



Academic Forensic Pathology:
The Official Publication of the National Association of Medical Examiners

Submission Guidelines and Journal Policies

Types of Unsolicited Manuscripts

Original Article: This is the typical unsolicited manuscript. Most consist of reports of original research and analysis of scientific observations. These may be based around short case reports or case series, provided they are accompanied by a thoughtful and critical review of the relevant literature.

Review Article: Most review articles will be solicited; however, unsolicited review articles are also welcome. A review article should be a balanced review of a particular topic. Review Articles may come to conclusions regarding proposed changes with respect to classification, daily practice, or other conventions in forensic pathology.

Methods and Procedures: This type of manuscript describes the results of new technical advances or refinements of existing techniques in the practice of forensic pathology. It may be based around short case reports or case series.

Case of the Month: In the interest of shifting the primary focus of the Journal away from case reports and toward more novel, original research and critical appraisals of the relevant basic science, medical and pathology literature, the Journal will publish one Case of the Month each month of the year (3 per issue, 12 per year). Priority consideration will be given to reports written by pathology residents and forensic pathology fellows. Each case should be presented in detail, be illustrated adequately (if appropriate), and include a thoughtful review of the relevant literature.

Images in Forensic Pathology: Forensic pathology is a visual profession that lends itself brilliantly toward the creation of high quality, informative images. Sometimes, those images might even be considered artistic. The Journal will publish one Image of the Month each month of the year (3 per issue, 12 per year). The image (scene, macro-, micro-, or other photograph) must be accompanied by a short description of the case, the illustrated finding(s), and their significance. The image and text will be published as one page in the Journal.

Letter to the Editor: In addition to letters pertaining to previously published articles, Letters to the Editor may address any topic relevant to forensic pathology or death investigation. Letters pertaining to previously published articles will be indexed once the Journal is selected by the National Library of Medicine for indexing; those pertaining to general subject matter will not. Letters to the Editor are not the appropriate format to present new scientific data; these should be submitted as manuscripts. Letters

should begin with the text, "To the Editor:" If a letter pertains to a previously published article, cite it and reference the article at the end of the letter.

Material presented at NAME Meetings

As the official publication of the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), Academic Forensic Pathology has the right of first refusal for the publication of any manuscripts based on platform or poster presentations from the NAME Annual and Interim meetings. If an author wishes to publish in a journal other than Academic Forensic Pathology, he/she may discuss the matter with the Editor-in-Chief, and it is possible that an exception might be made in certain situations. Presentation at a NAME meeting does not guarantee publication in the Journal, as all manuscripts must go through the peer review process. Abstracts from oral and poster presentations at NAME meetings will be published, however these are not indexed.

Anonymity

Many journals utilize a single-blinded peer review process, whereby the authors of the submitted manuscript are blind to the identity of the reviewers. However, in this model, the reviewers and the Editor(s) know the identities of the authors during the review process. Academic Forensic Pathology utilizes a triple-blinded peer review process, meaning that not only are the authors blind to the identities of the reviewers, but that the reviewers and the Editor-in-Chief are blind to the identity of the authors; the Editor-in-Chief does not even know the identity of the authors until a manuscript has been accepted for publication. When a manuscript is submitted, Journal staff strip identifying information such as author names and institutional affiliations before the manuscript is sent to the Editor-in-Chief for review and triage.

To facilitate this anonymity, authors should avoid including potentially identifying information within the text wherever possible in the original submission. For example, rather than state, "We have shown in previous studies (reference cited) that...", structure the sentence more like, "It has been shown previously (reference cited) that...". In the first example, the identity of the authors would be immediately known simply by looking at the cited reference. Another place to be cognizant of self-referential giveaways is in the Methods section. If the Methods section includes a sentence such as, "Cases from the Dallas County Medical Examiner's Office were examined prospectively for a six-month period...", the authorship anonymity may become compromised.

After a manuscript has been accepted for publication, the identifying information (including changes in desired sentence structure) can be added back in to the manuscript prior to publication.

Privacy

It is the reviewer's responsibility to maintain confidentiality regarding the manuscripts he/she reviews. It is a violation of the terms of practice for a reviewer to contact the author(s) of a manuscript they are reviewing or have reviewed, or communicate with any other individual regarding the content of the submitted manuscript, their review, or any related communications between themselves and the EIC or Publisher.

Authorship

Authorship is not to be taken lightly. It is not acceptable to include individuals as authors who do not have meaningful contributions to the work. This means, for example, that the Chief Medical Examiner should not be a de facto author on any paper originating in his/her office simply because that person is the chief and allowed the work to take place, using case material from the office.

The Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals has concise criteria for what constitutes authorship. The following is taken directly from that document(1):

1. Substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data
2. Drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content
3. Final approval of the version to be published

To qualify for authorship, an individual must meet ALL three of these conditions. Furthermore,

- Acquisition of funding, collection of data, or general supervision of the research group alone does not constitute authorship.
- All persons designated as authors should qualify for authorship, and all those who qualify should be listed.
- Each author should have participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content.

At the time of manuscript submission, there will be an acknowledgment that all authors satisfy each of these criteria. All contributors who do not meet the criteria for authorship should be listed in an acknowledgements section. Examples of those who might be acknowledged include a person who provided purely technical help, writing assistance, or a department chairperson [or chief medical examiner] who provided only general support.

Because readers may infer their endorsement of the data and conclusions, these persons must give written permission to be acknowledged. Once the manuscript has been submitted, the corresponding author will be contacted and asked for email addresses for each person listed in the Acknowledgement section so that the Publisher may contact them.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

Conflict of interest is a complex issue. As such, it is not possible to list all of the possible types of conflict that may occur during the creation of a scholarly article. Authors are asked to carefully review their own situation, and determine whether or not *perceived* or *actual* conflict of interest have occurred, and to communicate such conflicts to the Publisher and the Editor-In-Chief. Conflicts disclosure is to occur during initial submission of the manuscript on ScholarOne, but authors should feel free to declare potential or actual conflict at any other time by contacting the Publisher (publisher@academicfp.com).

Examples of potential and actual conflict of interest include, but are not limited to:

- receiving payment for writing or reviewing the manuscript,
- receiving payment for committee work related to the production of the manuscript
- receiving payment for expert testimony specifically related to the manuscript, and
- receiving payment, royalties, stock options etc. in return for featuring a commercial product in a manuscript.

Prior/Duplicate Publication

It is actually possible to plagiarize oneself. Once a journal publishes a manuscript, the copyright assignment is generally (see below) transferred from the authors to the publisher. With rare exception, it is not permissible to publish the same work in more than one journal, even if it would be beneficial to have the work available to two vastly different readerships. There are certain exceptions, for example, republishing seminal papers or guideline papers, providing the appropriate permissions from the original publisher is obtained. Publishing similar papers in two different journals, even if the two manuscripts are not verbatim copies, using the same data or research material, is also unethical, may constitute plagiarism, and would likely violate copyright law.

Copyright

Upon submission of a manuscript for editorial review, the corresponding author (with permission of all individuals claiming authorship) must complete an on-line Manuscript Submission agreement in order to transfer copyright from the author to Academic Forensic Pathology Incorporated. There are certain situations in which copyright transfer may be retained, the most notable of which is when the authors are employees of the United States Federal Government.

Format

General: The style of writing should be American English, with American spelling (e.g., “center” and “esophagus”, not “centre” and “oesophagus”). If preparing the manuscript in a country that primarily uses a language other than English, it might be useful to utilize a professional translation service to ensure that the manuscript makes use of appropriate style and diction. All units of measurement should be expressed in metric system units, including body measurements (height and weight) and temperature. All symbols and abbreviations should conform to IUPAC or ISI standards.

Title: The title should accurately and completely summarize the work. Keep in mind that the title is the first thing a reader sees and is usually the deciding factor on whether the reader continues into the abstract. While no specific rules will be enforced, it is generally more effective for the title to simply state the findings rather than pose a question or use flowery references.

Running Title: This is a shortened version of the title which may be used for quick reference during the review process, and which will be printed on alternate pages of the journal article when published. The running title must be no longer than 32 characters, including spaces.

Key Words: The selection of appropriate key words is important to facilitate appropriate cataloguing of the manuscript and enabling ease of literature searches.

Abstract: The abstract may be structured or unstructured. It must summarize the rationale for the study, the design, the findings, and the conclusion(s). Statements such as “the findings will be discussed...” are not appropriate. The abstract must be able to stand on its own, and enable a reader to obtain a complete understanding of the findings and conclusions of the work. In order to comply with indexing standards of the National Library of Medicine, abstracts must be no longer than 250 words.

Introduction: The most important function of the introduction is to explain the purpose of the study. It sets up the problem and justifies why there is a need for the study. It provides a historical background of the problem and summarizes the current state of knowledge in that particular area. Essentially, the introduction is to “set up” the remainder of the manuscript.

