

TOWARDS THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF REPORTING GUIDELINES AT BIOMEDICAL JOURNALS

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8 STEPS TOWARDS LAUNCHING A REPORTING STANDARDS POLICY

Review 8 essential steps to ensure successful launch

■ Each step is universal

- Submission system agnostic (ScholarOne, Editorial Manager, EJP)
- Journals can be society owned, publisher owned or independent entities
- Commission only or willing to receive unsolicited submissions
- Sensitive to different models of peer review

■ The implementation plan considers:

- Practical matters behind implementation
- Developing a theoretical policy rationale to suit your journal
- Navigating politics
- Identifying pain points
- Promoting the policy

8 STEPS TOWARDS LAUNCHING A PROCESS FOR IMPROVING REPORTING STANDARDS

- **Step 1** – Identify the needs of your journal
- **Step 2** – Select “champions” to support implementation of reporting checklists
- **Step 3** – Identify appropriate checklists
- **Step 4** – Determine enforcement level (mandatory compliance or simply recommend guidelines are consulted)
- **Step 5** – Phased or full launch
- **Step 6** – Write up proposal on implementing improved reporting standards
- **Step 7** – Preparations for launch
- **Step 8** – Launch activities

STEP 1 - IDENTIFY THE NEEDS OF YOUR JOURNAL

- Assess scale/nature of reporting *problem*
 - Within your journal
 - Within your field or sub-specialty
- Analyze any steps towards improved reporting standards other journals in your field have adopted
- Consult authors to determine potential reactions
 - Broad range of authors based on experience/location
 - Determine pre-existing comprehension of reporting issues
 - Establish how authors could/should embrace reporting standards during manuscript composition
- Outline the benefits of improving reporting standards
- Define measurable policy objectives

STEP 1 – IDENTIFY THE NEEDS OF YOUR JOURNAL

Outline benefits for improving reporting standards:

■ Journal benefits

- Raise quality, consequently boosting reader experience
 - Enables heightened scrutiny ahead of acceptance
 - Burnish papers by ensuring reporting standards are excellent
- Enhance the reproducibility of results
- Improved transparency

■ Author benefits

- Consistently good advice that improves their paper
- Perhaps, enhanced prospects of a paper being read and cited?

STEP 2 – SELECT “CHAMPIONS” TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF REPORTING CHECKLISTS

Champions (or facilitators) are needed to vocally, intellectually and even politically support a reporting policy and its adoption process

- **Shore up support**
- **Convince colleagues of the need for improved reporting standards**
- **Support the editorial office if criticisms emerge**

Champions can also help shape policy rationale

STEP 2 – SELECT “CHAMPIONS” TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF REPORTING CHECKLISTS

Editorial Champions

- Editors-in-Chief should consult their editorial board for input on nature and scope of a reporting policy
- Editorial boards can discuss methods of monitoring adherence
- Editorial board support for a policy enhances prospects of both formal adoption and author compliance
- Editorial board members could support educational outreach efforts to authors and reviewers
- Other Editors – consider collaboration with other journal editors within a field of study

