A FICTITIOUS STUDY ON HOW TO HAVE YOUR ISBS PAPER ACCEPTED

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The purpose of this study was to identify the causes of rejection of papers from conference proceedings and to present guidelines to limit the number of papers rejected from the Proceedings of the XXVth International Symposium on Biomechanics in Sports hosted by the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Scientists (n=95) with extensive experience in reviewing papers completed a survey. Each scientist selected their five most common reasons for rejecting papers. All scientists selected 'unsound experimental design’ and 'lack of clarity’ in one or more sections as common reasons for rejecting papers from proceedings. Other common reasons were poor identification of the problem (56%) and poor analytical methods (68%). Guidelines for authors arose from the study.

**KEYWORDS:** research, presentation, survey.

**INTRODUCTION:** The International Society of Biomechanics in Sports (ISBS) was established to disseminate useful and scientifically sound information on the biomechanics of sports. The journal Sports Biomechanics is the official journal of ISBS, focusing on generating new knowledge and practical applications of that knowledge to benefit sports practitioners (Knudson, 2018). The ISBS has recently called for papers to be presented at the annual conference. To be eligible for publication in the Proceedings the papers must reflect scientifically sound research with useful application to sport and exercise.

Thorough and Concise (1997) found that many conference papers were rejected because authors did not provide sufficient information about their scientific methods. Thus, the reviewers were unable to assess the scientific merit and soundness of those studies. Other research has indicated that papers have been rejected due to lack of clarity (Structure, Syntax & Flow, 1994; Order, 1996). A survey of authors of rejected papers revealed a need for guidelines to be given to authors prior to preparing their papers (Moore & Info, 1997). The purpose of this study was to identify causes of papers being rejected from conference proceedings and to establish guidelines for authors in an attempt to reduce the incidence of rejection of papers from the proceedings of future ISBS symposia.

**METHODS:** A survey was administered to 95 reviewers of papers for proceedings of scientific conferences. All reviewers had reviewed at least 10 conference papers exceeding 1000 words in length in the last two years. The survey instrument comprised a single question asking each reviewer to indicate the five most common reasons for rejecting papers. A list of choices was adapted from the reviewers’ checklist of the *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport.* These items were:

1. Problem identification: Have the authors clearly stated the purpose of the investigation?
2. Experimental design: Have the authors used a valid approach to the problem?
3. Analytical methods: Are the methods used in the design valid, reliable and clearly described?
4. Presentation of results: Are the findings of this research clearly presented?
5. Discussion of results: Have the authors discussed their results clearly in the light of previous research findings? Are their interpretations valid?
6. Conclusions: Are the conclusions clearly stated and justifiable?
7. Clarity of figures: Are the data clearly illustrated? Are the figures necessary?
8. Clarity of tables: Are the tables easily understood? Are they necessary?
9. Selection of references: Do the authors demonstrate a thorough understanding of previous research on the topic? Has all pertinent literature been appropriately reviewed and evaluated?

Reviewers involved in this study were permitted to list items not included in the above list. They were also given the opportunity to make comments.

Frequencies of each response were determined by simple addition. Responses by each reviewer carried equal weighting. This section usually concludes with information on the reliability of the measurements, data analysis, and the statistical procedures used.

**RESULTS:** One hundred percent of the reviewers responded and the frequencies of each response are shown in Table 1. Provide a descriptive header for data presented in tables and separate the header of the table by a top and bottom line. Draw a solid line also below the last item in the list. Do not waste space while using MS WORD format tables.

**Table 1: Frequency of responses.**

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| Item | Frequency |
| 1. Problem identification | 53 |
| 2. Experimental design | 95 |
| 3. Analytical methods | 65 |
| 4. Presentation of results | 61 |
| 5. Discussion of results | 52 |
| 6. Conclusions | 45 |
| 7. Clarity of figures | 10 |
| 8. Clarity of tables | 23 |
| 9. Selection of references | 12 |
| 10. Other: Lack of relevance to readership | 26 |
| 11. Other: Poor sentence structure | 23 |
| 12. Other: Not making recommended changes | 10 |

All respondents included 'experimental design' as a common cause of rejection of papers. The other most common errors included weaknesses in reporting data analysis and presenting specific results. Although 'clarity' was not a specific item, many respondents indicated that lack of clarity was a common factor by underlining the word 'clearly' in at least one of the item descriptions or by written comment. The relative size of the 12 most common reasons for rejection are presented in Figure 1. Please note that any figures and their captions should contain all relevant information you need to give. Label and provide the correct dimensions of the axes.



