

## Session 4: Editorial Perspectives and Addressing Reviewers' Comments

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

*Workshop on  
Publishing in High Impact  
Journal*  
Universitas Andalas,  
Padang, Indonesia  
14-15 March 2017



[www.utm.my](http://www.utm.my)

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

1

## EDITORIAL PROCESSES



[www.utm.my](http://www.utm.my)

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

2

## 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

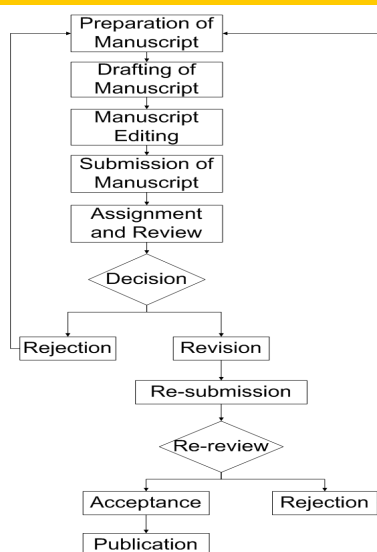


www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

3

## 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?



www.utm.my

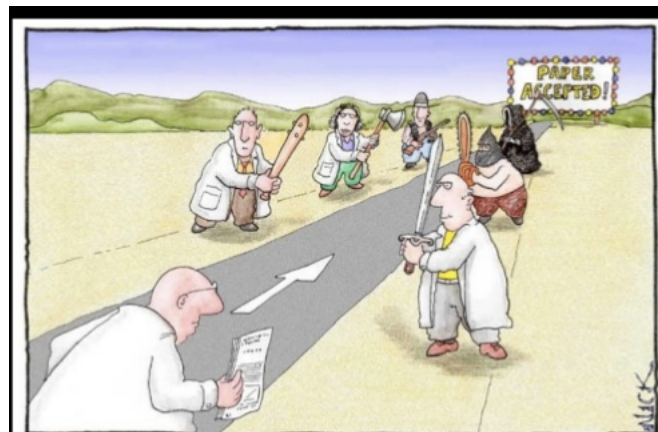
innovative • entrepreneurial • global

4

## 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.

## Review Aim?



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

## 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?



www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

7

## 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



www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

8

## 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”.



## HANDLING REVISIONS



## Most likely, a rejection is due to

- Seriously flawed research. Results are of suspect.
- Repeat of previous work (no novelty)
- Very **incremental** increase in new materials/ideas
- Poor presentation (language, unreadable diagrams, organization)
- Not able to explain results correctly
- Silly mistakes! (if you make these mistakes, how can we trust the result?)
- Submission to an inappropriate journal
- Subjective reasons (tastes of an individual editor, “rivalry”).



UTM  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

11

## 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!**



UTM  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

12

- **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!**



## When Receiving the Decision e-mail

- Normally Editor is very cautious with the wordings of the decisions:
  - “the manuscript is provisional accepted...”,
  - “we are unable to accept the paper in its current form...”
- Very few papers are accepted without comments or a need for revision.
- When you get huge negative comments, don't lose hope.
  - Read carefully what its says; it might not be as bad as you first thought.
- Even if the paper is rejected, the comments/ suggestions by the reviewers (experts) can be very valuable.





## 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



www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

17

## 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**



www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

18

## 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!**



www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

19

## 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!)**



www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

20

## Likelihood of paper to be accepted

- ❖ No single “Magic bullet”!
- ❖ The content/idea/solution need to be different from previous publications
- ❖ Contains sufficient originality (novelty)
- ❖ Well written: good structure and flow of arguments, very few mistakes.
- ❖ Area of high reader interest (old topics need to have substantial novelty)

**MOST IMPORTANT IS THE QUALITY OF YOUR RESEARCH RESULTS**



**UTM**  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

[www.utm.my](http://www.utm.my)

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

21

## WHY PAPERS ARE REJECTED?



**UTM**  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

[www.utm.my](http://www.utm.my)

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

22

## 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**)



UTM  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

23

## 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).



UTM  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

www.utm.my

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

24

## Key Article Components are Missing

- IMRAD not adhered to (missing)
  - Summary on the state-of-the-art
  - Identification of knowledge (research) gap
  - Novelty not mentioned
  - Methodology
  - Results/Discussion
  - Conclusion
  - References (important ones missing)



## Overstating your Achievement

- 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 to be considered...”
- **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)**



**UTM**  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

[www.utm.my](http://www.utm.my)

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

31

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



**UTM**  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

[www.utm.my](http://www.utm.my)

innovative • entrepreneurial • global

32



## 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@fke.utm.my](mailto:zainals@fke.utm.my)