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# Three Tips for Publishing Your Paper in the *Journal of Positive Sexuality*

*This editorial offers advice on the publication process including (a) reading and following the Journal submission guidelines, (b) not waiting for a paper to be perfect before submitting it, and (c) responding productively to editorial decisions. Specific guidance is offered for responding to revise-and-resubmit opportunities, including the purpose and format of a cover letter and how to respond to negative reviews.*

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## Editorial

As my term as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Positive Sexuality (JPS)* draws to a close, I wanted to share some tips about what authors can do to increase their chances of publishing their paper in *JPS*. I wrote these with *JPS* in mind, but most apply equally to other journals.

### Read the Submission Guidelines (and Follow Them)

The submission guidelines for *JPS* (<https://journalofpositivesexuality.org/submission-guidelines/>) describe the type of papers the Journal publishes (“... manuscripts on any topic relevant to positive sexuality”) and the people we hope will submit these papers (“Alongside the work of scholars and students, we are interested in contributions from community, clinical, and other nonacademic professionals. . .”).

The guidelines also describe the nuts and bolts of writing these papers:

While the *Journal of Positive Sexuality* has a preference for shorter manuscripts (2,000–3,000 words), longer manuscripts up to 10,000 words will be considered. . . authors should write in a straightforward and non-technical manner, avoiding jargon when possible. . . Manuscripts should be written in a style consistent with the latest edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Most authors do a good job with the positive sexuality focus, the paper length, and the readability, but I have been surprised by the number of submissions that are not in APA Style (American Psychological Association, 2020). *JPS* is a cross-disciplinary journal, and I realize that many authors might not be familiar with APA Style. Fortunately, there’s a straightforward way to bring your paper into compliance with APA Style:

Look at the sample paper linked at the bottom of the Formatting Guidelines (<https://journalofpositivesexuality.org/formatting-guidelines/>). APA Style can be a bit persnickety, but if you make your paper look like the sample paper, you’ll be complying with 95% of the rules (and the other 5% can be fixed during copy editing).

### Don’t Wait for Your Paper to be Perfect—Proofread it and Submit it

Perfect is the enemy of good, as they say, and in my experience, a paper is never 100% perfect. There’s always a sentence that could be reworded here or a citation that could be added there. But at some point, you must make the decision that your paper is good enough. At that point, give the paper a final read through, check citations against references, confirm the wording of quotes, proofread for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors, crosscheck your format with the submission guidelines, and submit it.

### If You Get a Revise-and-Resubmit, Make All the Changes the Reviewers Recommend (and Document Your Changes in a Cover Letter)

Here’s what happens after you submit your paper. The editor reads your paper and makes an immediate determination as to whether the paper fits the scope and mission of the journal. If it doesn’t, the editor rejects the paper without sending it out for review (this is sometimes called a “desk rejection”). When I have desk rejected a paper at *JPS*, it has typically been because the paper does not have a positive sexuality focus. I explain this to the author and sometimes recommend alternative journals that the author might want to consider. Desk rejections can feel disheartening, but they usually happen quickly, and the best response is to look for a better-fitting journal and submit the paper there.

If the paper makes it through the initial evaluation, the editor assigns the paper to an “action editor.” The action editor can be the editor themselves or it can be one of the associate editors of the

Journal. The action editor reads the manuscript and invites two to five scholars with expertise on the topic to review the manuscript.

Reviewers read the manuscript and send their evaluation to the action editor. The evaluation includes comments for the author on the paper's strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations for changes that would improve the paper. The evaluation also includes confidential feedback to the action editor regarding whether the paper should be accepted, given a revise-and-resubmit opportunity, or rejected.

The action editor reads the reviews and makes an editorial decision. Editorial decisions typically fall into one of three categories.

#### *A paper can be accepted*

This is, needless to say, very good news. An acceptance typically comes with a list of minor changes that the author needs to make, but these are usually straightforward to implement (fix this typo, add this citation, etc.), and as long as the author makes the specified changes, the paper will be published in the Journal.

