



Description

Submitting different article types to the same journal presents a deceptively simple problem: journals often publish a range of formats original research, systematic reviews, short reports, methods papers, case reports, commentaries, yet each format can carry its own word limits, structure, required checklists, ethical statements, and supplemental materials. This variation increases the risk of desk rejection or delayed processing when authors submit a manuscript formatted for the wrong article type. This article explains why journals differentiate requirements by article type, summarizes the common differences, shows how to identify and meet specific expectations, and provides a practical checklist to avoid avoidable delays. It concludes with options authors can consider if they need extra compliance support.

Why journals set different requirements for article types

Journals set tailored requirements because article types serve different scholarly purposes and audiences. An *original research* article typically demands a full IMRAD structure and detailed methods, while a *systematic review* requires explicit evidence-synthesis methods and a PRISMA flow diagram. Journals therefore align structure, length, data availability expectations, and supporting documents to the function and peer-review standards of each type. Following the correct format increases clarity for editors and reviewers and reduces the chance of administrative rejection. Practical examples of how journals describe and separate article types can be found in major publishers' author guidelines.

Common article types and the typical differences

Original research articles typically require a structured abstract, thorough methods, results with appropriate tables/figures, and a discussion that situates the findings. Many journals expect adherence to domain reporting standards (for example, EQUATOR-endorsed checklists) and often request data-sharing or registration statements. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses commonly require a PRISMA checklist and flow diagram and explicit search strategies and selection criteria.

Randomized controlled trials and clinical intervention studies usually require CONSORT compliance, trial registration numbers, and participant-flow documentation. Recent [CONSORT updates](#) emphasize clearer reporting and transparency for randomized trials.

Clinical case reports and single-patient narratives are often shorter but must address patient consent, anonymization, and may require adherence to the [CARE](#) checklist to ensure transparency and clinical value. Such standards improve completeness and make case reports useful for clinicians and researchers.

Letters, commentaries, methods papers, and brief communications will vary in permitted length, allowed figures or tables, and whether they undergo full peer review or editorial review only. Because [expectations differ](#), authors should confirm the journal's definition of each article type before writing or submitting.

How to identify the exact requirements for each article type

First, locate the journal's "Instructions for Authors" or "Submission Guidelines" page and read the descriptions for *each* article type. Many journals list specific items required per type (structured abstract vs. unstructured, maximum words, maximum figures/tables, supplementary file expectations). If the journal offers a format-free initial submission policy, note whether that policy applies to all article types or only to original research. This distinction matters for preliminary submissions.

Second, check whether the journal explicitly requires reporting checklists (PRISMA, CONSORT, CARE, STROBE, etc.). The EQUATOR Network provides a [searchable database](#) of reporting guidelines mapped to study types; consult it to match the correct checklist to the manuscript.

Third, inspect the journal's sample articles or recent issues. Comparing a published paper of the same type to the journal's checklist often reveals unstated stylistic or structural preferences (tone, balance of text vs. figures, reference style). Finally, if the article type is ambiguous for the work at hand, submit a brief pre-submission inquiry to the editorial office summarizing the work's aims and proposing a preferred article type; editors often respond with guidance that saves time.

Step-by-step checklist to prepare compliant submissions

1. Confirm the journal's article-type definitions and select the matching type.
2. Download and complete any required reporting checklist (e.g., PRISMA for systematic reviews).
3. Align the manuscript structure (abstract format, section headings) and word count with the journal's limits.
4. Assemble required supplementary and administrative documents (ethics approval, informed consent, data statements, trial registration).
5. Prepare a tailored cover letter that specifies the article type and explains why the submission fits that category.
6. Run a final compliance review (formatting, resolution of figures, naming of files) before uploading.

Use this checklist as a pre-submission gate to catch type-specific omissions early.

Practical examples and common pitfalls

A common pitfall occurs when authors submit a systematic review as a standard "review article" without the PRISMA checklist and search strategy details; editors may issue an immediate request for

additional material or reject for incomplete reporting. Major journals explicitly require PRISMA checklists and flow diagrams for systematic reviews. Omitting these items delays review.

Another frequent error is treating a case report like an original article and omitting patient consent or the CARE checklist. Because case reports focus on clinical detail and ethics considerations, missing consent or inadequate anonymization are grounds for immediate rejection.

Additionally, authors sometimes assume that a journal's "format-free" initial submission removes the need to indicate article type. In many journals, format-free submission speeds initial editorial triage but still requires the author to declare the intended article type and to provide any type-specific supporting documents upon request. Always double-check the scope of format-free policies in the journal's guidelines.

How to resolve disputes about article type or borderline cases

When a manuscript could fit more than one category (for example, a short methods development that includes original data), the safest approach is to consult the editorial office with a succinct [pre-submission query](#) that includes the title, abstract, and a one-paragraph rationale for the proposed type. Editors often indicate whether the submission should be classified as a full research article, technical report, or a shorter methods piece. If the editor suggests a different category, adapt the manuscript before formal submission to match the guidance.

Tools and services that can help streamline compliance

Authors who wish to reduce administrative errors can consider specialist support for the final compliance check. Services that offer targeted checks for example, a journal-specific formatting review, completion of reporting checklists, or assistance assembling submission packages can shorten time to submission and reduce remediable rejections. Enago's [journal selection](#) and [submission assistance](#) services provide tailored journal recommendations and can perform a compliance check and compile required submission documents. These services can help ensure the manuscript is prepared for the chosen article type and submission workflow.

Best practices and tips

- Treat article-type selection as a strategic decision: choosing the correct type affects peer reviewer selection, editorial expectations, and readership.
- Keep reporting checklists and ethics documentation current while writing; retrofitting them later is inefficient.
- Use the journal's sample or published articles as a template for tone and structure.
- When in doubt, ask: a short pre-submission inquiry saves time compared with reformatting after a rejection.

Conclusion

Navigating differing submission requirements within a single journal requires a disciplined, type-specific

approach: verify the journal's definitions, follow the relevant reporting guidelines, compile type-specific administrative materials, and run a focused compliance review before submission. When the requirements feel complex or time-sensitive, authors can consider targeted expert help for example, [manuscript editing](#) and journal-selection or submission assistance to minimize administrative rejections and speed editorial processing. For immediate next steps, authors should (1) identify the intended article type on the target journal's instructions page, (2) download the relevant reporting checklist (PRISMA, CONSORT, CARE, etc.), and (3) run the checklist against the manuscript before submission. If additional help is desirable, consider Enago's [publication support services](#) to ensure article-type compliance and a smoother submission process.

Category

1. Reporting Research

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