Description

You have just completed manuscript submission process for your target journal. The next steps would be initial review by the editor followed by the peer review by the invited experts. During these steps, you wait for the decision. However, in some cases, you may want to withdraw your manuscript. For instance, you may want to add or revise important points or you may want to correct some errors discovered after the manuscript submission. In these cases, it ends with your manuscript "withdrawn" from the peer-review process, and typically, its ID number deleted from the journal system.

Another common reason to withdraw your submission after acceptance and before publication is that authors suspect or discover a glaring error, possibly when checking the proofs. This error may require removing existing data, performing some experiments again. It may also require doing supplementary analysis. This may seem additional work, but it can help researchers avoids any future retractions.

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In addition, when authors do not want to make all research data available to the journal (sometimes required by the journals) for copyright or commercial reasons or when they realize that they have made submission to a potential predatory journal, authors can withdraw their paper. There are unethical reasons for a withdrawal though, such as being "unaware of the publication fees", or just wanting to submit to a higher-impact journal.

A final reason for withdrawal is impatience with peer review. This is not a black or white issue. Nevertheless, at some journals, the editor may not have yet sent your paper for peer review, even after 1-3 months or a peer reviewer has failed to submit his or her report even after ~4-6 months. This seems unreasonable.

Tips for Manuscript Withdrawal

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Timing and publication ethics-these two considerations should guide your action in making a manuscript withdrawal. The quicker you act, the better the outcome for everyone. At the scholarly journal a handling editor, if already assigned to your manuscript, will have to judge the merit of your request. For this to go smoothly providing facts are helpful for clear communication.

First, try the easiest way to withdraw the manuscript: doing it online via the journal submission system. In it, some journal publishers may have a tab, “withdrawing the paper”, or similar. However, this option may not work for many journals. For example, it seems that the widely used *ScholarOne Manuscripts* system does not offer this option for an online manuscript withdrawal.

If that does not work, immediately contact the editor handling your submission or the editorial office of the journal. Write a clear and concise letter, signed by all authors, explaining the situation surrounding the manuscript, and the reason(s) for its withdrawal. Often, through the online manuscript submission process, there is a tab or link to directly “contact the editor”, or you can look up his/her email from the website. At some journals, however, it may not be always necessary to give a full, in-depth explanation for the manuscript withdrawal.

There is a big difference between asking for manuscript withdrawal within 1 week of submission and during or after peer review, say in 1-6 months. In the former case, it should not be a problem. However, in the latter case, it is trickier, if not impossible because the journal may forbid it, and you should clearly argue your case on scientific reasons to resolve any misconduct.

Hopefully, you should receive an acknowledgment letter. This may acknowledge the withdrawal, or ask you for more information to adjudicate the issue on more scientific grounds. For the latter, it is important to cooperate and respond in time.

Possible Consequences

Ensure not to simultaneously submit your paper to more than one scholarly journal. This is a standard code of publication ethics. It is unethical to withdraw a manuscript, just because it was accepted sooner elsewhere. Nevertheless, what if you do not get a reply even after multiple requests. Write to the editor-in-chief this time indicating your plans to revise the manuscript, and eventually go ahead with a new submission at another journal after the acknowledgment.

Most journals are not keen on withdrawing your submission. It wastes their resources and the author may incur a penalty for manuscript withdrawal. This penalty could range from 200 to 1000 USD, depending on the journal. This information, however, should be transparent and clearly stated on the journal’s policy webpage. If authors withdraw manuscript on unethical grounds, journals may also blacklist the author and co-authors for future publications.

Some Parting Advice

Be courteous and keep records of all email correspondence with the journal publisher, when planning for manuscript withdrawal. To avoid such situations and any penalties, take extra time to check over your work before the manuscript submission.

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Have you ever faced such a situation? What do you think about unethical manuscript withdrawals? Do share your experience and thoughts in the comment section below!

Category

1. Publishing Research
2. Submitting Manuscripts

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