Journal of Controlled Release 385 (2025) 113973

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Controlled Release

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jconrel

Editorial

Effective communication with JCR editors in the peer review process

While the decision to accept or reject a manuscript for publication ultimately depends on its intrinsic quality, [1] effective communication with the handling editor can make the peer review process smoother and accelerate decision-making. As JCR editors, our goal is to facilitate the dissemination of high-quality research, [2] but the efficiency and outcomes of the process often depend on clear and effective communication between authors and editors. [3] If you are submitting your manuscript to JCR for the first time, or if you have any uncertainties, we strongly recommend reviewing the JCR *Guide for Authors* for helpful guidance.

1. Sending a clear message to editors

The first opportunity to start an effective communication process is through the manuscript's title, abstract, graphical abstract and cover letter. These elements are not mere formalities; they act as the "front door" of your submission and are the first things that handling editors review. The title and abstract should succinctly convey the essence of your work, clearly highlighting its novelty and relevance to the journal's readership. Avoid overly broad or vague titles that may fail to capture the editor's attention or misrepresent the study's scope. Additionally, the use of acronyms in the title is strongly discouraged.

A strong abstract and graphical abstract are essential for effectively communicating your research. A good abstract should begin by addressing the broader challenge in the field of drug delivery, highlight the specific problem the authors aim to resolve or the question they seek to answer, and clearly state the objective(s) of the study. It should concisely present the main findings and conclude with forward-looking insights regarding the study's implications and future directions. The graphical abstract visually presents the key idea of the research, emphasizing its unique contributions, and enabling immediate understanding of the study's core message. To create an effective graphical abstract, authors should adopt a 'less is more' approach, avoiding overly complex visuals. Instead, focus on highlighting the most significant findings, ensuring visual clarity through clean illustrations, concise text, and consistent design elements, such as font style and color palette. Together, a well-crafted title, abstract, and graphical abstract create a strong impression on editors and readers while enhancing the clarity and impact of your work within the scope of JCR.

The cover letter provides another important communication channel. Unfortunately, a common mistake many authors make is copying and pasting the abstract into the cover letter. While the abstract is intended to summarize the study for a broad audience, the cover letter should serve a different purpose. It is an important opportunity to explain why your work matters specifically to the journal and how it aligns with its mission. Use this letter to highlight the key contributions of your manuscript and articulate how your findings advance the field of drug delivery or controlled release. At the same time, be concise and avoid overstatements or unsupported claims. Editors appreciate cover letters that are direct, thoughtful, and tailored to the journal's scope and audience.

For invited articles and reviews, it is essential to specify in the cover letter the editors who extended the invitation and the name of the special JCR issue in which the article is to be included. This ensures that the editorial team has the full context and understanding of the manuscript's background and its alignment with specific themes or upcoming issues.

It is important to note that one of the corresponding authors should serve as the primary point of contact for communication with the handling editor throughout the manuscript submission and review process. It is not uncommon that authors who are not designated as corresponding authors handle manuscript submission and correspondence. However, such practices should be avoided to ensure clear and consistent communication between the journal and the authorship team.

In addition, corresponding authors are urged to use their institutional email addresses rather than commercial email accounts when submitting their manuscripts. Institutional email addresses lend credibility to the submission and may also minimize potential confusion or issues with email deliverability during the peer review process.

2. Understanding the editor's decision

A significant portion of submitted manuscripts does not progress beyond the initial editorial screening stage, a process known as "triage rejection". At JCR, this occurs when the handling editor determines that a manuscript does not meet the journal's scope, quality standards, or expectations for novelty and significance. Triage rejection is not necessarily a judgment of the technical quality of the research but rather an editorial decision based on whether the work aligns with the journal's mission and readership. This is often due to high competition, as JCR receives far more manuscripts than it can publish. Editors must make an initial judgment and decline a substantial proportion of manuscripts without sending them to referees to avoid unnecessary delays and conserve reviewer resources.

Common reasons for triage rejection include manuscripts that lack a clear connection to drug delivery or controlled release, or that fail to present a compelling narrative about the study's relevance and impact. A list of common reasons for triage rejection is provided in Table 1.

