Editorial

Methods Refocused

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Background

Methods of Information in Medicine (Methods) is the "longest running journal devoted to information in biomedicine and health care."[1] Since its foundation in 1962, Methods has stressed the methodology and scientific fundamentals of organizing, representing, and analyzing data, information, and knowledge in biomedicine and health care. Publications covered a broad spectrum in the fields of biomedical and health informatics, medical biometry, and epidemiology.

During the last decade, the field of biomedical and health informatics, including adjacent areas, such as eHealth and digital health, has been growing, and this is reflected in the establishment of several new journals. At the same time, we, as editors, have observed an increase in the number of submissions that are not fully within the scope of Methods, suggesting the need for improved communication of the journal's focus toward our community. We have therefore decided to limit the scope of the journal and to focus on methods in health informatics, thereby including clinical informatics, consumer health informatics, public health informatics, and clinical research informatics but excluding bioinformatics and imaging informatics.[2]

Which Articles Are Suitable for Submission to the Journal?

We will include submissions on novel scientific methods for structuring, integrating, analyzing, storing, and visualizing information, as well as methods, for system design, implementation, and evaluation.

The methods presented should address a clear clinical, public health, or patient need and may be rooted in several different subject areas such as ontologies and knowledge modeling, natural language processing, statistics, design science, machine learning and artificial intelligence, multimodal data integration, standardization, implementation science, and evaluation. Possible application areas include any areas of health informatics such as information systems and services, clinical decision support, consumer health and patient e-services, disease surveillance, and information systems infrastructures in low resource settings.

Submissions regarding bioinformatics, image and signal processing, medical decision-making theory, and pure epidemiologic studies will be excluded, as there are other, more suitable journals for their publication.

How Can You Best Prepare Your Submission as an Author?

To assure a good match between submissions and our expectations, we ask our authors to comply with the journal's author instructions and to motivate why their submission is suitable for the journal in the cover letter.

We ask authors whose native language is not English to have their manuscript edited by a language editing service before submission. Usage of clear, scientific English language will certainly speed up the review process.

How Can Reviewers Contribute to a Smooth Review Process?

The growing number of journals and submissions in the field have certainly increased the burden on reviewers. Of course, we would like to give each reviewer the paper they are most interested in; a well written paper with a high degree of novelty will certainly increase a reviewer's interest. However, to find the best match between submission and reviewer, we need our reviewers to update their competence areas in the journal submission system. Complete and specific keywords enable us to better assign reviewers. Both editors and reviewers evaluate the reviews and we add your peer-review activity to your Publons profile.

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How Do We Prepare as Editors?

We are aware that a timely review process is of utmost importance for every author and to assure this, we are in the process of recruiting new associate editors whose research profiles match the new scope of the journal. Another change will be going back to a single-blind review process. Currently, the journal operates with a double-blind review process which contains additional work for both authors and editorial assistant to provide and check the blinding of the manuscript, and several reviewers perceive the review process as difficult, at times impossible, if manuscripts refer to blinded literature.

Last but Not Least a Few Words about Our Student Editorial Board

Since several years, Methods has a Student Editorial Board (SEB) consisting of outstanding trainees who are enrolled in a graduate degree granting or postdoctoral training program.

The goal of the SEB is to learn, understand, and participate in the peer review process of submitted manuscripts that are considered for publication. We provide the SEB with a mentored opportunity to learn and experience the various aspects of the peer review process. The members of the SEB usually provide their review along with the reviews of at least two senior reviewers and we are proud to see that they receive excellent marks by our authors.

Conflict of Interest
None declared.

References
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2 Kulikowski CA, Shortliffe EH, Currie LM, et al. AMIA Board white paper: definition of biomedical informatics and specification of core competencies for graduate education in the discipline. J Am Med Inform Assoc 2012;19(06):931–938