focus of this article is on what advice can an editor could provide on successful journal submission and publication. This advice is presented as publication literacy. The two-fold review processes reported in this article, contribute towards the following publication literacy guidelines:

- The architecture of articles is based on *Background, Method, Results, Discussion* and *Conclusions* as the core of an article.
- The reference list and declarations/acknowledgements raise questions about whether the research was done correctly (fitness for purpose) and whether the correct research (fitness of purpose) was done.

- The peer review results communicated to authors should be informative and useful to improve the article.
- The review process and summative decision on an article's publication possibilities uphold the integrity of research published in the public domain.
- The decision to publish or not publish an article should be based on the threshold standards of a publication.

These guidelines are supported by various discussions relevant to the review process, namely DeHart et al. (2022); Steer and Sabine (2021) and Dreyfuss and Ryan (2018) or editorial policies, for example, from the *South African Journal of Science* (https://sajs.co.za/editorial-policies), *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology and Victimology* (https://crimsa.ac.za/acta-criminologica/) or the *South African Journal of Higher Education* https://www.journals.ac.za/sajhe/about.

Figure 1 presents visually a conceptual understanding of the editors' contribution to publication literacy.

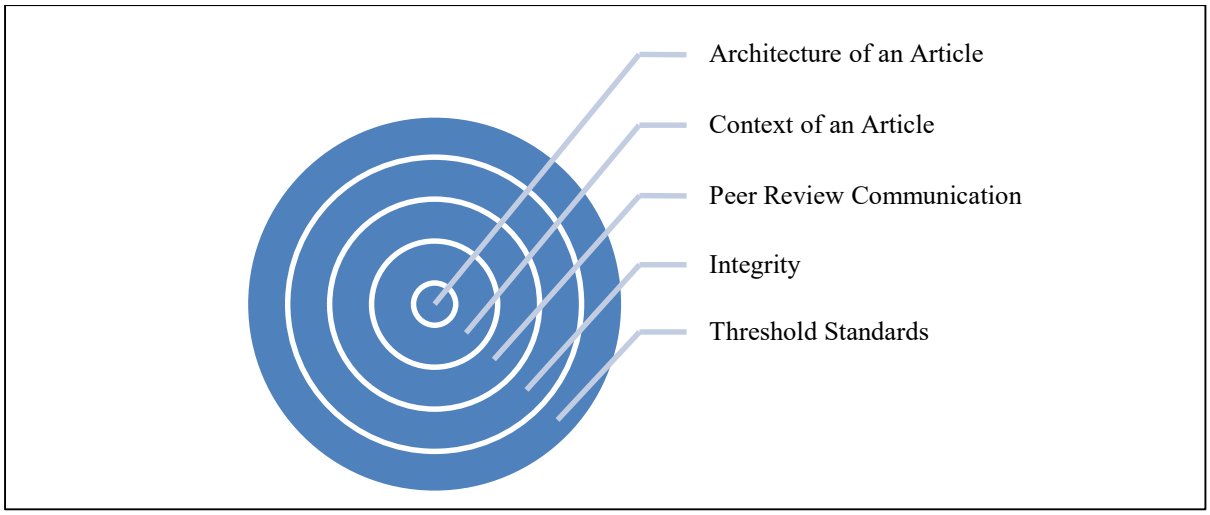

Figure 1. *Publication literacy guidelines*

HOW CAN PUBLICATION LITERACY BE INCLUDED IN THE RESEARCH EDUCATION CURRICULUM?

The research presented in this article confirms the important role of publication literacy for researchers and postgraduate students. Within research education, publication literacy can enrich a curriculum as it can enhance the learning outcomes of the postgraduate student.

Table 13 presents three broad-based stages that can be considered as core elements for a publication literacy curriculum.

Table 13. *Stages for a publication literacy curriculum*

Stage 1: Identifying an Academic Journal
Purpose: Identifying the right journal. • Journal type – Considering different types of journals – Discipline groups • Publication Policy of the Journal – Aim and scope of the potential journal • Guidelines for the submission and publication of articles • Target groups/audiences

- Who is my target audience and why?

- Ethical considerations
  - Values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, legality and dissemination.
  - The ethical and integrity statements and disclaimers, specifically regarding Artificial Intelligence tools.
  - Similarity (Turnitin Reports)
- Data sharing requirements
  - Transferring of copyright infringements.
  - The reproduction, translation, and/or distribution.
- Access / Open Access
  - Free, open online access to academic information.
  - Accessing publications without any financial, legal or technical barriers = Open Access.
  - The information is freely available to be read, downloaded, copied, distributed or printed.
  - The main goal of open access – open where possible and close as ethically necessary.
- Indexing / Impact factor
  - Differ from journal to journal.
- Language editing requirements
  - The requirements of language editing.
- Publication costs
  - Consider the costs associated with publication in a specific journal.

Stage 2: Submission to an Academic Journal

Purpose: Preparing the article for submission.

- Submission, Acknowledgement, technical evaluation considering aspects such as preferred word count and referencing style, inclusion of abstract and keywords, and similarity checks.
  - Similarity (Turnitin Reports)
- What is an acceptable similarity percentage?
  - None
  - 1 – 19%
  - 20 – 29%
  - 30 – 39%
  - 40 – 49%
  - 50 and above.
- Lessons learned because of poor academic writing:
  - High similarity does not necessarily mean plagiarism.
  - Low similarity does not mean no plagiarism.
  - Implications of standard phrases, quotes and formulas.
  - Excluding quotes and the reference list from the similarity report.
  - Citation only might not be enough.
  - Common phrases and discipline-specific literature and methodology.
  - Similarity and articles based on a Master's or Doctoral study.

Stage 3: Peer Review Process

Purpose: Peer review.

- The purpose of peer review.
  - Ensuring Quality and Accuracy
  - Improving academic rigor
  - Maintaining Academic Standards
  - Building Credibility
- Role of a peer reviewer.

CONCLUSIONS

From an editor's perspective, four important recommendations are provided to authors:

- The scope of the author's research should fit the scope of the journal. When a relevant journal is identified, the submission requirements should be adhered to.
- Similarity detection can be representative of bad academic writing and/or plagiarism. In most cases, high similarity detection points towards the absence of the author's voice. Instead, the voice of the reference is followed. This is an indication that the authors may not have fully mastered the research process.
- A good article is representative of the architecture of an article as well as what informs the architecture of the article.
- A successful article is evident in the editorial review and peer review categories.

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