A growing trend is 'self-plagiarism", where a manuscript exhibits substantial similarity to existing literature, often from the authorship team. This could include verbatim matches from sentence to sentence, or

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jconrel.2025.113973

Available online 26 June 2025

Table 1
Common reasons for manuscripts not advancing to external peer review.

1	Outside the scope of JCR
2	Lack of generality requiring other specialty journals
3	Lack of originality / minor variation of published work / similarity in abstract
4	Marginal improvement over existing methodology
5	Lack of necessary in vivo data for certain formulations (e.g., claiming drug targeting without in vivo data)
6	The manuscript presents only preliminary data. Theres is insufficient depth of research and or a lack of sufficient experimental details
7	The pharmaceutical/medical relevance of the manuscript is too limited
8	The manuscript promotes a specific product
9	Text/language is sub-optimal
10	Insufficient adherence to journal guidelines

in some cases from paragraph to paragraph, often found in the Methods section. While such overlaps may not always violate ethical standards, they can approach the boundary of plagiarism, even if they are derived from the authors' prior publications. In this case, JCR editors may decide to return the manuscript without sending it out for in-depth evaluation.

Another recurring issue is insufficient contextual framing, where authors fail to clearly relate their work to the mission of JCR. [4] This often occurs when authors submit previously rejected manuscripts by other journals to JCR without making meaningful revisions. A lack of effort to adapt the manuscript for the journal's audience signals to the editor that the submission might not be suitable for JCR.

Furthermore, a fraction of manuscripts lacks proper contextual framing within the relevant body of literature. The introduction or discussion frequently fails to provide a thorough assessment of prior work and to compare the reported findings with those of previous studies. As a result, reviewers may comment that the substance of the work is not novel or innovative, citing prior publications that present similar advancements. In some cases, authors rely on broad review articles rather than data-driven evidence to contextualize their work, which may be insufficient and undermine the foundation of the proposed research hypothesis. It is critical that the authors describe, in the cover letter, and meticulously cite relevant references within the body of the manuscript to explain why the work represents an important advancement in delivery science, within the scope and mission of JCR, rather than relying on the volume of data presented.

Recently, there has been a strong tendency toward *overengineering*, proposing complex and marginally characterized solutions, rather than testing simpler alternatives that might work just as well and are pharmaceutically more viable. While such approaches may be of interest from a fundamental perspective, they might not always align with the scope and priority of JCR. Therefore, it is essential for the manuscript to clearly justify the selection of the proposed formulation and, wherever possible, compare with the current standard of care. JCR prioritizes drug delivery technologies that can enhance the safety and efficacy of therapeutic agents beyond existing clinical benchmarks. Without a clear assessment of the improvement relative to current standards, it is difficult to gauge the significance of the reported system's advancements.

After receiving the decision letter following the peer-review process, it is crucial to carefully interpret the feedback from the editor. As a peer-reviewed journal, JCR relies heavily on expert reviewers to provide informed evaluations and guide editorial decisions. When a manuscript passes the initial screening and is sent out for in-depth review, it suggests that the editor considers the work potentially suitable for publication in JCR. However, it is important to note that the handling editor may not be an expert in the specific area of your research, even though JCR makes every effort to assign manuscripts to editors with relevant expertise. For this reason, reviewers' comments and evaluations play a significant role in shaping the final editorial decision. While the editor or the authors may not agree with all comments made by the reviewers, respect for the time and expertise provided by the reviewers must be exercised.

Authors should take reviewer comments seriously and address them thoughtfully and comprehensively when preparing their revised manuscript. At the same time, it is important for authors to understand that JCR editors do not simply tally reviewer votes when making decisions. Instead, we carefully assess the substance and rationale of reviewer opinions before reaching a conclusion. In rare cases where we feel that reviewers' requests are unreasonable or disproportionate, we may intervene and make a decision that differs from their recommendations. Editors may also choose to make a decision — often a rejection — before receiving the targeted number of reviews, particularly if the completed reviews consistently raise substantial concerns. This practice reflects our commitment to efficient manuscript handling, allowing authors to move forward without unnecessary delays.