Methods: Describe how the research was done. This may be as simple as stating that records were retrospectively reviewed for certain criteria during a certain time period, or describing the search strategy used for an Internet search. This section may also be quite complicated, especially if it involves laboratory procedures or advanced statistics. The most important criterion for this section is that it should be complete enough to allow a reader to be able to independently reproduce the study. It is acceptable to use subheadings within this section to organize different topics within the manuscript.

Depending on the nature of the article, a Methods section may not be necessary.

Results: The results section should summarize the findings of the study. It should reference and compliment data represented in the figures and tables. This section should be limited to an objective description of the findings, without stating opinions or coming to any conclusions. It is acceptable to use subheadings within this section to organize different topics within the manuscript.

Depending on the nature of the article, a Results section may not be necessary.

Discussion: The discussion should briefly summarize the findings of the study without completely restating them. The primary focus of this section is to draw appropriate conclusions and sometimes, give opinions. Two of the most common reasons a manuscript is rejected for publication are 1) that the conclusions are inappropriately drawn from the data presented and 2) that there are other reasonable but differing conclusions that could also be drawn but are either not discussed at all, or that the authors do not argue why their conclusions are more appropriate. It is acceptable to use subheadings within this section to organize different topics within the manuscript.

References: It is important to cite the appropriate source (cite the actual paper rather than a review article that references it. Use the National Library of Medicine style of formatting references (this is one of the options in Endnote).

Examples include:

Journal article:

Moritz AR. Classical mistakes in forensic pathology. Am J Clin Pathol 1956 Dec;26(12):1383-97.

Book:

Dolinak D, Matshes E, Lew E. Forensic Pathology: Principles & Practice. 1 ed. San Diego: Academic Press; 2005.

Chapter in a book:

Matshes E, Lew E. Forensic osteology. In: Dolinak D, Matshes E, Lew E, editors. Forensic Pathology: Principles and Practice. 1 ed. San Diego: Academic Press; 2005.

Legends: Legends must be included for each drawing or diagram (figures), photograph (images) and table. Include all legends in the manuscript main document, immediately preceding the References section.

Figures: A figure is a drawing or schematic diagram. These will be printed in brilliant full color.

Images: An image is a scene or autopsy photograph, or a photomicrograph. These will also be printed in brilliant full color. High resolution, non-formatted TIFF or JPEG files must be uploaded at the time of submission. Identifying features should be removed prior to upload through ScholarOne. Low quality scanned photos or photomicrographs can be improved by submitting original materials directly to the Publisher for scanning. A fee will apply. Such a service is only available (and only offered) after your manuscript has been accepted for publication.

Tables: Submit tables in any format desired. If accepted for publication, the data in the table will be redesigned during layout design in a standard format to ensure the consistent appearance of tables throughout the Journal.

Upon acceptance of a manuscript, authors may be asked to provide raw data in order to reproduce tables and/or figures in a uniform style.

Editorial Process

Our editorial process involves a triage system of manuscript evaluation whereby submissions are first evaluated for compliance with technical and English language requirements (the “first” decision), and then are reviewed briefly by the EIC to determine overall suitability for the journal (the “second” decision). Evaluation by the EIC following peer review by the Editorial Board members and other reviewers constitutes the “third” or “final” decision.

Authors will be advised within **three business days** if their manuscripts have been accepted for formal editorial review. If they have not been accepted, an explanation will be provided. If the EIC triages the manuscript for peer review, the manuscript is reviewed by at least two individuals: either two members of the editorial board, or one or two members of the editorial board and a guest reviewer. The results of the reviews are conveyed to the EIC who considers them, and speaks with the reviewers directly, if necessary, about any concerns. Uniform agreement by reviewers and the EIC to accept with or without revision results in publication. Uniform agreement by reviewers and the EIC to reject results in immediate rejection. Non-uniform agreement regarding manuscript acceptance will mandate involvement of at least one additional reviewer who might be either a member of the editorial board, or a guest reviewer. After the EIC receives the results from the additional reviewer(s), the decision about acceptance/rejection rests with the EIC, and will be based upon consideration of all three reviews, and his own review. For those manuscripts requiring review by only the EIC and two reviewers, a final decision will be provided to the author within **30 calendar days** of submission. If a manuscript requires review by the EIC and three reviewers (a 'tie breaker'), a final decision will be provided to the author within **45 calendar days** of the first decision.

In accordance with the accepted standards of editorial practice, the EIC is ultimately responsible for the editorial content of the Journal. Prior to manuscript acceptance, the EIC will review a version of the manuscript that includes all identifying data, as well as technical data prepared by journal staff including an up-to-date listing of the prior scholarly publications of the first and last authors, and the results of online plagiarism / duplication investigations.

