

*Short Communications*

**Acceptance and Rejection of Peer-reviewed Articles in Environmental Sciences: My Personal Publication Experience**

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**INTRODUCTION**

I am a young lecturer and have so far published 50 peer-reviewed papers from 2002 until March 2007. Still, I think I can contribute more by writing more papers in the future. This article should be somewhat motivating and thought provoking as well as encouraging, if it were to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. The objectives of this article are: (i) to encourage research students and new researchers to write so as to share their knowledge by publishing their findings, and (ii) to share my personal publication experience.

**WHY DO WE NEED TO REFER TO PEER-REVIEWED PAPERS?**

When I was a student, I was always not confident of what I was doing and regarded international peer-reviewed articles as major references for my research work. When I became a lecturer, I again referred to related peer-reviewed articles for the sake of updating my knowledge and as references. I always tell my students about the importance of peer-reviewed articles for their project work and to improve their future career prospects with a good number of publications. When I was doing my Masters and PhD research projects, I referred to many peer-reviewed scientific journals, either published internationally or locally. Some of them had

a relatively high impact factor of more than 2.0. Although some of them had very low impact factor or were not even listed under the International Science Index (ISI) or Science Citation Index (SCI), they were still very useful for my research work. To start as a research student, good peer-reviewed papers are sources of research activities and ideas for doing research work. Besides following methodologies which had been published and done by others on other species, similar ecological and ecotoxicological work, from this country and sometimes this region, had not been reported using the species I had chosen. Although capable of doing a similar type of work, being able to come up with new ideas of presenting the data once again requires appreciable scientific understanding and creativity or innovation, apart from, of course a wide range of knowledge, hard work and lots of perseverance.

A continuation of other people's work or doing a similar type of work which had been done by other prominent scientists using quite a similar methodology, but on other organisms or ecoregion, is acceptable for a start. Since science is about knowing, searching for new pieces of knowledge or to discover interesting phenomena, a research student who is doing ecological research should read a lot and refer to papers related to the ecological species that they are working on.

### WHY DO WE NEED TO PUBLISH?

To be confident of what we have learnt through our research activities, our learning process and scientific values need constructive comments, although they are sometimes hard to accept. Peer-reviewed comments are given by the experts in our field of study. The comments given, if constructive, should be regarded as the 'stepping stones' to make our scientific values and understanding better.

Scientists are measured by their publications (Tregenza, 2002) and peer review of journal articles and other technical reports are the key elements in the maintenance of academic integrity (Meier, 1992). Knowing these, writing a scientific journal paper is greatly encouraged by any institutions of higher learning.

'Publish or perish!' has always been a warning given to any researchers or academicians hired in institutions of higher learning, particularly if they are paid to provide scientific articles. Currently, every lecturer in a world class university is required to produce a few peer-reviewed articles with high citation per year. Publication of any scientific work has been an important criterion in the consideration for the promotion of an academician. Hence, the writing of peer-reviewed scientific papers is always focused upon by researchers or academicians.

### SOME FACTORS IN DETERMINING THE ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION OF PEER-REVIEWED PAPERS

Apart from depending upon the merit of the work, there are other factors which could influence the acceptance or rejection of manuscripts including personal biases and preconceptions of the referees and editors involved (Bonnet *et al.*, 2002; Cassey and Blackburn, 2003). According to Tregenza (2002), a manuscript with multiple authors and by native English speakers is more successful. Gosden (2003) explained that this could be due to the fact that non-native speakers of English or novice researchers having to face the challenging task of framing effective replies to referees' criticisms. Based on my personal experience, reviewers usually look at the significant points and findings of my work. I had an experience in which my paper was rejected and this was solely due to the problem of 'bad English language presentation.' According to Bonnet *et al.* (2002), scientists who worked on less 'popular' organisms would usually

find difficulty in getting their papers published and they complained that referees were biased against them. Based on this view, my publication experience seems to agree with the finding of Bonnet *et al.* (2002) since I usually work on well-studied and popular species.

### MY PUBLICATION EXPERIENCE

The publication experience includes papers being rejected and accepted. However, I think the most important thing is the constructive comments given by the referees, rather than the disappointment of having a paper rejected. It is the good comments by the experts in our field of specialization which will certainly help to shape our understanding and positive scientific values on a particular point of discussion in the manuscripts which are submitted for consideration for publication in an international journal. Although I think that I am still a new and young researcher, the above facts about my journal publication experience should be shared with other people and maintained throughout my academic career.

From my publishing experience, I have learnt a lot by reading the comments given by the referees of international journals. This is because the reviewers whom I had suggested, when I were requested by the journal, are among the best researchers who have published numerous papers in good and highly cited international journals. Almost all of them are professors in the field which is relatively similar to my specialization. To focus on the work, devotion of time by the authors [sometimes at the sacrifices of time spent for the family] is required and they should stay focus, particularly during the writing process. As for me, when there is no new idea coming into my head, I will keep the draft papers aside until a new 'wave' of ideas comes. In the meantime, I keep searching for as much as information related to the topics which are necessary to explain any ecological and ecotoxicological findings.

This is the reason why some of my papers took me more than 18 months to draft, in addition to the fact that they were still not up to my satisfaction to be submitted for publication. A paper is usually ready to be edited by an English editor after at least 10 drafts, and after that, it is ready to be submitted for consideration for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

When you have come to a stage whereby your research students have collected a lot of data, you should encourage the students to write or report the data in the form of scientific articles, besides their theses. Writing any articles requires an application of knowledge from many disciplines, scientific understanding and skills, experience or a combination of all of the above. As for me, the 'feeling' and the enthusiasm of presenting an important 'imaginary idea' and facts on an ecotoxicological phenomenon are equally of significant importance.

The preparation of a good journal paper requires a lot of time, devotion and mental concentration, and this is a good way to train research students and any academicians who wish to become up-to-date researchers. Getting your research data accepted and published is an achievement for any researcher and you should be proud of it. An equally important contributing factor is the enthusiasm to do research, which must be maintained even after your research work has been published in a peer-reviewed journal. This is becoming a norm in any academician's life. Finally, it is hoped that this article will be an encouragement to all researchers. Writing a research paper is a matter of knowledge searching [besides of course, reporting the findings] and self discipline, especially in term

of time management, while publication of the research data is a contribution to science. Hence, keep on writing and never give up, as 'keep on doing what you have started in the first place and you will finally succeed in completing a task once considered an impossible mission.' To all, I wish you all the best in your publication endeavours.

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