Best Practices for Editorial Office Reporting: Editorial Board Reports 1-5

Best practice in editorial office management requires benchmarking the journal's (i.e., editors', editorial office's, reviewers', authors') performance by collecting and analyzing the appropriate data and providing those data in useful reports for editors, societies, publishers, editorial boards, and the editorial office to use for goal setting and for ensuring that set goals are met. Additionally, analyzing these data helps to identify steps in the peer review process that may need attention in order to improve efficiency. The ISMTE Education Committee collected information from their experiences and from the June 2016 member survey to create the list of the top five reports that every editorial office needs to create on a regular basis. These include

1. Submissions for the current year and compared to the past 2 years
2. Acceptance rate for the current year and compared to the past 2 years
3. Countries/geographical regions of origin of submitted and accepted articles
4. Time from submission to first decision for externally reviewed and not externally reviewed papers
5. Time from submission to final decision for externally reviewed papers.

The list may seem obvious or perhaps you see glaring omissions, but even if we all agree that these are the required reports, there are confounding factors in producing them. For example, all of the data need to be filtered on article type and version (e.g., original, final revision). Are commissioned papers included in the number of submissions received per year? Additionally, what is the definition of an acceptance rate? When creating a report on the country of origin, whose country should we use – the corresponding author’s, the lead author’s, the country of the majority of the authors?

This resource provides you with best practices for providing these reports, as advised by the ISMTE Education Committee members (Jan Higgins, Latoya Jackson, Anupama Kapadia, Kathy Lyons, Julie Nash, Kristen Overstreet, Sherryl Sundell, Tim Vines, Hannah Wakely, and Meg Weist), the Top 5 Reports Subcommittee (Kristen Overstreet, Margot Puerta, Jason Roberts, and Michael Willis), and contracted statistician, Dana Turner. Our special thanks to Dana for her professional help with this resource and the companion, Best Practices for Editorial Office Reporting: Editorial Board Reports 1-5 – Instructions for Creating the Reports in Excel.

It is important to provide your audience (e.g., editorial board, society, publisher) with reports that are created with clean data and include all of the required information so that the reports are self-explanatory. The viewer should not be left wondering what parameters were used to collect and analyze the data. Write up the process and parameters you used for each report and include this with the reports and in the journal’s policy and procedures manual, so that the processes can be duplicated in future and ensure the data are reported consistently over time.
Report 1: Submissions for the current year and compared to past years

Data to include:
- This report will include only original submissions.
- Using at least 3 years of data is desirable for comparisons.
- Removing invited/commissioned manuscripts may be desirable.

Best way to display the data:
- The information should be reported as a bar chart with a cluster of bars for each year that includes separate bars for each manuscript type.
- Exact values printed with bars are desirable.
- A line graph also can display the data and simplify visual comparisons of changes over time.
- Add a note to the chart, such as: Note. Data are for original submissions only. Commissioned articles have been removed from the data.

Comparisons:
- In the bar chart, heights of bars and number of manuscripts should be compared.
- In the line graph, changes over time can be visually compared.
- Percent change from year to year can be calculated for each article type. This calculation can be performed in Excel (i.e., [Year 2 – Year 1]/Year 1]).

Interpretation of data:
- In the bar chart, the relative heights of the bars demonstrate differences in the number of submissions of each article type between years.
- In the line graph, the changes in the lines demonstrate changes in number of submission across years.
- The percent change reveals how much the number of submissions increased or decreased compared to the submissions of the previous year.

Note. Data are for original submissions only. Commissioned articles have been removed from the data.
### Journal Manuscript Submissions by Article Type and Year

![Graph showing number of manuscripts by article type and year](image)

**Note.** Data are for original submissions only. Commissioned articles have been removed from the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Type</th>
<th>% Change 2013 to 2014</th>
<th>% Change 2014 to 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Report</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column</td>
<td>-42</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter to the Editor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>-26</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplement Article</td>
<td>-60</td>
<td>-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Submissions</td>
<td>2013: N = 92</td>
<td>2014: N = 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Version approved November 2016 by the ISMTE Professional Development Education Committee
Report 2: Acceptance rate for the current year and compared to past years

Data to include:
• To include data for a year, at least 80% of submissions should have received a final decision.
• Using at least 3 years of data is desirable for comparisons.
• Remove invited/commissioned manuscripts.
• The number of accepted articles should be divided by the total number of submissions of that article type and multiplied by 100 to get the acceptance rate for an article type. The calculation can be made in Excel.

