Going blind: UWOMJ's updated review process

“DEEP DOWN, ACADEMICS WANT THE SAME THING AS EVERYONE ELSE: ACCEPTANCE, WITH MINOR REVISIONS.”¹

@ACADEMICSSAY

Though peer review can be controversial and is occasionally derided in the academic community, it is still widely recognized as an essential cornerstone of scientific communication. Peer-reviewed scientific journals first circulated in the 1660s, but it wasn't until after the Second World War that peer review was widely implemented.² In the decades that followed, leading journals deliberated on the merits of different peer review strategies, considering efficiency, efficacy, stringency, collegiality, and more recently, equity. The most common strategies today are

- *open peer review*, wherein the authors' and reviewers' identities are disclosed throughout the review process
- *single-blind peer review*, wherein the identities of the reviewers are never disclosed to the authors
- *double-blind peer review*, which expands on single-blind review by also withholding the authors' identities from the reviewers during the review process

Some journals have even implemented a triple-blind peer review, wherein the journal editors are also uninformed of the authors' nor reviewers' identities during review, however this is still often too much of a logistic challenge for most journals.³ In a 2013 survey of over 4000 researchers, 76% considered double-blind an effective peer review strategy, while only 45% and 20% considered single-blind and open review to be effective.² Despite this, most medical journals still follow a single-blind review process.⁴

In 2015, in response to growing author and reader support, the Nature Publishing Group began to offer authors the option to submit manuscripts for double-blind review instead of their traditional single-blind review.⁵ Surprisingly, uptake of this option was only 12% in the 2 years that followed.⁶ Authors who opted for double-blind review were more likely to be affiliated with less prestigious institutions, and their manuscripts were less likely to be sent out for review (8% versus 23%) or accepted after review (25% versus 44%).⁶ These statistics may bias reviewers into thinking that double-blind submissions are of lesser quality.⁷ Such disparaging attitudes should not discourage journals or researchers from double-blind review; on the contrary, this demonstrates the crucial need for the universal uptake of double-blind review. Indeed, double-blind review has been shown to mitigate

reviewer bias with respect to the author's reputation, gender, country, and institution.^{4,8–10}

In the interest of offering students an educational peer review experience and eliminating any potential bias in our review process, the UWOMJ editorial team has successfully implemented a double-blind peer review process as of this issue. We hope that this push towards objectivity and equity will also strengthen the credibility of UWOMJ publications. We will continue our time-tested tradition of involving both peer and faculty reviewers for each submission accepted for review; while our peer reviewers will focus on the quality of communication, faculty reviewers will focus on content validity.

This development could not be possible without the contributions of our wonderful reviewers – your patience and feedback are greatly appreciated.

Alexander Levit
Co-Editor-in-Chief

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