

# A FICTITIOUS STUDY ON HOW TO HAVE YOUR ISBS 200X 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 XVII International Symposium on Biomechanics in Sports. 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 (53), and poor analytical methods (65). 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 ISBS has recently called for papers to be presented orally or as posters at the XVII International Symposium on Biomechanics in Sports. To be eligible for publication in the Proceedings the papers must reflect scientifically sound research with useful application to sport.

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.

**METHOD:** 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 Australian Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport (now 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.

**Analysis Methods:** Frequencies of each response were determined by simple addition. Responses by each reviewer carried equal weighting.

**RESULTS:** Frequencies of each response are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Frequency of Responses**

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 scientists included 'experimental design' as a common cause of rejection of papers. Although 'clarity' was not a specific item, all 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 results are summarized in Figure 1.

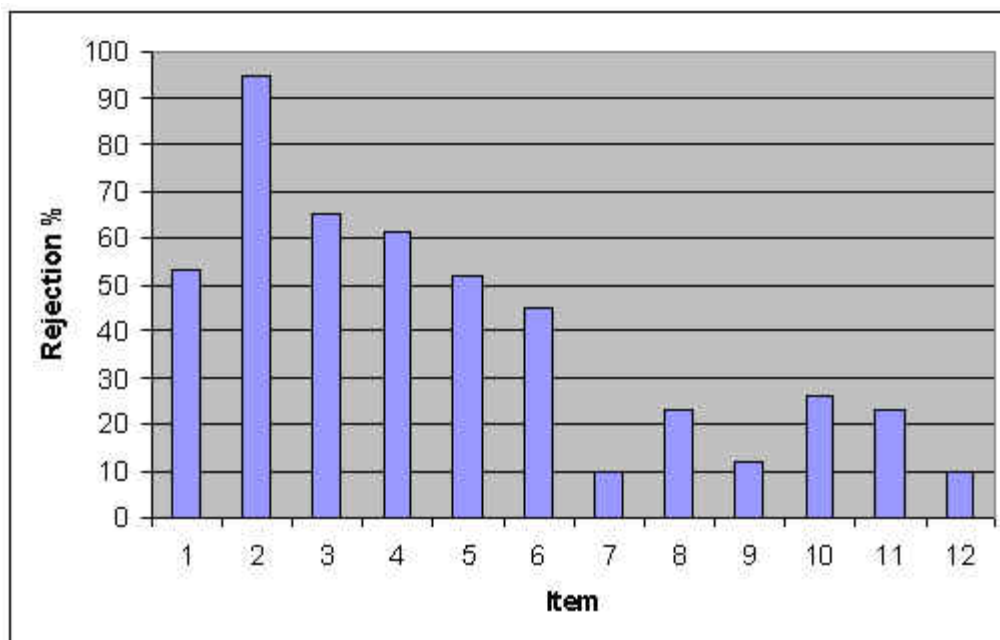


Figure 1: Sample Figure

**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, Syntax, & Flow (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 proof read 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, modeling 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. Some guidelines for improving the chances of acceptance were discussed. With regard to the symposia of the ISBS authors were strongly advised to explain the implications and 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.

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