

EDITORIAL

From Quantity to Quality: A 13-Year Longitudinal Analysis of Editorial Performance and Scientific Impact in ABJS

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Scientific journals are often evaluated through publication counts, citation indicators, impact factors, and rankings. However, these metrics capture only part of journal development. A journal is also an editorial system in which manuscripts are screened, reviewed, revised, and selected for inclusion in the scientific record. Examining how this system evolves over time can therefore provide insights beyond conventional bibliometric measures.

The 2013–2025 editorial history of the Archives of Bone and Joint Surgery (ABJS) demonstrates a substantial transformation in submission volume, publication capacity, geographic diversity, article types, manuscript processing, and scientific visibility. The trajectory suggests three broad stages: establishment, expansion, and maturation [Table 1].

Table 1. The 2013–2025 editorial history of the Archives of Bone and Joint Surgery (ABJS)

year	issues per volume	submissions	accepted after review	desk accepted	total accepted	rejected after review	desk rejected	total rejected	published	first Action (days): technical check	first reviewer assignment	days M.S. has been in the author's dashboard for resubmission	review days (average)	first revision	days M.S. has been in the author's dashboard for revision	submission to accept	accept to publish	countries	article type
2013	4	33	27	3	30	4	0	4	27	5	8	3	9	41	32	58	21	3	2
2014	4	113	70	8	78	3	1	4	63	4	4	0	13	44	31	102	35	10	3
2015	4	162	83	7	90	39	19	58	58	12	36	24	14	87	73	339	140	9	5
2016	4	184	69	7	76	48	44	92	79	6	49	43	20	133	113	N/A	N/A	12	4
2017	6	185	83	11	94	50	36	86	81	6	38	32	23	159	136	174	172	23	8
2018	7	240	78	13	91	61	59	120	139	5	38	33	24	120	96	N/A	N/A	21	9
2019	6	261	73	12	85	45	106	151	86	3	39	36	35	147	112	187	181	30	9
2020	7	275	130	54	184	88	170	258	121	2	47	45	22	157	135	160	194	32	10
2021	6	317	71	18	89	51	144	195	105	3	70	67	22	224	202	194	210	29	11
2022	12	239	68	21	89	30	87	117	140	2	55	53	18	151	133	N/A	N/A	28	8
2023	12	282	84	32	116	62	70	132	122	2	24	22	13	94	81	N/A	N/A	32	11
2024	12	311	98	30	128	70	74	144	124	2	39	37	14	101	87	116	155	36	11
2025	12	360	80	41	121	46	59	105	117	2	42	40	12	N/A	#VALUE!	N/A	N/A	37	12

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The most important question, however, is whether this expansion in editorial activity was accompanied by evidence of increasing scientific visibility. The longitudinal editorial data, when considered together with Scopus CiteScore and category-percentile indicators, suggest that ABJS has not simply become larger. It has progressively developed into a journal with greater measurable scientific influence [Figure 1].

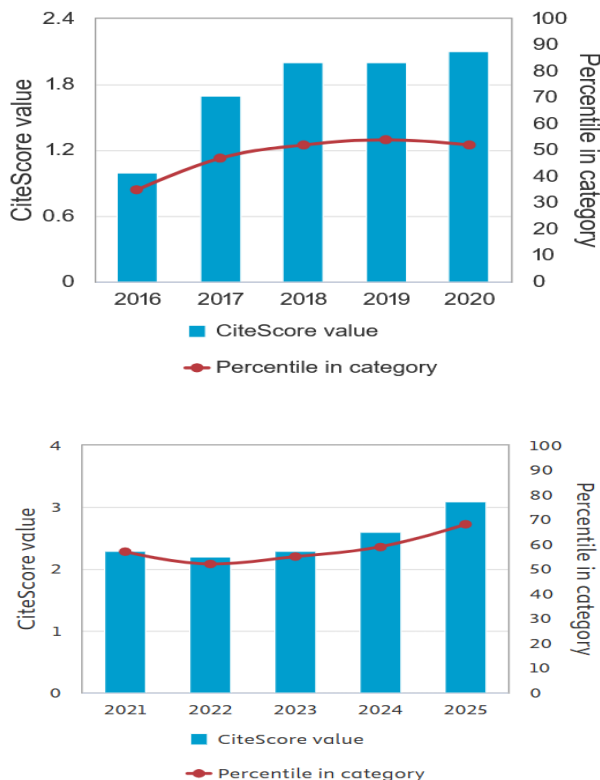


Figure 1. Longitudinal trend in CiteScore and Scopus subject-category percentile of the Archives of Bone and Joint Surgery (ABJS), 2016–2025.