When a manuscript is accepted with revisions, the author will have **30 calendar days** to comply with the EIC's requests, or to withdraw their manuscript. Revised manuscripts received after 30 calendar days will be treated as new submissions.

Editorial Decisions {descriptions taken directly from (2)}

Accept: The global rating of Accept is clear-cut and unambiguous; this rating implies that the reviewer does not see any need for revision of the manuscript and that it is suitable for publication "as is." In fact, because most reviewers (with good reason) suggest changes to any manuscript, the Accept rating is granted to few manuscripts on initial review. Given that it is a rare manuscript that cannot be improved in some way, sometimes the Accept rating is an indication that the reviewer has not looked at the manuscript with an eye toward improvement. When revisions are suggested, the decision category always should be Accept Pending Revisions rather than Accept.

Accept Pending Revisions: The Accept Pending Revisions rating indicates that the reviewer finds some ways in which the manuscript should be changed before final acceptance. The suggested changes may include items such as a request for clarification of the methods. However, it is implied in this rating that the authors can reasonably make these changes and that doing so will more or less result in publication of the revised version of the original manuscript.

Reconsider After Major Revisions: A rating of Reconsider After Major Revisions indicates that the reviewer believes that considerable changes are needed but that a reasonable possibility exists for the manuscript to proceed to publication. Examples of indications for providing this rating include a belief that,

first, the reported data need to be analyzed in a different manner; second, additional data are needed; third, the authors have failed to appropriately take certain study factors into account; or fourth, the authors have not appropriately discussed their results against the background of previous studies. Most manuscripts that receive a Reconsider After Major Revisions recommendation are ultimately published.

A NAME member who submits an article to the Journal for review, and ultimately receives a judgment of “Reconsider After Major Revisions”, will have the option to access our special NAME-member-only Research Enhancement Program. This unique program will be supported infrastructurally and financially by the Publisher. In this program, authors will have access to expert research assistance from our network of volunteer pathologists and basic/translational research scientists, and from Publisher-funded access to professional third-party research assistants. Authors who choose to access this service will receive valuable mentorship which will ultimately enhance current and future scholarly projects.

Reject: The Reject rating is provided when the reviewer is of the opinion that no amount of revision will make the manuscript suitable for the journal to which it was submitted. It is worth emphasizing that, in some cases, the rating is based not on the opinion that the manuscript is poorly written or an inadequate study. Instead, sometimes a reviewer recommends rejection on the belief that the manuscript was submitted to the inappropriate journal.

Publication

All manuscripts will be published in the next online issue of the journal if:

- at least 14 calendar days separate the acceptance date from the date of next issue, and
- if the authors comply with the timelines of the publisher as they pertain to the production process.

An exception to the rule of publishing in the next online issue will include cases published in the category Case of the Month or Images in Forensic Pathology. For example, the Case of the Month for April might have a publication delay if accepted for publication in December (but is not published until the April issue).

At the time a new manuscript is submitted, authors whose works meet specific criteria can request a **fast-track review**; in these circumstances, the time between manuscript submission and final decision will be seven calendar days. In the absence of an author-based request for fast-track review, the EIC may select this option if his initial review suggests the contents of the manuscript are of sufficient magnitude. Criteria for fast-track review are:

- the results of the research are of significant magnitude as to have an immediate impact on the practice of forensic pathology, or
- a delay in publication could result in a negative impact to the forensic pathology and criminal justice communities, or to members of the general public.

A request for fast-track review should be made in writing in the cover letter you upload with your manuscript via ScholarOne.

Presubmission inquiries are accepted. You may choose to contact the Editor-In-Chief director (editor@academicfp.com) or in the interest of maintaining anonymity, you may contact the Publisher (publisher@academicfp.com) who will anonymize your query and send it along to the Editor-In-Chief.

References for this document(3)

1. Editors ICoMJ. Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals: Writing and editing for biomedical publication. 2010 [updated April 2010; cited 2010 November 11]; Available from: http://www.icmje.org/urm_full.pdf.
2. Provenzale JM, Stanley RJ. A systematic guide to reviewing a manuscript. *AJR Am J Roentgenol* 2005 Oct;185(4):848-54.
3. Patrias K, Wendling DL, National Library of Medicine (U.S.). Citing medicine the NLM style guide for authors, editors, and publishers. Bethesda, Md.: Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, U.S. National Library of Medicine; 2007. Available from: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/citingmedicine>
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/bv.fcgi?rid=citmed.TOC&depth=2>
<http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS100717>.