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Fast-Tracking Manuscripts in EJPA

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In an era where pivotal events such as the COVID pandemic or the public release of ChatGPT shape the societal landscape, there is an urgent demand for swift and informed responses from the research community. Researchers are expected to provide timely insights and solutions to pressing issues. However, the necessity for speed must not come at the expense of scientific rigor (Besançon et al., 2020). To address this dual imperative, we are introducing a fast track peer review process for particularly current and impactful manuscripts. This initiative aims to balance the need for rapid dissemination of crucial findings with the unwavering commitment to thorough and meticulous scientific evaluation.

The peer-review system is one of the most important ways through which scientific journals maintain a high level of quality control on published papers, ensuring the validity and credibility of published research (Roberts et al., 2020). This rigorous quality control process based on interaction with peers and experts in the field inherently takes time – a lot of time. The peer-review system is therefore slow – certainly slower than both authors and editors would want it to be. Several factors contribute to this slowness (Bilalli et al., 2021). High volumes of submissions may be difficult to manage efficiently by journals, contributing to delays. Reviewer availability, especially finding highly qualified reviewers who also have the time and willingness to review a manuscript, can be challenging. Reviewing is often considered important, but little to no reward is given, making it difficult to carve out time in busy schedules. In fact, virtually all potential reviewers are of course active researchers with their own commitments and may not be able to prioritize peer-review duties – it is therefore oftentimes impossible to impose very strict timeframes and short dead-

lines on their review work. The topic and content of manuscripts can lead to delays, especially for highly specialized and complex manuscripts. The revision process by authors, that is, the time authors may take to revise their manuscripts in response to reviewers' comments can be another factor, requiring back-and-forth communication between authors and reviewers and sometimes multiple rounds of review (occasionally even involving new reviewers), extending the timeline even more. Editorial decisions can sometimes also contribute to delays, because after peer review, the editorial team must make decisions that may include additional deliberation and sometimes coordination among multiple editors.

Journals develop and maintain their own policies and procedures, that may also affect the pace of peer-review and final publishing: some journals have a more streamlined process, while others may have more elaborate protocols – all these geared towards their objectives and the general pace of the scientific domain that they serve. These policies and procedures need to be occasionally reviewed and revised, according to the changes in the publishing ecosystem.

In some scientific fields, the wheel turns extremely fast – new research is developed and needs to see the light of the day at a very alert pace (Björk & Solomon, 2013). This is in part mandated by fierce competition between authors groups, and in part by the underlying rhythm of that specific domain. Such rapidly evolving scientific fields are computer science, biomedical research, and certain areas of physics, and in these fields the pace of new discoveries and innovations can outstrip the traditional peer-review-driven publishing model with its more generous timelines. Technological developments in general and advances in AI probably more than anything also require our field of

psychology (including psychological assessment) to rethink existing processes.

To find a good and working compromise between rigorous peer-review on the one hand and timely publication of important and time-sensitive findings on the other hand, researchers and institutions have adopted several alternative and supplementary strategies to disseminate new findings more quickly. For example, researchers may prefer to share parts of their research through collaborative platforms like GitHub (<https://github.com/>) and Figshare (<https://figshare.com/>) – especially data and code are suited for such sharing. Others prefer to use social media and blogs – and especially younger researchers show an increased appetite for the use of social media platforms like X, LinkedIn, or personal blogs, if not to actually share manuscripts, then at least to share their findings and discuss recent developments before they are published (Rowlands et al., 2011). These practices help to speed up the dissemination of research but arguably do not maintain a minimal level of scrutiny on the quality of the outputs.

Preprint servers such as arXiv (<https://arxiv.org/>) or OSF (<https://osf.io/>) allow researchers to share their findings with the community before undergoing peer review, inviting informal feedback from other researchers, which can be incorporated into the manuscript before formal submission to a peer-reviewed journal. They also allow for post-publication peer review while at the same time signaling that the work is still in process.

On a more specific level, journals have reacted to this need in the research community through two instruments: journal special issues and fast-track options. Special issues can solve the problem of a slow publication process in part, when they are focused on hot topics and invite and/or accept contributions from research groups that focus on that topic – but special issues appear only occasionally and each of these issues is focused on only one specific topic. In addition to this, special issues often also involve the traditional peer-review process and, thus, might take (too) much time. Fast-track options are also a solution, and journals can offer this option for high-priority or groundbreaking research. The fast-tracked manuscript receives expedited handling from submission through to publication, which involves a rapid review process, often within a specified number of days, ensuring that significant findings are disseminated quickly but at the same time also without compromising the quality of the review.

We at *EJPA* make all the effort to be fast and thorough in our handling of all manuscripts. The average time to first editorial decision (desk reject vs. accept for review) is 4 days, and for the first review-based decision 46 days. The average accept time from first submission to accept is 45 days for the manuscripts on first revision, 48 days

for manuscripts on second revision and 29 days for the third revision. After formal acceptance, manuscripts are published online on average in 83 days.

At the same time, we have noticed in the past 2 years that some manuscripts could benefit from an even more expedited review process. This is especially the case for technology-rich research that melds psychometrics with AI/ML, in which authors are rightly concerned that waiting for even a few months for this process to unfold will make their ideas and findings outdated – especially because in this particular domain authors have taken increased gusto to preprints.

We have therefore decided to introduce a fast-track option for papers in *EJPA*. Authors will have the opportunity to request that their manuscript is fast-tracked in their letter to the Editors on submission. If authors choose to make this request, they should briefly justify why their manuscript is a candidate for fast-tracking. The decision to fast-track a manuscript will be at the discretion of the Editor-in-Chief. This option is in principle available only for papers that focus on extremely hot and fast-paced areas, either from a technical point of view (e.g., computational psychometrics, analytics, data mining, and AI/ML) or from a societal point of view (e.g., during COVID-time and especially in the early days of the pandemic, many researchers could have benefited from peer-reviewed measures or scales of people's attitudes towards the corona virus). Depending on the topic and availability of researchers, these manuscripts could also be reviewed by Associate Editors of *EJPA*, or qualified Editorial Board members, to expedite the process. The *EJPA* editorial team will tentatively aim at a 2-week turn-around from submission to first decision. If revisions are necessary, we will aim at making a final decision of acceptance or rejection within 10 days of the submission of the revised manuscript. Thus, a fast-tracked manuscript could be accepted within 4 weeks after submission.

We hope that this fast-track peer review option will foster the rapid dissemination of critical research findings, enabling timely and informed responses to urgent societal challenges. By maintaining our dedication to scientific rigor while expediting the review process, we aim to support researchers in making significant and immediate contributions to their fields. This initiative reflects our commitment to advancing knowledge and addressing the pressing needs of our time with both speed and precision.

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