Submitting your manuscript... and receiving a decision

Alison Bennett
Research Leader
James Hutton Institute

Associate Editor at:

Functional Ecology

Pedobiologia
Dear Editorial Office,

We are submitting a manuscript entitled “Article Title” for publication in Journal Name. We believe that this manuscript is a very important contribution to our understanding of the factors that structure quantitative bipartite mutualistic networks.

Our manuscript addresses three novel questions: 1) Does successional stage alter network properties? 2) Do seasonal dynamics alter network properties? 3) Do successional stage and seasonal dynamics interact to influence network properties? As discussed in our manuscript, these questions are rarely addressed in bipartite networks and have never been addressed in a below-ground mutualistic networks. This manuscript demonstrates that although successional stage and seasonal dynamics do not interact, both factors influence the structure of mutualistic bipartite networks.

There are several novel results highlighted in this manuscript for both the study of mutualistic networks and arbuscular mycorrhizal fungal biology. First, there were no effects of replication suggesting that observed effects are consistent across the study site and perhaps even across other systems. Second, succession influences mutualist network structure by decreasing the number of interactions and increasing the proportion of specialists within the network. Third, the mutualism is dynamic throughout the growing season. Finally, partnerships between AM fungal and plant species change throughout the growing season. Together these results highlight the importance of incorporating successional and seasonal dynamics into the study of mutualistic networks both above- and below-ground. Thus, we feel this paper would be an excellent fit with Journal Name.

This submission has not been published or accepted for publication, nor is being considered for publication elsewhere. This manuscript is original and all necessary acknowledgements have been made. All authors of this manuscript have read the submitted version of the manuscript and approve its submission, and all persons entitled to authorship have been included. We also confirm our study has been reviewed by two peers (Joe Bloggs and Kevin Smith) whose names are included in the acknowledgements.

We look forward to your response,

Author 1
Author 2
Author 3
Author 4
Address
Address
Address
Address
Cover Letters

Editorial Office
Journal Name

Dear Editorial Office,

We are submitting a manuscript for potential publication in Journal Name. We believe that this manuscript advances our understanding of the factors that structure networks in mutualistic systems.

Our manuscript addresses three novel questions: 1) Does successional stage alter network properties? 2) Do seasonal dynamics alter network properties? 3) Do successional stage and seasonal dynamics interact to influence network properties? As discussed in our manuscript, these questions have been addressed in a below-ground mutualistic network. This manuscript demonstrates that although successional stage and seasonal dynamics do not interact, both factors influence the structure of mutualistic bipartite networks.

This is where you convince the editor that your paper should be published in their journal.
Highlight what is novel and interesting
Bullet points work well here
Answer journal questions

Final paragraph contains assurances:
Not published elsewhere, all authors have seen and agree, has been previously reviewed, etc.

We look forward to your response,

Author 1
Address

Author 2
Address

Author 3
Address

Author 4
Address
Submitting your Manuscript

• Before you begin one last time read:
  – Journal remit
  – Author guidelines
  – Cover letter guidelines
• Identify potential editors and reviewers
• Collect email addresses for all authors
• Reserve two hours
Submitting your Manuscript

- Fill in sections as directed in web page
  - Cut and Paste
Submitting your Manuscript

Preferred Reviewers
OR
Non-preferred Reviewers

Increase likelihood of acceptance

Identify editors that will understand the topic/importance of your paper

Increase likelihood of acceptance
Submitting your Manuscript

Review and Submit

- Most important step
- **ALWAYS** download and review your submission
  - Check for track changes
  - Do figures look correct?
  - Any glaring mistakes?
- Go celebrate! 🎉
Peer Review Process

• Handling editor reads paper and asks the following questions:
  – Does it address remit of journal?
    • If no, immediate reject
  – Do the methods, etc. appear to be appropriate?
    • If no, immediate reject
  – Who should review paper?
    • Six people added to list, three invited
      – One person from Preferred Reviewer list
      – One person from each field
      – Diversity in gender, world region, career stage
    • All reviewers decline...
Peer Review Process