STEP 2 – SELECT “CHAMPIONS” TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF REPORTING CHECKLISTS

Editorial Staff as Facilitators

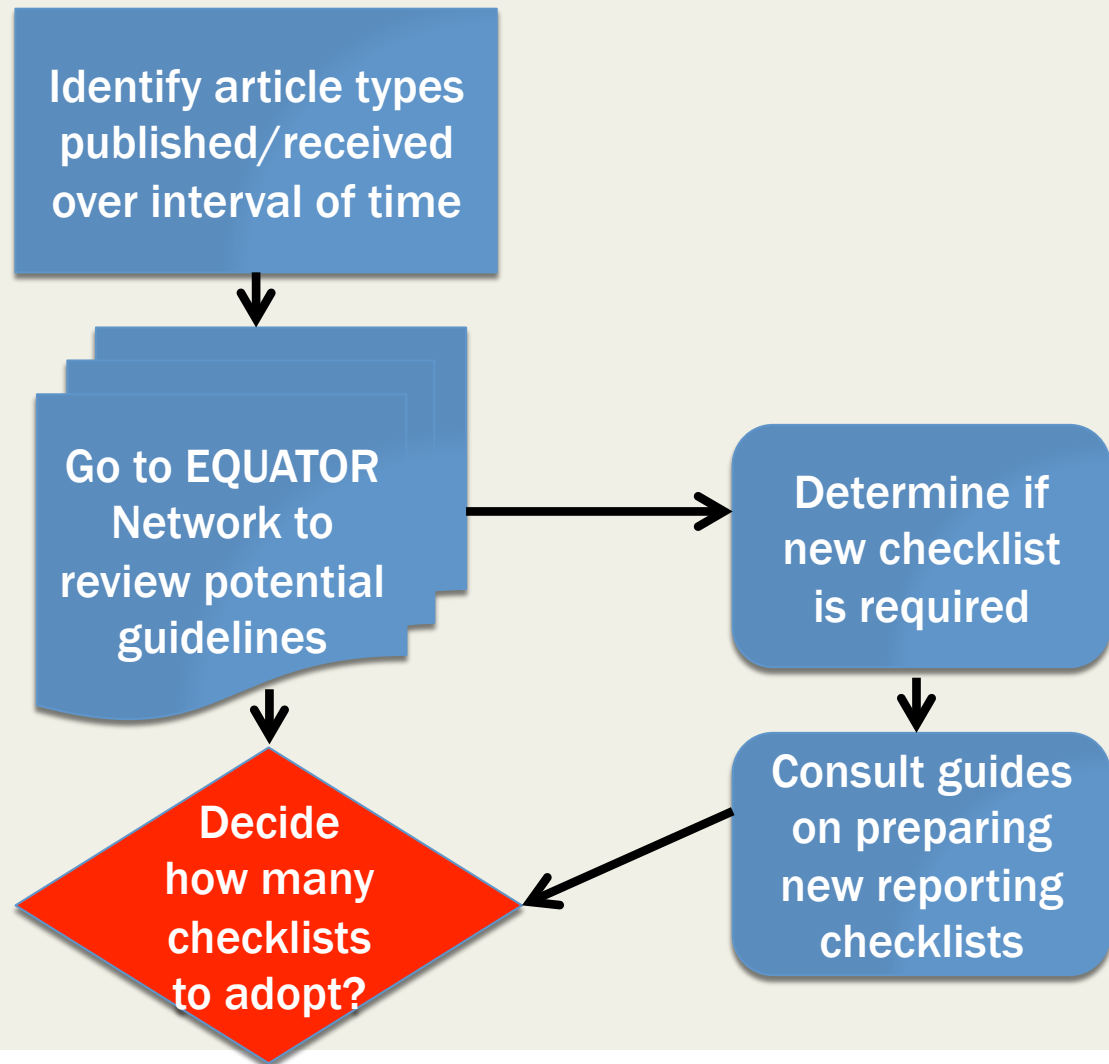
- Editorial staff *must* be engaged to devise new, sustainable, workflows
- Devise adaptations to the submission process
- Do editorial staff have the information they need to handle queries?
- If a mandatory policy is enforced (requiring follow up with errant authors), can they handle the extra responsibilities?

STEP 2 – SELECT “CHAMPIONS” TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF REPORTING CHECKLISTS

Thought leaders as champions

- Help overcome potentially negative perceptions
 - Prominent individuals can lead the way by evidently displaying adherence to reporting standards in their own work
- External advocacy: educating and informing authors and reviewers
- Internal advocacy: convince skeptics, particularly vocal critics or power-brokers on Publication Committees or society Board of Directors
- Thought-leader champions needed during policy development *and* implementation phase. Adds validity and support

STEP 3 – IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE GUIDELINES



STEP 3 – IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE GUIDELINES – GUIDELINES ENDORSED BY *HEADACHE*

Study Type	Reporting Guideline	% of submissions
Randomized Controlled Trial	CONSORT	16%
Behavioral and Non-pharmacological Interventions	Behavioral/Non-pharmacological Clinical Trials Checklist	5%
Observational Epidemiological Studies	STROBE	53%
Diagnostic Accuracy Studies	STARD	5%
Systematic Reviews	PRISMA	5%
Meta-analyses of Controlled Trials	PRISMA	2%
Meta-analyses of Observational Studies	MOOSE	1%
Quality Improvement Reports	SQUIRE	1%
Qualitative Research	COREQ	12%

