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## Foot and Ankle Surgery

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### “Guide for Authors” – Up-to-date or obsolete?



After having served for this journal for more than 20 years as a reviewer (2002–2011), associate editor (2011–2018), and editor-in-chief (since 2018), I always appreciated structured submissions. But why should submissions be structured at all and if yes how? Is this up-to-date and necessary or obsolete and unnecessary? What are the expectations and needs from the other side, i.e. authors? Like most other journals, Foot and Ankle Surgery has rules for submission structure called "Guide for Authors". There are several rules including extent (maximum word count, number of figures and tables), structure (abstract, keywords, introduction, material and methods, results, discussion, references, figures and tables) and content (anonymization, abbreviations, statistics). Then further structural requirements are defined such as line and page numbering, definition of margin, font size and type and even spacing between lines and size or margins. Does all this make sense or is this just cumbersome for authors and journal staff? From the standpoint of editor in chief, the only obligatory requirement is the anonymization of the manuscript to allow for double-blind peer review. What about all other rules? As Foot and Ankle Surgery is still published as paper-printed hardcopy as desired by the majority of the EFAS members, the extent matters because of paper use and cost. From a scientific point of view, extent is also important as limited extent enforces focused and concluded content. This would also apply to online publications where paper use and cost are not relevant. Some other requirements seem to be less important such as the submission of tables and figures as extra files instead of embedding them in the manuscript text. This is not important for the editor-in-chief's assessment but for the reviewers and associate editors. Line numbers are only needed to allow for structured review and revision. The citation of references and the reference list are also important for the scientific content, and also for the review process. Why do journals have different rules for formatting citations and reference lists? It seems to be like different standards for adapters for mobile phones or electric outlets. There is just no worldwide authority that defines this and it is irrelevant from a scientific point of view if the references are listed in alphabetical order in order of appearance in the text. What is the advantage of all these regulations in the "Guide for Authors"? In conclusion, it should ensure equal sufficient quality of the submissions to allow for optimal review and revision process and later potential publication. For the journal's

staff, it is optimal if all submissions are equally formatted, anonymized and standardized regarding content. However, how is the situation for the authors? I remember very well the time more than 20 years ago when starting to prepare and submit manuscripts. In the very beginning, paper prints with photographs as figures in multiple copies had to be submitted via mail. This material was then sent also by mail to the reviewers who submitted their reviews back to the journal also by mail and so on. The change to online processing was a real game-changer. I also remember the enormous time needed for the preparation and multiple rejections or at least revisions due to insufficient formatting at the beginning. I realized a learning curve as the process becomes easier with experience. Currently, artificial intelligence (AI) based systems for manuscript preparation have been inaugurated and even (co)authorship of these AIs is discussed. I have no personal experience so far with AIs as coauthors or even authors, and I am not sure if this will solve or cause problems. Maybe AIs can help to solve problems following "Guide for Authors" or might this then be better changed to "Guide for AIs"? Maybe AIs can also take over the reviewers' and editors' jobs. Finally, AIs could also substitute the journals' readers. As this is a more or less desirable look into the future, the current situation seems to be more important, and my personal experience as editor-in-chief shows increasing problems with submissions that are not respecting the guide for authors. Currently, at least 20% of all submissions are rejected or revised before starting the review process because of relevant shortcomings such as missing anonymization. This percentage is clearly increasing and also causes workload to increase, especially for managing editors and associate editors. The preparation of revisions also seems to cause more and more problems. Basic requirements such as answering all reviewers' queries and highlighting changes in the text seem to overwhelm more and more authors. Submission of an inadequate revision also causes an increased workload for the journal's staff and delays the revision process. Maybe this is also an expression of generation change with limited maximum time for focusing on one subject or incompatibility with the much shorter publication formats in current social media platforms regarding word count or video time. However, it is unclear why a complex study including analysis is somehow manageable but adequate preparation for the final submission is too cumbersome. One should also keep in mind that all reviewers work

voluntarily and the editors for a yearly honorarium that results in a very low hourly rate. Both groups are mainly active surgeons and work for the journal in their spare time. It should be also an expression of respect for reviewers and editors to prepare the submission well. I personally think that the current "Guide for Authors" is adequate and fair and does not overwhelm the actual scientific author generation.

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