

Panorama

Any Given Monday: Association Between Desk Rejections and Weekend Manuscript Submissions to Rheumatology Journals

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Academic rheumatologists make substantial efforts to avoid “desk rejections,” where editors of rheumatology journals reject or transfer a manuscript prior to external peer review. Conventional strategies include a focus on novel or engaging content, the crafting of a compelling and answerable research question, involvement of collaborators with content expertise, rigorous study design and statistical methodologies, and copy editing to eliminate grammatical errors. Anecdotally, researchers frequently employ less conventional strategies, including having a colleague click “submit,” offering up a prayer or burning incense, or submitting on a particular day of the week.^{1,2,3} Day-of-the-week considerations include Mondays as the workweek begins, Fridays before the weekend, or procrastinating until Saturday when the tedious task of loading submissions onto online portals consumes valuable weekend time. The objective of this project was to describe the odds of desk rejection with respect to the day of the week that an investigator submits their manuscript to rheumatology journals.

We performed a convenience sample of high-impact rheumatology journals that publish original general rheumatology content, including *Rheumatology*, *The Journal of Rheumatology*, and *Seminars in Arthritis and Rheumatism*. Editors or editorial staff were contacted with a request to share records related to the calendar date of initial submission, type of manuscript, and manuscript acceptance or rejection prior to external peer review. Data were combined and presented descriptively. The association between desk rejection and the day of the week (reference day: Monday) a manuscript was submitted was calculated using a logistic regression model that included journal, type of article, and year of submission (categorized by 5-year intervals) as covariates. Results are presented as adjusted odds ratios (OR) and 95% CIs. All analyses were conducted on R version 4.1.2 (R Foundation for Statistical Computing).

A total of 48,305 editorial decisions were obtained, 20,862 of which (43%) were desk rejections. The majority of manuscripts came from *Rheumatology* (31,513; 65%), followed by *The Journal of Rheumatology* (13,406; 28%) and *Seminars in Arthritis and Rheumatism* (3386; 7%). The most common article type was original research (65%), followed by case reports (12%) and letters or editorials (9%; Supplementary Table 1, available from the authors on request). In a logistic regression model that included journal, type of article, and year category as covariates, manuscripts were significantly more likely to be desk-rejected if they were submitted on a Saturday (OR 1.23, 95% CI 1.12–1.35), Sunday (OR 1.13, 95% CI 1.04–1.24), Thursday (OR 1.07, 95% CI 1.00–1.14), or Tuesday (OR 1.07, 95% CI 1.01–1.15) as compared to Monday (Figure 1).

This assessment of over 20,000 desk rejections from major rheumatology journals found an increased likelihood of desk rejections for manuscripts submitted on a Saturday or Sunday, with 23% and 13% higher odds of being desk-rejected, respectively, as compared to Monday submissions. This extends similar findings in other fields to high-impact journals in rheumatology.^{1,2,3} Elevated odds of lesser magnitude were observed for Tuesdays and Thursdays. The biologic mechanisms for these associations lie outside the present work, but multiple possibilities should be considered. First, journal staff or associate editors may have a larger workload on Mondays, which could plausibly increase the odds that they would desk-reject a manuscript submitted over the weekend. Second, researchers may be more distracted and perhaps less diligent during the weekend, resulting in lower-quality submissions. Both represent modifiable risk factors for rejection that could be addressed through weekday submissions.

In addition to these eminently reasonable explanations, unmeasured confounding could also be driving these results. For

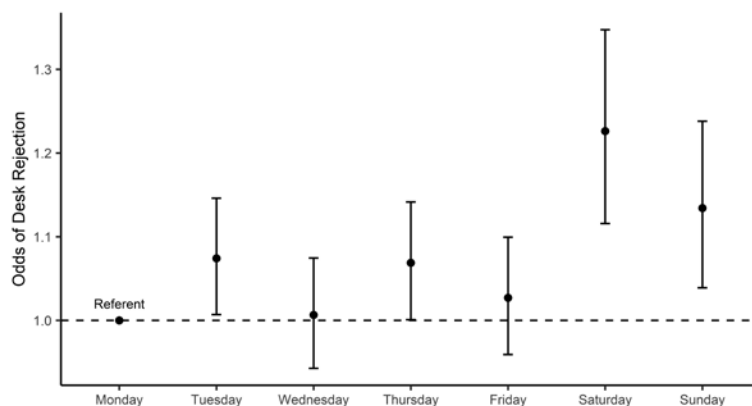


Figure 1. Adjusted odds of desk rejection by day of the week.

one, grant-funded researchers may submit higher-quality work and also have more dedicated research time during the weekdays. For another, we (the authors) have previously noticed the rapidity of Monday rejections and may or may not have considered an irrational “Hail Mary” strategy of delaying submissions of lower quality to Friday evenings. A late Friday submission both increases the manuscript’s “exposure time” to editorial review, which feels beneficial even if it is not, and insulates us from the sadness of a rapid desk rejection. If others pursue a similar strategy, it may again introduce unmeasured confounding because more suitable submissions are relegated to the work-week. Finally, important limitations of this study include selection bias from the included journals and an inability to account for time zone differences, the latter of which may be relevant for researchers who have a propensity to submit manuscripts around midnight after putting children to sleep.

These results should not be used to imply causality, but there are few plausible risks to submitting manuscripts during weekdays and multiple obvious ancillary benefits. Consequently, we strongly suggest that rheumatology researchers should enjoy their weekends and avoid submitting manuscripts on Saturdays or Sundays.

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DATA SHARING POLICY

Data will be made available upon reasonable request.

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