#### *A paper can be rejected*

It never feels good to get a paper rejected, but keep in mind that you are in good company. Everyone who submits papers to journals regularly gets their papers rejected. It happens to all of us.

When I get a paper rejected, I read through the decision letter and reviews, and then I put them aside for a couple of days. When I'm ready, I re-read the decision letter and reviews, and I strategize on what to do next. Sometimes the reviewers have identified a fatal flaw in the research that cannot be addressed by revising the text. At that point, the path forward requires conducting another study or reconceptualizing the research at a fundamental level. More often, the reviewers have identified problems with the study or the paper that are not fatal flaws. The editor decided to reject the paper, but the paper isn't necessarily doomed. Instead, I need to choose a different journal to submit it to. Before submitting it to the new journal, however, I try to address as many of the concerns raised by the reviewers as I can. I do this for a couple of reasons. First, reviewers are smart people with expertise on the topics discussed in the paper. Implementing their feedback will improve the paper and increase the chances of it being accepted at the next place I send it. Second, action editors choose experts on a topic to review a paper, and it is not uncommon for the same reviewer to be invited to review the paper again when it is sent to another journal. Reviewers are likely to be more positively disposed toward a paper if they see that their recommendations on the first submission were implemented.

If a paper gets rejected multiple times, it might be worth consulting with a senior colleague or mentor about the paper and the journals you're submitting it to. The colleague might be able to suggest edits that would improve the paper or journals that would be better suited for the piece. Or the colleague might identify a deeper problem with the line of research that would be best solved by collecting more data. The last thing I'd note about rejections is that some of my best papers were published only after being rejected by multiple journals. My personal record is, "An Ethical Approach to Peeking at Data" (Sagarin, Ambler, & Lee, 2014), which was rejected by five journals before being accepted by the sixth. Our perseverance paid off. Since publication, the paper has been cited over 100 times. Don't give up on a paper. If it has a contribution to make, it can find a home.

#### *A paper can receive a revise-and-resubmit opportunity*

This is good news, but it doesn't always feel that way. When I got my first revise-and-resubmit decision, it looked like pages and pages of criticism followed by a grudging willingness to read another draft of my paper if I felt the need to inflict it upon the journal. Then I showed it to Bob Cialdini, my graduate school advisor and mentor, and he translated the message for me. He told

me that action editors don't give authors a revise-and-resubmit opportunity unless they see a clear path to publication, and the pages and pages of criticism are the map to get us there. To maximize the probability of getting your paper accepted, he explained, you should go through the editorial decision letter and the reviews and make all the changes they asked for. Equally important, you should write a cover letter to accompany the resubmission that documents how you responded to each comment from the action editor and from the reviewers. I have taken this advice to heart over the years, and following this advice has led to the vast majority of my revise-and-resubmits being accepted (sometimes after another round or two of revision).

Here's what I do: When I receive a revise-and-resubmit decision, I read through the decision letter and reviews and then, as with a rejection, I put them aside for a couple of days. It's hard (at least for me) not to react defensively to the feedback. How could they have misunderstood our argument? Didn't they see that we provide that information in the second footnote under Table 3? A couple of days gives me a chance to read the feedback more objectively, at which point I usually find that I had not, in fact, presented my argument as clearly as I could have and that the critical piece of information should probably be placed in a more prominent spot. Even for comments that I still feel are misguided (or even hostile), I try not to take it personally. It helps to assume (or to pretend, if necessary) that the reviewer meant the comment constructively and to find a kernel of useful advice in the criticism. That lets me figure out some change I can make to my paper to address the comment. My goal is to make at least one revision to address each recommendation offered by the editor and the reviewers. And when things get particularly harsh, keep in mind that the best revenge for a hostile review is getting your paper published.