Whether the editorial decision is "revision" or "rejection," authors should carefully read both the editor's comments and the reviewer reports to understand the expectations for the next steps. While JCR does not explicitly categorize revisions as "minor revision" or "major revision" in its standard decision letters, some editors may specify Major Revision in the decision letter when substantial changes or new experiments are necessary. However, even minor comments should not be dismissed as trivial. It is not uncommon for manuscripts to face rejection after a round of revision if the changes are insufficient or the raised issues are inadequately addressed.

For a "major" revision, whether explicitly indicated in the decision letter or inferred from the extent of changes required, authors should recognize that the editor sees potential in the manuscript but expects substantial improvements. These often involve additional experimental results to substantiate claims or expanded discussions to address reviewers' concerns. Manuscripts undergoing "major" revision are typically sent back to the original reviewers for further evaluation but may also be reviewed by new reviewers, depending on the circumstances. Regardless of the reviewer, the key consideration is whether the authors have substantially improved the manuscript to address the reviewers' comments. Providing clear, point-by-point responses, supported by revised data and well-explained reasoning, helps reviewers assess the extent of the manuscript's improvement.

A "rejection" decision can be disheartening, but it is important to understand that it does not necessarily reflect the intrinsic quality of the research. In some cases, rejection occurs because reviewers did not express the high level of enthusiasm required to support publication in JCR. It is worth noting that JCR accepts only a fraction of submitted manuscripts, making the selection process highly competitive. It is also crucial to note that reviewers sometimes share additional information with editors that may not be directly accessible to authors. This can create challenges in fully understanding the editorial decision. For example, a reviewer who recommends rejection might not always highlight significant concerns in their specific comments, but the editor may have additional context or concerns that influenced the decision. While this may be frustrating, it is a common aspect of the peer review process and underscores the broader considerations that editors must take into account when making a final decision.

When a manuscript is rejected, it is important to read the editor's comments and reviewer feedback carefully. These comments often provide valuable insights into the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the study. Authors could use this feedback constructively to improve their manuscript for submission to another journal or for resubmission to JCR if the editor explicitly invites it.

Editors may recommend "resubmission after rejection" when they determine that a manuscript has the potential to meet the journal's quality standards but requires extensive changes that cannot be simply addressed through one round of revision. It is important to note that resubmitted manuscripts will only proceed to peer review if the original decision letter explicitly included an invitation to resubmit. When resubmitting, authors should reference the original manuscript number and the name of the handling editor who extended the invitation in the cover letter. This information helps streamline the processing of the resubmitted manuscript. Typically, resubmitted manuscripts are sent

back to the reviewers who evaluated the original submission, allowing them to assess whether the resubmitted new manuscript adequately addresses their concerns.

3. Responding to editor and reviewer feedback

When revising a manuscript in response to reviewer comments, authors should view the process as an opportunity to enhance the quality, clarity, and impact of their work. A thoughtful and well-structured point-by-point response facilitates effective communication and increases the likelihood of a positive outcome.

In the response letter, authors should address each comment individually and specify where changes have been made in the manuscript. Including the specific text or figure changes in the response document itself can also be helpful to the reviewer. Use clear, professional, and respectful language, even when you disagree with a suggestion. For comments that cannot be fully addressed — such as those requiring experiments beyond the current scope or resources — explain the constraints, provide a reasoned argument, and, if possible, suggest alternative approaches to address the concern.

It is important, however, not to adopt a "reviewer-as-master" mindset. While reviewers play an essential role in identifying gaps or weaknesses, not all suggestions are feasible or relevant. Occasionally, reviewers may make requests that are overly demanding, unnecessary, or beyond the scope of the study. In such cases, authors should carefully evaluate each comment and prioritize changes that align with the study's goals. Use the response letter to clearly articulate your perspective, providing evidence or reasoning to support your decisions. If necessary, authors can reach out to the handling editor for clarification. However, authors should avoid negotiating with the handling editor about which specific experiments to perform.