Best way to display the data:
• The information should be reported as a bar chart with a cluster of bars for each year that includes separate bars for each manuscript type.
• Exact values printed with bars are desirable.
• A line graph also can display the data and simplify visual comparisons of changes over time.
• Add a note to the chart, such as, Note. At least 80% of the manuscripts in each included year had received a final decision. Commissioned papers were removed from the data.

Comparisons:
• In the bar chart, heights of bars and acceptance rates should be compared.
• In the line graph, changes over time can be visually compared.
• Percent change from year to year can be calculated for each article type. This calculation can be performed in Excel (i.e., \([\text{Year 2} - \text{Year 1}]/\text{Year 1}\)).

Interpretation of data:
• In the bar chart, the relative heights of the bars demonstrate differences in the acceptance rates of each article type between years.
• In the line graph, the changes in the lines demonstrate changes in acceptance rates across years.
• The percent change reveals how much the acceptance rates increased or decreased compared to the acceptance rates of the previous year.

Acceptance Rate by Article Type & Year

Note. At least 80% of the manuscripts in each included year had received a final decision. Commissioned papers were removed from the data.
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Report 3: Countries/geographical regions of origin of submitted and accepted articles

Data to include:
• Geographic region (defined by United Nations Statistics Division [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm]) should be displayed in the plot. Data that includes many countries will be difficult to display by country. Region will function better for one-size-fits-all guidelines.
• The figure caption should include a list of included countries from each region, if space allows.
• Using at least 3 years of data is desirable for comparisons.

Best way to display the data:
• The information should be reported as a bar chart with a cluster of bars for each year that includes separate bars for each geographical region.
• Exact values printed with bars are desirable.
• A radar plot also can be used for visual comparison of the number of manuscripts from each region for each year.
• Add a Note to the table indicating whether the data is for the submitting, corresponding, lead (etc.) author for each manuscript.

Comparisons:
• In the bar chart, heights of bars and numbers of manuscripts from each region should be compared across years.
• In the radar plot, the heights of the lines for each region can be compared on the axes for each year.
• More advanced statistical comparisons are not very practical for this report. Because different countries and/or regions likely will be represented in different years, interpreting such comparisons would be difficult.

Interpretation of data:
• In the bar chart, the relative heights of the bars demonstrate differences in the number of articles from each geographical region between years.
• In the radar plot, the positions of the lines for each region on the axes for each year show the number of manuscripts from each region and how they compare to other regions in a particular year. All axes of the radar plot are on the same scale, and tick marks at the same level correspond to the same number.
Note: Africa includes Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa; Asia includes China, India, Japan, Turkey, Uzbekistan; Europe includes Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, & Spain; Latin America and the Caribbean includes Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Saint Lucia; Northern America includes Canada & United States; Oceania includes Australia, Micronesia, New Zealand. Data are for first authors.
Report 4: Time from submission to first decision for externally reviewed and not externally reviewed papers

Data to include:

- The median number of days should be reported. The median for each article type for each year can be calculated in Excel.
- Report on only the original submissions. Determine what “submission” means for your journal: Is it the time the author started the submission process or the time that the submission reached the editorial office?
- A coefficient of variation also should be included. The median of all included numbers of days under review and the standard deviation of all included numbers of days under review can be calculated in Excel. The calculated standard deviation can then be divided by the calculated median to produce a coefficient of variation that can be used to set the error bars. Note: This is a simple and easy to compute method. There are more accurate methods, but they would require a tremendous amount of work. This method is acceptable for the purposes of these reports.
- Using at least 3 years of data is desirable for comparisons.

