

The Silent Workforce of Academic Publishing: Time to Give Credit to Peer Reviewers

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In our profession as researchers, it is important to publish the findings of our work in the form of scientific papers. Besides the inherent value of sharing knowledge and contributing to science, we researchers are also assessed based on the quantity and quality of our publications. The phrase “publish or perish” reflects the importance of publishing in academia and highlights its impact on career progression and opportunities. Publishing your work entails submitting your manuscript to a suitable scientific journal. At the *International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance (IJSP)*, the Editor, together with the Editorial Assistant, conducts an initial assessment to determine whether the manuscript aligns with the journal’s scope and meets the minimum standards to be sent out for peer review. If the outcome of this editorial assessment is positive, the manuscript will be allocated to an Associate Editor,

who is responsible for identifying suitable reviewers. Typically, a manuscript will be reviewed by 2 or 3 academics or industry experts in the relevant field. As part of this process, the Associate Editor must ensure that no conflicts of interest exist (eg, reviewers should not be based in the same division or department as the authors, and they should have extensively published on the same topic). Although time-consuming, this step is essential to maintaining the integrity and quality of the peer-review process at *IJSP*.

Over the years, several *IJSP* editorials¹⁻⁴ have highlighted not only the importance of high-quality peer reviews but also the ongoing challenge of finding suitable reviewers who are willing and able to undertake this role. In 2024, Noordhof and Sandbakk³ reported that the average number of invitations required to secure 2 reviewers had risen from 3.6 in 2014 to 7.4 per manuscript during the first 5 months of 2024. By the end of 2024, this number had grown even further to 8.0 invitations per manuscript (Figure 1A). In response to this challenging development, and to recognize the important work that reviewers do, *IJSP* introduced an incentive program in February 2024. As part of this, reviewers who have completed 3 high-quality reviews are offered a waiver of article submission costs,³ valued at US\$40. During the first 5 months of 2025, the number of invitations per manuscript decreased to 6.5, which may be partially explained by the success of the waiver incentive program. However, the number remains substantially higher now, in 2025, than it was between 2014 and 2019. When examining the data from a relative perspective, only 1% of all submitted manuscripts between 2014 and 2019 needed 10 or more invites to secure 2 reviewers, while this rose to 22% in 2024 and dropped slightly again to 12% during the first 5 months of 2025 (Figure 1B).

In addition to the challenges of finding willing reviewers, we, as Associate Editors, also sometimes encounter situations where reviewers, despite initially accepting the invitation, inform us at the deadline of submitting the review report that they are no longer able

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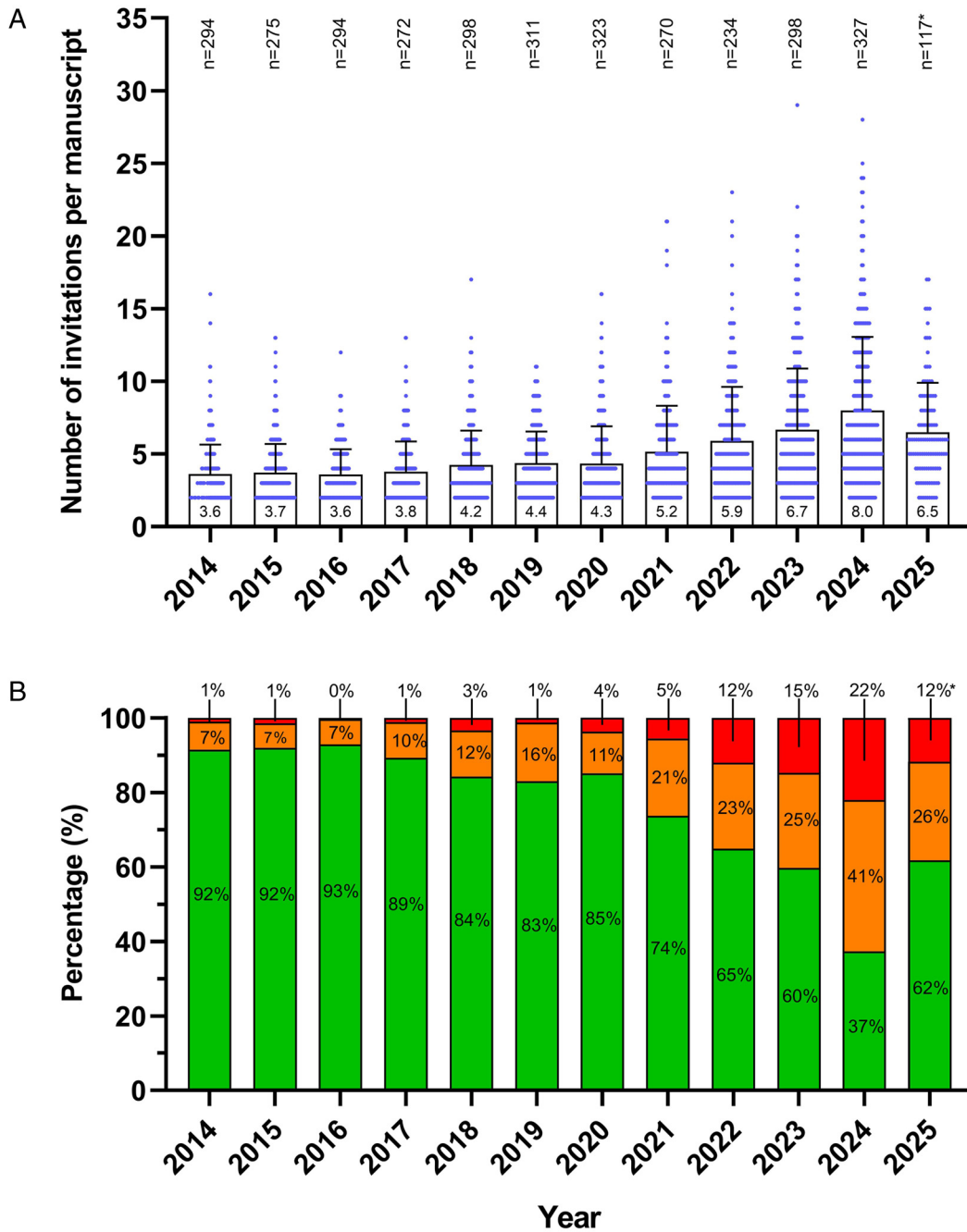


