The top 10 mistakes that lead to manuscript rejection and how to avoid them
Journal rejection is difficult to deal with. Yet most researchers have faced this unsavory prospect at some point in their career. Some errors that lead to rejection are related to study design and cannot be corrected once the study is complete, but many others can be rectified at the manuscript writing stage. Here are the top 10 reported reasons for rejection and a list of steps you can take to avoid them:

01 Inappropriate or incomplete statistics
- Ensure you use the correct statistical analysis method.
- Describe the analytical method in detail.
- Report $p$ values and $R^2$ values at appropriate places.

02 Over-interpretation of results
- Avoid drawing conclusions that are disproportionate to the actual findings.
- Do not include irrelevant or redundant information to support your data.
- Acknowledge the limitations of your study.

03 Inappropriate or suboptimal instrumentation
- Describe the methods in sufficient detail, such that a reader could repeat the study if desired.
- In case of standard methodology or instrumentation, cite relevant previous studies in which these methods were used.
- If the description is very lengthy (e.g., survey sheets, questionnaires), include it as supplementary information.

04 Sample too small or biased
- Check published literature to find acceptable sample sizes for studies similar to yours.
- Mention inclusion and exclusion criteria clearly.

05 Text difficult to follow
- Write in a simple, direct manner and ensure that the manuscript does not have long, complicated sentences.
- Get an English-speaking colleague or expert to review your manuscript for clarity and grammar.
- If you are submitting to a journal with a broad target audience, avoid using subject-specific jargon.
- As far as possible, avoid local phrases and references. Use standard terms or phrases that are commonly used in international literature.
Insufficient problem statement

- State the objective of the study clearly in the abstract and early in the manuscript.
- Check whether the conclusions of your study tie up with your hypothesis/problem/objective.

Inaccurate or inconsistent data reported

- Ensure consistency between similar data reported in different parts of the manuscript (e.g., abstract and text, results and figures).
- Instead of including inconclusive data, sort through your data and include only data that are relevant to your hypothesis/objective.

Incomplete, inaccurate, or outdated review of the literature

- Cite relevant recently published literature. Citing outdated references reflects poorly on your knowledge of the subject.
- Do not deliberately exclude studies that do not support your conclusions. Instead, discuss them and try to give possible explanations about why your findings differ from what is already known.

Insufficient data presented

- Provide as much data as possible; consider submitting supplementary data as well, if available.
- Make sure that the data is not too preliminary.

Defective tables and/or figures

- Make sure that the tables and figures are concise and easy to understand.
- Check whether you are using the best illustrative mode to present your data. For example, consider whether a histogram would suit your data better than a line graph would.

Following the best practices listed above will help you prepare a sound, well-written manuscript and avoid the risk of being rejected solely on account of a poor manuscript.

1. Pierson DJ. The top 10 reasons why manuscripts are not accepted for publication. Respiratory Care 2004, 49: 10.
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