Best way to display the data:

- When plotted using Excel, the data is best presented as a bar chart of the median numbers of days with upper error bars. The error bars should be assumed to extend the same distance in the lower direction, but including the lower bars on the figure creates a noisy appearance.
- Exact values printed with bars are desirable.
- A line graph also can display the data and simplify visual comparisons of changes over time.
- Article types with limited data (i.e., data for only one year) should be excluded from the line graph.
- Add a Note to the chart, such as, Note. Date of “Submission” was the date the manuscript was received in the editorial office. Data are for manuscripts submitted during the given year. OR Note. Date of “Submission” was the date the manuscript was received in the editorial office. Data are for manuscripts submitted during the given year. Data shown are for submissions that received a decision of accept (e.g., Letters to the Editor) or reject (e.g., does not fit the journal’s scope). Submissions that received a revision decision without external review are not included.

Comparisons:

- Heights of bars and median number of days from submission to first decision should be compared.
- In the line graph, changes over time can be visually compared.
- It will be difficult to generate sound statistical inferences using Excel when the data will differ from query to query. These visual comparisons should be sufficient for current needs.

Interpretation of data:

- The relative heights of the bars demonstrate differences in the median number of days from submission to first decision of each article type between years.
- Two-thirds of newly submitted manuscripts should be expected to fall within the span of the error bars (plus and minus).
- In the line graph, the changes in the lines demonstrate changes in time from submission to first decision across years.
**Time from Submission to First Decision with External Review**

Note. Date of “Submission” was the date the manuscript was received in the editorial office. Data are for manuscripts submitted during the given year.

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Report 5: Time from submission to final decision for externally reviewed papers

Data to include:

- The median number of days should be reported. The median for each article type for each year can be calculated in Excel.
- Use data for the version of the manuscript that received the final decision (i.e., do not include multiple versions of each submission).
- Use the definition of “submission” that you determined for Report 4.
- A coefficient of variation also should be included. The median of all included numbers of days under review and the standard deviation of all included numbers of days under review can be calculated in Excel. The calculated standard deviation can then be divided by the calculated median to produce a coefficient of variation that can be used to set the error bars. Note: This is a simple and easy to compute method. There are more accurate methods, but they would require a tremendous amount of work. This method is acceptable for the purposes of these reports.
- Using at least 3 years of data is desirable for comparisons.

Best way to display the data:

- When plotted using Excel, the data is best presented as a bar chart of the median numbers of days with upper error bars. The error bars should be assumed to extend the same distance in the lower direction, but including the lower bars on the figure creates a noisy appearance.
- Exact values printed with bars are desirable.
- A line graph also can display the data and simplify visual comparisons of changes over time.
- Article types with limited data (i.e., data for only one year) should be excluded from the line graph.
- Add a Note to the chart, such as, Note. Date of “Submission” was the date the manuscript was received in the editorial office. Data are for manuscripts submitted during the given year and sent for external peer review.

Comparisons:

- Heights of bars and median number of days from submission to final decision should be compared.
- In the line graph, changes over time can be visually compared.
- It will be difficult to generate sound statistical inferences using Excel when the data will differ from query to query. These visual comparisons should be sufficient for current needs.

Interpretation of data:

- The relative heights of the bars demonstrate differences in the median number of days from submission to final decision of each article type between years.
- Two-thirds of newly submitted manuscripts should be expected to fall within the span of the error bars (plus and minus).
- In the line graph, the changes in the lines demonstrate changes in number of submissions across years.
**Time from Original Submission to Final Decision**

- **Clinical Report**
- **Column**
- **Letter to the Editor**
- **Literature Review**
- **Research Paper**
- **Supplemental Article**

**Note.** Date of “Submission” was the date the manuscript was received in the editorial office. Data are for manuscripts submitted during the given year and sent for external peer review.

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**Time from Original Submission to Final Decision**

**Note.** Date of “Submission” was the date the manuscript was received in the editorial office. Data are for manuscripts submitted during the given year and sent for external peer review.