Figure 1 — (A) Total number of manuscripts reviewed and the corresponding number of invitations required to secure at least 2 reviewers per manuscript. (B) Percentage of manuscripts requiring ≤6 invitations (green/bottom bars), 7–9 invitations (orange/middle bars), and ≥10 invitations (red/top bars). Note: For 2025, the data are drawn from the period from January to May.

to complete the review, or, in worse cases, they never submit a report. In this latter case, it is not uncommon to be unable to get in contact with this reviewer, which means that, at some point, the Associate Editor will need to make the decision to uninvite this reviewer and start searching for a new one. Another challenge we sometimes encounter is that reviewers are not willing to look at a revised and resubmitted manuscript. In such cases, the Associate Editor often needs to take over the task of the reviewer, checking whether the submitting authors have sufficiently responded to all comments and suggestions raised and whether or not the manuscript can be accepted for publication.

Several factors may be contributing to the decreasing acceptance rate of review invitations and the reluctance to review revised manuscripts. These include the increasing workload of academics and the lack of formal recognition for this peer-review work by their institutions, as well as insufficient appreciation from the academic community. Reviewing manuscripts for journals is often not part of an academic job description and is typically not considered in performance assessments. As a result, review requests for journals are commonly accepted based on goodwill and are often completed during personal time. With these academics making time available to review articles and potentially also having

to deal with the slow research processes of their own submitted manuscripts, there is a risk of developing a vicious negative cycle, which further demotivates academics from accepting review requests.

To be able to “publish and not perish,” we also need to review. Without the dedication of academics who are willing to review for journals, peer-reviewed publishing would not exist.² Although we understand that these tasks are labor-intensive and it is impossible to accept every review invitation, we hope that this editorial persuades academics to more often assist journals like *IJSPP*. In addition, we trust that this editorial has provided insight into why the review process can sometimes take longer than we ideally strive for at *IJSPP*. Last but not least, this editorial should serve as a motivation for institutions to recognize and value the peer-review tasks performed by their staff and graduate students.

We sincerely thank our peer reviewers, whose contributions have helped *IJSPP* to become a highly successful journal that has firmly established itself among the top Q1 journals in the field of Sport Sciences. This achievement was recently confirmed by a substantial increase in our Journal Impact Factor, which rose from 3.8 in 2024 to 4.3 in 2025.⁵ We are confident that, with the continued support of our peer reviewers—both current and those

who may join us as reviewers based on this editorial—and the exceptional support of the Human Kinetics staff, we can continue to grow *IJSPP* and further advance the field of sport science.

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