From a publication-limited to a selection-limited journal

In 2013, ABJS received 33 submissions and published 27 articles. By 2025, submissions had increased to 360, while publications reached 117. Thus, submissions grew approximately eleven-fold, whereas publication output increased about four-fold. This divergence is more informative than publication growth alone.

The expanding gap between submissions and publications indicates that ABJS has moved from an early phase focused on establishing a sustainable publication flow toward a more selective system in which the principal challenge is identifying manuscripts with durable scientific and clinical value. Increased submissions should therefore not automatically be equated with increased quality, just as a stable publication volume does not imply stagnation.

The evolution of editorial triage

Desk rejection was essentially absent in 2013–2014 but increased substantially during the period of rapid submission growth, reaching approximately 62% in 2020. This suggests that editorial triage became an important mechanism for managing increasing demand. By 2025, however, desk rejection had declined to approximately 16%.

This reduction does not necessarily indicate reduced selectivity. Rather, it may reflect improved screening and triage, allowing the editorial office to identify suitable manuscripts more effectively and direct a greater proportion of potentially appropriate submissions to peer review. In a mature editorial system, selectivity is not defined simply by rejection rates but by the efficient allocation of editorial and reviewer resources.

Peer review and the hidden bottlenecks

Average review time increased from approximately 9 days in 2013 to 35 days in 2019, but subsequently declined to approximately 12–14 days in 2024–2025 despite much higher submission volume.

In contrast, reviewer assignment became a major bottleneck. The time required to assign the first reviewer increased from 8 days in 2013 to 70 days in 2021. This indicates that delays were not necessarily caused by reviewers themselves; manuscripts could spend considerably longer waiting to enter peer review than reviewers needed to complete the review.

The availability and workload of reviewers are therefore critical components of editorial sustainability. For ABJS, strengthening the reviewer network and accelerating the process of assigning reviewers remain important strategic priorities.

Another less visible source of delay was the time manuscripts spent with authors during revision. The average resubmission interval reached 224 days in 2021, substantially exceeding the review time. Following measures such as reminder emails, clearer revision guidance, and policies for manuscripts not revised within defined periods, this interval declined to approximately 81–87 days by 2023–2024.

These findings demonstrate that editorial efficiency should be evaluated as a complete workflow:

Submission → screening → reviewer assignment → peer review → revision → editorial decision → publication.

Improving only one stage may have limited effect on the overall publication experience.

From editorial growth to scientific impact

The editorial transformation becomes more meaningful when considered alongside Scopus indicators [Figure 1]. CiteScore increased from approximately 0.9 in 2016 to 1.7 in 2017 and approximately 2.0 in 2018–2019, reaching 2.1 in 2020. During the same period, ABJS's Scopus subject-category percentile increased from approximately the 35th percentile in 2016 to the low-50th percentile range by 2018–2020.

From 2021 onward, CiteScore remained around 2.2–2.3

through 2023 before increasing to approximately 2.6 in 2024 and 3.1 in 2025. The category percentile simultaneously increased from approximately the 57th percentile in 2021 to approximately the 69th percentile in 2025.

Thus, the recent period demonstrates improvement in both absolute citation-based visibility and relative standing among journals in the field. Importantly, this occurred alongside increased submission volume and improvements in several aspects of editorial processing.

These data do not establish that editorial efficiency caused the increase in citation impact. CiteScore is influenced by article characteristics, citation practices, article mix, visibility, international collaboration, indexing, and the broader scientific environment. Nevertheless, the parallel trajectories suggest that ABJS's expansion was not accompanied by an obvious dilution of bibliometric impact. Instead, increasing selectivity, improved processing efficiency, greater international diversity, and rising citation indicators are consistent with qualitative maturation.

