



Email refereeing: Experiences from the Journal of Orthodontics

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I would like to outline some of our experiences following the introduction of email refereeing for the *Journal of Orthodontics*. We decided to introduce electronic submission of manuscripts and onward transmission to referees at the start of 2001. We took this step for the following reasons:

- To make it easier for authors to submit papers
- To allow the Editor to acknowledge submission of paper easily and quickly.
- To bypass slow national and international postal services
- To reduce the work in the journal office posting papers on to referees
- We wanted to reduce the amount of paper in the Journal Office.

Submission of papers

The process of submitting papers is now fairly easy. We request that the author submits their paper in Word or rtf format and that they send a hard copy signed letter from all the authors, in a similar way to a standard submission. This is essential to make sure that all authors agree with the content of the paper.

We then print one copy of the paper and file the electronic copy on the network fileserver. This is backed up weekly.

We accept figures in most standard forms but prefer that they are sent to us in TIFF format, as this provides the quality that is needed for final production. When clinical papers are submitted we will accept scans of the pictures but if the case report is accepted, we need the author to submit the photographs or transparencies. This is because very high quality is needed for final manuscript preparation.

Sending out to referees

When the emailed manuscript is received in the office, it is immediately acknowledged by email. We

then print out one hard copy for our records and then send the paper plus a refereeing pro-forma. Importantly, we request that the referee returns their report within three weeks. If we have not received a report in three weeks then we send a polite reminder to ask the referee to provide their report as soon as possible.

Return from referees

When the referees' reports are returned they are then filed on the server and the editor then downloads the reports and carries out the final review. Some referees will return a copy of the paper that they have edited using the "track changes" tool in Microsoft Word and others will send us a hard copy that they have edited. When the editor has taken the decision on whether to accept the paper, he then immediately thanks the referees and sends them all the referee's reports as email attachments so that they know the decision and thoughts of the other referee.

Sending the decision to the author

The editor then sends an email to the author letting him/her know the decision on the status of the paper. If the paper is accepted with the provision that the author needs to make changes to the paper, the authors are informed of the changes that are required. They are then asked to re-submit the paper, as an email attachment, with the changes clearly marked using the "track changes" tool in Word and one "top copy".

Does this system work?

After a few initial problems with the acceptance of the new system by some referees the system appears to be working very well. Our time from submission to letting the authors know the outcome of their submission is approximately 6 weeks. We do not waste time in the office photocopying papers, sending FAXes or spending money on postage. Furthermore, the filing of manuscripts on the fileserver makes



manuscript handling and retrieval very straightforward and rapid.

Nevertheless, we have had some problems and these do occur when an author submits a paper as a hard copy submission. In this instance, we still send the paper out to referees but this slows up the refereeing process, particularly, if we are using an international referee. In fact, when a paper copy of a manuscript is received we contact the authors and request an emailed version. All authors have been happy to provide us with an electronic version of their paper.

Other problems arise with some referees despite preparing a report using a word processor, then send the report back by post or even complete the refereeing pro-forma by hand and then send it back! This then leads to obvious delays.

Finally, we have found that if we simply send a report

to an author it is possible for them to identify the referee by opening the "properties" fields of the document. This is avoided by re-saving the document, and the author of the report is identified as the Journal Office.

Summary

In summary, since the introduction of email acceptance of manuscripts and onward transmission to referees, the acceptance times of papers sent to the *Journal of Orthodontics* have reduced. The filing and organisation of papers is simplified and most importantly, we are saving a lot of paper.

Finally, we are now investigating web submission of manuscripts to make the process simpler for authors to submit their papers to the *Journal of Orthodontics*.