

Reasons that Papers about Studies / Interventions Are Not Accepted

A. Reasons that generally suitable manuscripts may be rejected

1. Space is limited for papers of all kinds, and/or many authors are competing for a finite amount of publishing space; therefore only a small portion of submitted papers will be published.
2. The material in the paper is not suitable for the defined readership of the journal, either in terms of specialty or type of article. For many decades, most biomedical journals have published few if any descriptive articles; the primary focus is on “research,” and the definition of research is a narrow one, seldom covering qualitative methods or reports of observational studies.
3. The paper is not based upon first-hand observation or involvement (but is, for ex., a general presentation of work done by others).
4. The paper devotes all attention to one or two aspects but says nothing about other necessary and equally important aspects.
5. The claims/conclusions are not justified by the reasoning or evidence given.
6. The paper is
 - a. poorly organized, and/or
 - b. vague and imprecise, and/or
 - c. unclear, obscure, verbose, with too much jargon.

B. Reasons that generally unsuitable manuscripts may be rejected

1. It is not suitable for publication in the journal in question (e.g., a clinical paper is sent to a non-clinical journal). Note: This reason also applies to the category above on generally suitable manuscripts being accepted.
2. It violates the journal’s restrictions on subject matter or methodology.
3. It ignores length limitations.
4. It ignores the journal’s requirements for style (that is, the format in which the manuscript is to be prepared).

C. Reasons outside the author’s control that can lead to the rejection of even an excellent manuscript (whether a hypothesis-testing, methods, or descriptive paper)

1. *Timing*
 - The journal may have recently accepted (or published) an excellent article(s) on the same topic or even on the same general subject.

- The journal may tend to amount to allot a proportion of its space to particular formats (original research, commentaries, letters to the editor) or sub-fields (different communities or research interests within the readership); if that space has been “filled” for a period of time ahead, authors of papers in those formats or sub-fields will have limited opportunities.
- The strength of the competition at any one time depends on the papers that arrive at the same general time; that is, articles must meet external standards of merit and then the best ones must compete for space.

2. *Journals as human systems*

- Every editor makes poor decisions sometimes, but often there is no way to tell which are the good and which the bad for some years.
- Some journals (by tradition or mandate) or their editors (by personality or circumstances) may be more careful or thorough or flexible or adventurous than others.
- Some journals operate under greater financial pressure than others, and editors react differently under in those circumstances.

Sources: The first two parts of this list are loosely based on the text of Richard G. Barlow, Form in the preparation of scholarly manuscripts, *Scholarly Publishing* 1991; 23:242-7. The third was created by Addeane S. Caelleigh.