

Advice for AAEM editors: How much editing is enough?

One of the aims of AAEM is to train researchers in publication skills so that they can become more autonomous. Researchers should learn

- 1) the importance of following the journal's rules for the structure of the abstract and main text,
- 2) the need to stay within the word limits, and
- 3) the importance of following the journal's rules for reference formats.

If you encounter problems in these areas, it's a good idea to let the author know that they should remedy them before you can finish editing the manuscript.

1. If you know which journal the manuscript will be submitted to, you can correct the basic structure of the abstract or main text (number and type of headings and subheadings), or you can advise the authors to make the appropriate corrections by referring to specific guidance in the journal's instructions for manuscript preparation. Whether you make the corrections yourself or advise the author to make them is up to you.

2. Shortening the text is a task for the authors as subject experts, because only the authors know what content is the most novel and important for the intended readers. If the abstract or main text is over the journal's word limit, you should ask the authors to shorten them before editing can be completed. It makes no sense to spend time editing lines of material that are going to disappear later on because the text is over the word limit.

If the author asks you to shorten the abstract or main text for them, it is important that you clearly document your suggested deletions. It is also important that the authors retain responsibility for the final content of the manuscript by carefully reviewing your suggestions and accepting or rejecting them as they consider appropriate.

3. Correcting the references to comply with the journal's format rules is the authors' responsibility. It is helpful to paste the journal's instructions and examples into the manuscript just before the Reference section and remind the authors politely about the journal's rules.

If the references contain many format errors, it is helpful to take one of each type (journal article, book, book chapter, website) from the list and correct it as per the journal's rules, so the authors can see just how many details need to be corrected. Scientists are trained observers, so if you show them the details of reference formats that they overlooked, this may help them learn how to prepare the references correctly themselves.

Note that reference management software may be out of date for certain journals or publishers, so even if this software is used, the references may still come out wrong if the journal has changed its rules recently. Note also that because of production issues, reference formats in published articles may differ from the journal's own instructions or guidelines. If there are discrepancies, it is better to follow the current Instructions for Authors or Guidelines for Manuscript Preparation than to copy the formats that appear in articles published recently by the target journal.