

Reflections

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Headlines

As ever, the themes in this issue of *Reflections* are wide ranging. Last time I recognised the wonderful job our reviewers perform and how their contributions improve the quality of publications in this Journal (and elsewhere). This time, the focus is on the challenges of peer review and the importance of authors working together with reviewers (and the EiC) to make papers ‘shine’. On a happier note, ‘short communications’ will be introduced as a new category of manuscript to submit the Journal. Often, a neat, rounded piece of work is better suited to a standalone publication and can be lost in the push for a ‘big’ paper. Peer review and the usual rules will apply but the text of MS is no more than 2000 words with a maximum of 20 references. Finally, even in the refined world of scientific publication, it is good to celebrate success. The number of downloads is measure of reader interest and accordingly papers with > 400 downloads (and beyond) are flagged within an issue and across the archive.

Peer review and feedback

I acknowledged the critical role of peer reviewers in the last *Reflections* whose contributions significantly improve manuscripts. Reviewers are busy people but give their time and expertise freely. They are not selected randomly but for their experience, knowledge and insight. From personal experience as an author, their constructive criticism can occasionally be difficult to accept. However, when the dust settles, the realisation frequently dawns that the feedback is helpful and yes, improves (often significantly) the manuscript. Of course, some feedback doesn’t hit the spot and then its about negotiation with the reviewers and the EiC. However, the expectation of peer review is that the authors respond to the feedback respectfully and constructively. An exasperated response of ‘I responded to this last time’ is neither helpful nor constructive. Indeed, asking the same (or similar) question in a new round of peer review suggests the answer was incomplete or – worse still – ignored. In this case, the end game was ‘reject’ which is a frustrating outcome for all parties. Thankfully, this is a rare event but nonetheless a dispiriting experience.

New - 'short communications'

Back in 1979, I published a short communication in the *Journal of General Microbiology*. Pleasingly, this remains an option for 'smaller pieces of work' in what is now *Microbiology*. Going forward, JIB will introduce a 'short communication' category for small, rounded pieces of research or review. Peer review and the usual style rules will apply but the text must be less than 2000 words in length with no more than 20 references and up to four Tables or Figures. As the word count is demanding, the 'text' excludes the author contributions, conflict of interest, references and tables/legends. To put a 'short communication' in context, analysis of 22 research papers published in 2023/24 in JIB contain an average of 4914 words (range 2416-7725) with 45 references (range 14-79).

Celebrating success

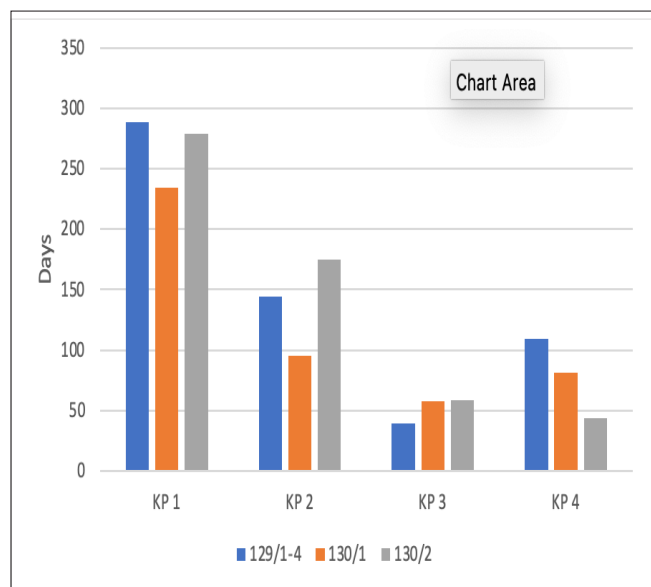
The number of downloads a publication receives is a nice measure of success. Significant downloads of > 400 and beyond - are now celebrated within the details of each issue and collectively in the archive.

Publication KPIs

There are four 'key performance indicators' (KPIs) segment the process from submission to publication. These are outlined below.

KPI	Activity
1	Total process time (in days) from submission to publication
2	Time from submission to 'soft' accept (intention flagged to the authors)
3	Time for copy editing by the EiC. On completion, 'hard' accept
4	Time for pdf creation, review by authors, final proof edits by the EiC

The KPIs are reported for each issue together with a consolidated metric for the 16 publications in the journal in 2023 (volume 129/issues 1-4). This time there are – as anticipated - some encouraging signs with the turnaround of KPI 4 speeding up. This reflects the previously described new ways of working for the generation and editing of pdfs.



To conclude

There are four research papers in this issue with one from Croatia and (unusually) three from the UK. The papers include studies on beer, whisky and gin. The themes are 'the impact of pasteurisation and storage on aroma compounds in lager', 'optimisation of yeast ascospore formation for heat inactivation experiments', 'the sensory detection of 2,4,6-trichloroanisole in neutral spirit and whisky' and 'tracking volatile organic compounds during gin distillation'.

Cheers,

David Quain
Editor in Chief