STEP 4 - LEVEL OF ENFORCEMENT

Mandatory completion of checklists

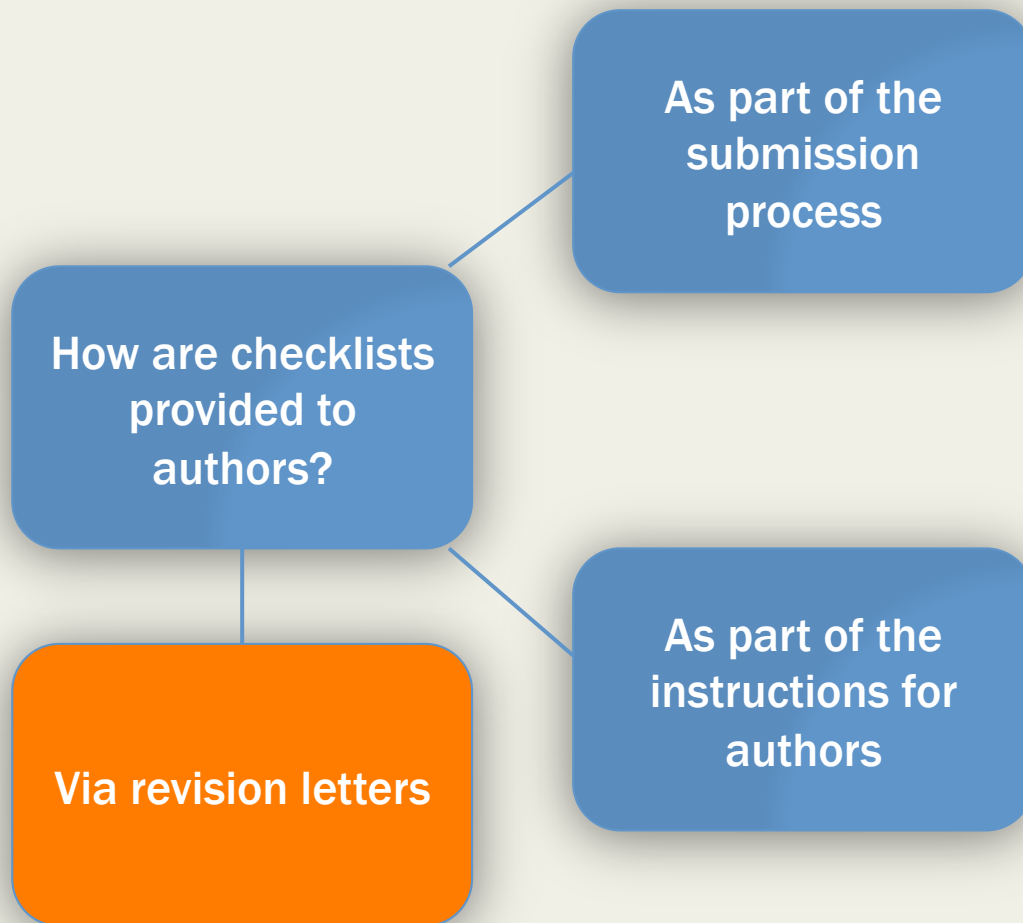
Do authors complete an accompanying reporting checklist at submission?

(1) Authors upload checklist with manuscript via submission system

(2) Authors supply completed checklist after submission (e.g. fax copy, scan)

(3) Completed checklist supplied with revision

STEP 4 - LEVEL OF ENFORCEMENT – PROVIDING AUTHORS WITH WHAT THEY NEED



- Is that too late?
 - Will authors go back and update?
 - Will this step irritate authors?
 - Might regular authors get used to the process quickly?
 - What proportion of authors are repeat submitters?
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- Link to sites where reporting checklists can be downloaded
 - Checklists embedded within online instructions for authors
 - Checklists embedded in submission site

STEP 4 - LEVEL OF ENFORCEMENT

Strong Recommendation Authors Consult Guidelines

Simply encourage authors to include a checklist with submission

Recommend authors become familiar with reporting guideline criteria and ensure their manuscript adheres to the criteria