While editors bring valuable expertise and insights, it is essential to recognize that their editorial styles can vary significantly. Some editors take a more hands-on approach, offering critical insights and providing detailed comments on specific aspects of the manuscript. These editors may actively guide the authors in refining their work. On the other hand, some editors prefer a more neural role, acting primarily as intermediaries to facilitate communication between reviewers and authors, ensuring that the peer-review process remains fair and constructive. Ultimately, authors should strive to maintain a collaborative approach, balancing constructive responses to reviewer feedback and editorial comments while focusing on improving the quality of their study.

The standard revision time for JCR is typically two months, though the handling editor may adjust this timeline depending on the extent of the changes required. If authors require additional time to complete their revisions, they should contact the handling editor to request an extension. As JCR strives to receive high-quality revised manuscripts, requests for additional time are often granted, provided they are made in a timely and reasonable manner. Importantly, authors should avoid rushing to submit their revisions merely to meet the deadline. Careful attention to addressing reviewer comments will maximize the chances of a successful outcome.

Changes in authorship during the revision stage should be handled with great care and transparency. Authors are expected to carefully consider the list and order of authors before submitting their manuscript and provide the definitive author list at the time of the original submission. Any additions, deletions, or rearrangements of authorship should be made only before the manuscript is accepted and must be approved by the journal editor.

If changes to the author list are necessary during the revision stage, the corresponding author must provide a clear explanation for these changes. This includes ensuring that all authors agree on the contributions and their respective roles. In line with the Guide for Authors, to request such a change, the editor must receive the following from the corresponding author: (a) the reason for the change in the author list, and (b) written confirmation (via email or letter) from all authors agreeing to the addition, removal, or rearrangement. In cases involving the addition or removal of authors, confirmation from the author being added or removed is also required. All changes must be clearly communicated to the handling editor, along with the revised manuscript, to ensure proper acknowledgment of contributions and adherence to JCR's ethical standards.

It is important to note that, under normal circumstances, the editor will only consider changes to the author list before acceptance. After acceptance, changes to authorship will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. If a request for a change is made after acceptance, the publication of the manuscript will be suspended while the editor considers the request. If the manuscript has already been published online, any changes approved by the editor will be addressed through a corrigendum.

4. After acceptance

In the acceptance decision letter, authors of research articles may be invited to submit illustrations for consideration as JCR cover images. Currently, JCR selects four cover images per issue — the front outside, front inside, back inside, and back outside — based on the significance of the topics and the quality of the images. Cover images should highlight the key elements of the research in a simplified and visually engaging manner, without delving into details of the reported findings. To maintain clarity and esthetics, the use of lettering on the images is discouraged. More guidelines for the design of cover images can be found in the guide for authors on the homepage of JCR.

Reviewing and correcting galley proofs is a critical step in the publication process, as it represents the final opportunity for authors to ensure the accuracy and clarity of their work before it is published. Errors in text, figures, tables, or references that persist in the final publication can compromise the intended message of the research, potentially leading to misunderstandings by JCR readers. Furthermore, inconsistencies or inaccuracies in the final form of the publication may reflect poorly on the authors and undermine their credibility. Taking the time to carefully review the proofs not only safeguards the integrity of the work but also upholds the authors' credibility and the journal's reputation.

5. Corrections to the record

JCR is a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and adheres to its *guidance* when addressing corrections to the record. If authors discover any mistakes or errors in their published work, it is essential that they contact the handling editor (if available) or the editor-in-chief to correct the issue. We highly appreciate self-reported corrections, as they demonstrate a commitment to the accuracy and integrity of the scientific record. When reporting errors, authors should provide a detailed explanation of what caused the error, whether the error affects the conclusions drawn from the work, and a suggested replacement or fix for the problem. This detailed information helps editors understand the nature and significance of the error, guiding the decision on the appropriate next steps. Each case will be handled individually. By promptly notifying the editors and offering clear, thorough information, authors help maintain JCR's high standards and ensure that the scientific community benefits from reliable, accurate publications.

In summary, effective communication with JCR editors is essential to the success of scholarly publishing. Thoughtful cover letters, professional responses to feedback, and respectful communication foster positive relationships with editors, making the peer-review process more efficient. These interactions not only reflect the author's commitment to their research but also help editors gain a clearer understanding of the work's significance and its alignment with the JCR's mission.

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