Internationalization and diversification

ABJS also became substantially more geographically and academically diverse. The number of countries represented in submission data increased from 3 in 2013 to 37 in 2025, while the number of article types increased from 2 to 12.

Greater international diversity can expand a journal's intellectual network, reviewer pool, subject coverage, and potential readership. Its simultaneous growth with CiteScore and category percentile is therefore encouraging. However, country counts alone do not fully measure internationalization. Future analyses should examine country distribution, international co-authorship, institutional diversity, and geographic concentration.

What can—and cannot—be concluded about quality?

The available data cannot directly establish that the methodological quality of individual articles increased. Submission volume, acceptance patterns, processing times, geographic diversity, and publication numbers primarily describe editorial performance rather than scientific rigor.

Likewise, rising CiteScore is evidence of increasing citation-based visibility and influence, not definitive proof of methodological validity, reproducibility, clinical applicability, or originality.

Nevertheless, the combination of indicators provides stronger evidence of editorial maturation than any single metric. ABJS has experienced substantially greater demand while maintaining constrained publication capacity, developed stronger editorial triage, reduced review turnaround after a period of prolonged processing, improved revision-related delays, expanded its international and article-type diversity, and increased its Scopus CiteScore and category percentile.

The next frontier: quality-adjusted growth

The future challenge for ABJS is unlikely to be simply publishing more articles. Instead, the objective should be to

maximize the scientific value generated by each publication opportunity.

This concept of quality-adjusted growth requires attention to several questions: Which manuscripts are selected? How rigorous is their methodology? How diverse and independent is the reviewer pool? How effectively does peer review improve manuscripts? Which articles influence clinical or scientific thinking, and which achieve sustained visibility?

Answering these questions requires article-level data. Citation counts, field-normalized impact, highly cited article rates, usage metrics, corrections and retractions, methodological characteristics, international collaboration, and clinical relevance could be integrated with editorial workflow data. This would provide a more comprehensive model of scientific performance than journal-level metrics alone.

Priorities for the next decade

Several priorities emerge from the ABJS experience: Strengthen the reviewer ecosystem as strategic infrastructure by expanding geographic and career-stage diversity, matching reviewers to methodological and clinical expertise, and recognizing reviewer contributions.

Continue developing editorial triage, focusing not on maximizing desk rejection but on directing editorial and reviewer resources toward appropriate, methodologically sound, and relevant manuscripts.

Improve revision management through clearer instructions, structured responses to reviewers, and efficient handling of revised manuscripts.

Evaluate article-level success, recognizing that the ultimate value of a publication lies in its usefulness to researchers, clinicians, educators, and patients.

Interpret bibliometric indicators longitudinally, since trajectories are more informative than isolated annual values.

Publish transparent editorial-performance reports covering submissions, decision pathways, reviewer assignment, review duration, revision burden, publication time, geographic diversity, and article-level impact.

Conclusion

The 2013–2025 history of ABJS represents a transition from establishment through expansion to maturation. The most important achievement was not simply the increase from 33 to 360 annual submissions or from 27 to 117 annual publications. Rather, it was the development of an editorial infrastructure capable of managing a much larger and more internationally diverse scholarly community while improving several components of manuscript processing.

The Scopus trajectory adds a critical dimension to this development. CiteScore increased from approximately 0.9 in 2016 to 3.1 in 2025, while the category percentile rose from approximately the mid-30s to the high-60s. Although these indicators cannot establish causality or directly measure methodological quality, their sustained upward trajectory

indicates increasing scientific visibility rather than an obvious dilution of impact.

The central challenge for the next decade is therefore no longer simply how to grow, but how to grow without diluting scientific value. ABJS's next phase should emphasize quality-adjusted growth: fewer unnecessary delays, stronger reviewer networks, rigorous methodological assessment, greater international diversity, transparent editorial metrics, and research that remains useful long after publication.

A journal's maturity is not measured only by how many

manuscripts it receives or publishes. It is measured by how effectively it transforms a growing flow of scientific work into a durable, trustworthy, and influential scholarly record. ABJS demonstrates that quantity and quality need not be opposing trajectories when growth is accompanied by selectivity, operational efficiency, international reach, and sustained attention to scientific value.

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