*Recommend consultations of guidelines on initial submission.
Mandatory adherence with the revised submission*

STEP 4 - LEVEL OF ENFORCEMENT

Strong Recommendation Authors Consult Guidelines

Provide links to checklists via Instructions for Authors. Include statement that consulting guidelines is encouraged:

“It is strongly recommended, where appropriate, that you ensure your manuscript conforms to a reporting guideline that best fits your type of manuscript. For example, a CONSORT statement should be completed and uploaded with your manuscript for a Randomized Controlled Trial. The [International Society for Sexual Medicine \(ISSM\) Publication Reporting Guidelines](#) detail the appropriate checklist to use per study type.”

Example from *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* Author Instructions

STEP 5 – PHASED OR COMPLETE LAUNCH OF REPORTING POLICY

Phased Launch

Initial launch with one guideline (either recommended consultation or mandatorily enforced). Other guidelines added later if needed

Initial launch involves recommendation to consult guidelines



Subsequent move to mandatory enforcement

- Phased launches may be politically expedient
- Success of phased launch is somewhat predicated on assumption that many authors will return to submit new work

STEP 5 – PHASED OR COMPLETE LAUNCH OF REPORTING POLICY

Complete Launch

- A declarative policy containing multiple checklists and mandatory enforcement states firmly to authors that minimum standards must be met for ALL manuscript types
- Short, sharp shock: quickly ensures compliance?
- Anecdotal reports from editorial offices:
 - Authors frequently fail to read Instructions for Authors
 - For smaller or lower ranked titles authors are often shopping papers around journals, rarely making changes to a paper – hard to get authors to comply to formatting and policy requests
- Anecdotal evidence: “soft launches” have led to low take-up of reporting policy adherence

STEP 6 – WRITE UP PROPOSAL FOR IMPLEMENTING POLICY

- Draft policy outline to include:
 - Goals
 - Expectations
 - Degrees of enforcement
 - Approach to monitoring compliance
 - Implementation plan
- Get approval from publication committee/board of directors/publisher
- Approval offers:
 - Support if the need for standards is challenged by influential figures within the field
 - Powerful backing if the policy is undermined by authors through non-compliance

STEP 7 – PREPARATIONS FOR LAUNCH

- Prepare editorial to outline policy rationale to authors, reviewers and readers
 - Outline reasons for launching a reporting standards policy
 - Present the evidence from previously published studies that shows benefits of consulting checklists
 - Explain what will be required of authors
- Schedule publication/posting of new Instructions for Authors upon launch of policy
- If applicable, provide guide for reviewers on the utilization of checklists supplied by authors
- Ensure system configurations are in place with policy launch
 - Develop template letters to respond to cases of non-compliance

STEP 8 - LAUNCH

- Publish editorial and new instructions
- Consider email marketing/publicity campaign to previous authors – stress benefits
- After suitable time interval, publish a follow up editorial documenting success of policy, continued need for observation
 - Loder EW, Penzien DB. *Improving the Quality of Research Reporting: Headache Steps Up to the Plate* (Headache, 2009)
 - Roberts JL. *Reporting Policies and Headache*. (Headache 2010)
- Additional publicity mechanisms:
 - Member newsletters
 - Publish quotes from thought-leaders in support of policy
 - Social media

CONFOUNDERS

Journals will be confronted by:

Apathy

Editors

Authors

Concern

Asking too much?
Overly complex
submission and
review process?

Entrenched
Practices

Accepted, but flawed, practices perpetuated

Subject thought leaders believing their research
results trump methods/reporting standards

Misinterpretation

Unable to comprehend reporting guidelines

Weak skills/no training to facilitate incorporating
reporting criteria

CONCLUSIONS

- Research your journal's need and the potential author reaction to the imposition of a policy
 - Ensure staff/editors can handle additional responsibilities
 - Determine level of enforcement
 - Decide upon phased or complete launch
 - Devise coherent policy
 - Secure support for policy
 - Promote policy through published articles, instruction/educational courses and marketing
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- Always stress the rewards of extra effort
 - Be patient and supportive with authors unfamiliar with reporting guidelines