**Figure 1: Provide concise and clear description of the figure in the caption.**

**DISCUSSION:** The high response rates for 'experimental design', 'analytical methods', and 'identification of problem' indicated that reviewers were concerned about the manner in which the studies were conducted. It is not possible to interpret specific reasons for these concerns due to the limitations of the survey instrument. However, it is apparent that the reasons would fall into two main categories. First, the reviewers may have concluded that the reported design and analytical methods were not adequate to address the problem identified by the authors. Second, the reviewers may have had insufficient information to assess whether the methods used could address the problem adequately. This may have been due to a lack of detail when describing the methods or an inadequately defined problem or purpose of the study. Based on the findings of Thorough and Concise (1997) it is common for authors to provide insufficient information.

Rejection of papers on the basis of poor design or analytical methods suggests that authors should submit papers only for studies based on scientifically sound methods. Authors should ensure that the methods are explained clearly and with enough detail to convince readers of their scientific quality. Because the length of papers published in proceedings is limited, information must be presented in the most concise manner possible. This may be achieved by structuring sentences in such a way that the meaning is conveyed with a minimum of words. Repetition should be avoided.

The finding that many papers were rejected due to a general lack of clarity in writing supports the findings of Structure et al. (1994) and Order (1996). Therefore, authors should be very careful to present information in an order that promotes ease of reading and understanding. This applies to the structure of the whole paper, paragraphs, and sentences. In the case of paragraphs, it is often advisable to introduce the theme of the paragraph in the first sentence, elaborate in the intermediate sentences, and summarize the content or message of the paragraph in the final sentence. Authors whose native language is not English have an especially difficult task. If possible they should ask a colleague who has good English writing skills to proofread the work and ensure that the meaning is still clear when translated into English.

The number of rejections due to a 'lack of relevance to the readership' was small relative to the concerns of inadequate method and lack of clarity. This indicated that some authors selected an inappropriate conference to present their work. Alternatively, the work was relevant to the readership but the authors did not establish the relevance strongly enough. The latter implies that authors need to state the purpose or problem clearly. The 'Introduction' section should be used to establish the importance of the study, how the findings may be used, and how they might lead to further advancement of knowledge in the area of research.

The main purpose of the symposia of the ISBS is to disseminate information on biomechanics in sports. Therefore, papers should have relevance to sport. However, the range of topics within that constraint is very broad. Papers may deal with topics such as sports technique, acquisition of skill in sports, prevention of injury in sports, rehabilitation of sports injury, modelling and simulation in sport, neuromuscular biomechanics, and equipment design and testing. Papers may also deal with development of techniques and methods of data collection and analysis that lead to further knowledge of sport and advancement of the science of biomechanics in sports.

To ensure that the relevance of the paper is readily apparent to readers, authors should explain the implications and applications of the findings. In the 'Discussion' and 'Conclusion' sections authors should indicate clearly how the findings could be applied. This may include practical suggestions for coaches and players to improve performance, reduce the risk of injury, or expedite recovery.

**CONCLUSION:** This study identified the most common causes of rejection of papers from conference proceedings. Although there were many reasons why papers were rejected, the most common were the use of unscientific methods or poor reporting of methods and a general lack of clarity. Another cause of rejection was failure to establish the relevance of the study. With regard to the symposia of the ISBS, authors were strongly advised to explain the implications and potential applications of their work for coaches and athletes or for advancement of the science of biomechanics in sports. When preparing their papers authors should follow the guidelines presented in this paper and remember that the results need to be connected with potential application in sports and exercise.

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