

# Methods Open – A New Journal Track Starting in 2017

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## Summary

From 2017 (volume 56) onwards the journal *Methods of Information in Medicine* will consist of two tracks. Authors can decide to submit their manuscript to either the subscription track that continues to publish its six print and electronic (non-open access) issues for journal subscribers, or the new *Methods Open* track that will consist of digitally pub-

lished manuscripts (as gold open access). These two tracks will constitute from 2017 on the journal's Tandem Model. Simultaneously, *Methods* will introduce a double-blinded review process and reviewer assessment by the submitting authors. Implications of these changes for both authors and reviewers are discussed. With these steps, *Methods* aims to improve the visibility of the journal and contribute to sharing research results as timely and as widely as possible and thereby to promote scientific progress.

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## 1. Methods in the World of Open Access

*Methods of Information in Medicine* started with its first volume in 1962, and is as such the journal with the longest tradition in the field of health and biomedical informatics. Since 2002, *Methods* has taken several steps towards digitalising the process of the journal for submitting, peer reviewing, as well as for publishing manuscripts. These include electronic access to manuscripts [1, 2], which is comprised of all journal volumes since 1962 [3], publishing and indexing of accepted manuscripts ahead of print

[4, 5], online submission and peer reviewing [5], hybrid open access of manuscripts either by paying additional charges [6] or by being an “Editor’s Choice” designated article (since 2012), as well as the possibility of adding online supplementary material to published manuscripts [6].

All these steps were targeted towards improving services for authors, reviewers, and readers, as well as to increase visibility of *Methods* to our community of health and biomedical informaticians. However, we know that there is room for improvement. University libraries around the world, for example, tend to subscribe to journals from

larger rather than smaller publishers and *Methods* is often lacking in their portfolios. Open Access is an obvious way to increase visibility, but it needs to be affordable to both authors and publishers. Furthermore, the transformation of a subscription-based journal into one that is open access is not a simple task. Consequently, we have thoroughly discussed such a change during the past three years and have decided on a process to perform the transition using a “Tandem Model” and evaluate the process systematically [7].

## 2. *Methods Open* as a New Track of the Journal's Tandem Model

From 2017 onwards a new, additional track, *Methods Open*, will offer new opportunities for authors and readers. *Methods of Information in Medicine* will on the one hand continue to publish its six print and electronic issues for journal subscribers. In addition to this traditional track, from volume 56 on the new *Methods Open* track will contain manuscripts, that are published digitally only (i.e. not in print) in gold open access. These two tracks constitute from 2017 on the journal's Tandem Model. With this step, *Methods* aims to improve the visibility of the journal generally and contribute to sharing research results as timely and as widely as possible so as to promote scientific progress.

The submission and review processes for manuscripts in *Methods* remain identical for articles in both, the traditional subscription track and the *Methods Open* track. Authors decide which of the journal's tracks during the submission that they would like their manuscript to appear, if accepted. Reviewers selected for evaluating the manuscript will not have access to which track the manuscript is being considered.

In case of selecting *Methods Open*, accepted manuscripts will be immediately online accessible after acceptance, copyediting and typesetting. They will also be immediately deposited in PubMed Central®. The copyright regulations will be different, with significantly more rights to authors and readers through a Creative

Commons licence. For manuscripts, appearing in the *Methods Open* track, authors will have to pay an “Article Publication Charge” (APC).

Manuscripts in the traditional subscription track will continue to be quoted as ‘Methods Inf Med. <year>; <volume>( <issue>); <first page> – <last page>’. The quotation of *Methods Open* articles will be ‘Methods Inf Med. <year>; <volume>(Open): e<first page> – e<last page>’.

As further and natural consequence of this change, there will be no more hybrid open access papers, as such articles can now appear in *Methods Open*.

The reviewing process for both tracks will be exactly the same and simultaneously to establishing *Methods Open*, *Methods* will also introduce a double-blinded review process and reviewer assessment by the submitting authors.

## 3. What Are the Implications of these Changes for Authors, Reviewers and Subscribers?

Authors who want to publish in *Methods Open* will have to pay an APC but will have their articles made available open access very fast after acceptance both at the journal site and in the PubMed Central® repository. As there is no waiting time for the paper based journal to appear, the indexing process for e.g. Science Citation Index might be reduced significantly. A printed paper version of the article will not be available for this type of submission.

For authors who want to publish in the traditional subscription track, changes will be restricted to the introduction of the double-blinded review process.

The review process will be double-blinded to ensure an even, fair review and be exactly the same for both tracks. Authors will need to blind their manuscripts. The Instructions to Authors will be modified and updated because of these changes. The new instructions will be printed in issue 1/2017 of *Methods*. They will also be available on the journal's website.

The impact factor will be the same for both tracks as *Methods of Information in*

*Medicine* remains one journal (see [8] for the journals publication policy in general and related to the impact factor and [9] for the 2015 situation). As the quality of reviewing remains the same and as *Methods Open* papers will be more widely available and so might be quoted more often, this change might also have a positive impact on the journal's citation metrics.

For reviewers there is no change in the review procedure except that authors are blinded to ensure an even, fair review process and reviewers will from 2017 on not only be rated by the editors but authors will have the possibility to comment on the reviews. This feedback will be included in the editor rating.

For subscribers there will be a fairer pricing. By clearly separating the journal's submission track from the open access track, subscribers will receive in future their issues without and not paying for articles, being published in hybrid open access (no so-called “double dipping”). In case there will be a decrease of manuscripts in the subscription track – which we do not know – the publisher will review its subscription fees and possibly make appropriate adjustments.

## 4. Interested in Open Access and Why the Tandem Model Has Been Chosen?

If you are interested in details of why this Tandem Model has been chosen, please read in [7] about Trans-O-MIM, a research project, exploring the transformation, respectively conversion, of subscription-based journals into open access journals. For an introduction to terms like gold, green, and hybrid open access, as well as for discussions about the pros and cons of open access please read, e.g. [10–12] or just have a look at [13]. More details on open access can also be found, e.g. in [14–19].

## 5. You Decide Which Track Is Best for You!

After having carefully prepared and extensively discussed the introduction of *Meth-*

*ods Open* during the last three years, we see primarily benefits and are very optimistic that this decision will be of advantage for the journal, its authors and its readers.

From 2017 on it will be your choice whether you want to publish an article, having been accepted for publication in *Methods*, in the journal's traditional subscription track or in *Methods Open*.

With this new service we hope to keep continuity in the aims and scope of *Methods*: to be a timely and high-quality forum for good scientific communication for research, stressing the methodology and scientific fundamentals of organizing, representing and analyzing data, information and knowledge in biomedicine and health care.

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