• Handling editor receives 2-3 reviews:
  – Reads reviews
    • Comments for only editor
    • Comments for both author and editor
  – Handling editor decision based on:
    • Issues raised by reviewers
    • Quality of reviews
    • Reviewer recommendations
    • Own opinion
  – Possible decisions
    • Accept (NEVER happens...)
    • Major revisions
    • Minor revisions
    • Reject with invitation to resubmit
    • Reject—but pass on to associated journal with reviews
    • Reject
Receiving a Reject Decision

• “Never call up/email an editor after you’ve received a decision and call them an idiot.”
  – Wait until you are calm
  – Did they really make a mistake?

• Petition
  – Be VERY polite and avoid phrases like “you are wrong”
  – Expect 30% success rate

• Or is there a flaw in the paper you can address for the next submission?

• ALWAYS address reviewers comments before you submit to the next journal
Receiving a Major/Minor Revisions Decision

• Celebrate!
• Carefully read all reviewers comments
  – Reviewer’s goal: to improve your manuscript
  – Respond to every comment by editor/reviewers
    • Tips for responses to reviewer comments:
      – Be polite
        » reviewers often get to read your responses and decide if you have addressed comments appropriately
      – Explicitly number each comment and list where in text (use line numbers) changes have been made
      – Make every possible change requested
        » Limit the number of comments you contest to as few as possible
        » Avoid phrases like “you are wrong”
      – Utilize co-authors to help tone down any confrontational responses
Writing your manuscript
a.k.a. The fun part

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Christchurch, New Zealand
www.stoufferlab.org
Structuring your article:

1. Four main components (IMRAD)
   *Intro, Methods, Results, & Discussion*
2. Create an ‘‘hourglass’’ shape
3. ‘‘The 5 pivotal paragraphs’’
4. Start with your Figures (and Tables)
5. Work on the Methods and Results next
Picking a title:

1. Don’t be too system specific...
2. ...but too general leaves readers stranded.
3. Highlight the key question or result(s)
   Knowledge of predator–prey interactions improves predictions of immigration and extinction in island biogeography
4. Be creative/playful to catch readers’ eyes
   Des différences, pourquoi? Transmission, maintenance and effects of phenotypic variance
Writing the abstract:

1. Often last; never least.

2. The structured abstract is not your enemy.
   ______ and ______,
   but ______,
   therefore [we] ______.
   As a result, ______.

3. Give away the punchline!

   Please be good enough to put your conclusions and recommendations on one sheet of paper at the very beginning of your report, so that I can even consider reading it.

   -- Winston Churchill
Effective writing style:

1. Tell a story
2. Clarity, coherence, and concision
3. Choose your words with care
4. Use plain English
   Don’t utilize utilize; use use.
5. Favor the active voice
6. Used short or mixed-length sentences (≤30 words)
7. Design each of your paragraphs
Editing your article:

1. Brush up on the basics
2. Beware the urge to write the perfect sentence, paragraph, etc.
3. Seek the opinions of others
4. Keep an open mind
5. Lather, rinse, repeat (as needed)
Authorship:

1. When in doubt, rely on the advice of others

ICMJE criteria for being an author:

- Formulation of theory and prediction
- Contributions to experimental conception and design
- Acquisition, analysis and/or interpretation of data
- Drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content

2. Approach the question positively

3. Honesty is the best policy

4. Learn about the cultures to author order
You don’t have to build the Taj Mahal.
You don’t have to build the Taj Mahal.
You don’t have to build the Taj Mahal.
Key references:

The craft of scientific writing
Michael Alley

Writing science in plain English
Anne E. Greene

Houston, we have a narrative
Randy Olson

Stylish academic writing
Helen Sword

The write stuff
Henry Gee (http://goo.gl/jrhV4w)

The elements of style
Strunk & White

The 5 pivotal paragraphs in a paper
Brian McGill (https://goo.gl/1wcM9K)