I start the revision process by drafting the cover letter. My cover letters start with a paragraph or two to the editor, thanking the editor for the feedback and for the opportunity to revise and resubmit my manuscript. Then, I copy all the comments from the editorial decision letter and the reviews into my cover letter. I put these comments in bold, and beneath each, I explain how I plan to respond to the comment. In some cases, my explanation is brief (e.g., "Thank you for catching that typo. It has been corrected."). In other cases, my explanation can be quite lengthy.

The cover letter serves multiple purposes. Writing it helps me strategize how I plan to revise the paper. Reading it then provides a list of the changes I need to make. And submitting it along with the revised manuscript demonstrates to the editor and reviewers all the changes we made in response to their feedback.

Here are a few of examples from the cover letter my co-authors and I wrote for "Partner Selection, Power Dynamics, and Mutual Care Giving in Long-Term Self-Defined BDSM Couples" (Cutler, Lee, Cutler, Sagarin), published in JPS in 2020:

#### **Does average age refer to the mean or median?**

Average age refers to the mean. We have revised the text to clarify this (p. 11).

#### **This section needs some citations to back up this claim. I'm not so sure that people are dealing with BDSM relationship dynamics in the same way, nor even dealing with the same issues as 2 decades ago.**

This is a fair point. As recommended, we have added citations to support our argument for the relevance of the current data despite their age. In particular, Hammack, Frost, and Hughes's (2019) section on "Kink/Fetish/BDSM Intimacies" identifies a dearth of studies on such relationships and posits "four common features or experiences of kink relationships" (p. 576). We evaluate the present data in the context of these common features (pp. 36-38). We hope that this evaluation has helped to highlight the ways the present data are still relevant (in the context of Hammack et al.'s

features of recreational power exchange, consensual and collaborative scripting, and minority stress) while also acknowledging the areas in which the age of the data have an impact (in the context of Hammack et al.'s feature of embeddedness within a larger community and with respect to terminology).

**There is a lot of descriptive data here. Although fabulous for a longer publication a lot of it is somewhat repetitive and could be revised and condensed, especially for a results section. I recommend removing much of the description and discussion and maybe using some of that in the Discussion section. Also, I'm not sure all of the subsections are really necessary here. Provide the highlights and the most interesting items, not an exhaustive analysis.**

We have revised the Results section, retaining the material that seemed most relevant to the purpose of the paper and removing the material that seemed less relevant. We have also attempted to remove redundancy, both within the Results section and between the Results and Discussion sections. We would be happy to make further revisions if extraneous or redundant material remains.

After drafting the cover letter, I revise the actual manuscript. While making the revisions, I sometimes discover that the plan I outlined in the cover letter for a particular point doesn't work in practice, in which case I revise that part of the cover letter. When

I'm done revising the manuscript, I give it a full read-through to ensure I've addressed all the points. The read through also helps me fix any writing issues that arose from the changes I've made. Addressing individual reviewer points can sometimes disrupt the flow of the paper. Finally, I go back through the cover letter, filling in page numbers to show where the changes I made appear in the revised manuscript.

All this can lead to some very long cover letters. In fact, some of my cover letters have ended up longer than the paper itself!

My experience as an editor and a reviewer is that a comprehensive cover letter effectively demonstrates that the author has done everything we asked them to do and that the paper is ready to be accepted.

### Some Final Words

To close, I want to take this opportunity to thank the dedicated people who make the Journal of Positive Sexuality happen: Founders of the journal: Emily Prior and DJ Williams; Incoming Editor-in-Chief: Joye Swan; Production Editors: Jim Fleckenstein and John Edgar Browning; and Editorial Board Members: Aleah Poncini, Apryl Alexander, Daniel Copulsky, Dave Holmes, Jennifer Vencill, Jim Fleckenstein, John Edgar Browning, Karen Sabbah, Kat Klement, Liam Wignall, Moshoula Capous-Desyllas, Richard Sprott, R. Todd Hartle, and Zaedryn Rook. It has been a pleasure to work with such wonderful, generous colleagues. I look forward to seeing where Joye takes the Journal from here!