

# AVJ user survey 2013

## Note from the editor

We recently sent a survey to a group of 2500 users of Manuscript Central, from our reviewer and author database. The aim was to get feedback from users on ways of improving our submission, reviewing and publication processes.

There were 384 emails that bounced, and 238 respondents (11.6% response rate).

Respondents identified themselves as author (167), reviewer (159), associate editor (3), university academic/clinical practitioner (56), from a research institution (27), retired (22), student (11) and AVA member (51).

There was no real difference from the question on whether their recent experience with the AVJ was in 2012, 1-2 years ago or more than 2 years ago.

Each question had a section for comments, many of which were very similar, and I have included a selection in each category. Direct comments from respondents are listed in double quotes. I have also included some comments in response – these are italicised.

Many of the specific comments related to what authors saw as negative experiences with their individual papers, especially if they were rejected, or disagreed with the reviewer comments. If anyone has a specific issue that they would like to take up with me, then I would be more than happy to discuss any issues further.

I am very grateful for the people who took the time to help us with their feedback. We will consider all of the specific recommendations.

My favourite comment was: "Compared with medical publishing, you guys are a piece of cake!"

I would appreciate any further comments. You can forward them to me directly at [editor@ava.com.au](mailto:editor@ava.com.au)

Dr Anne Jackson  
Editor in Chief

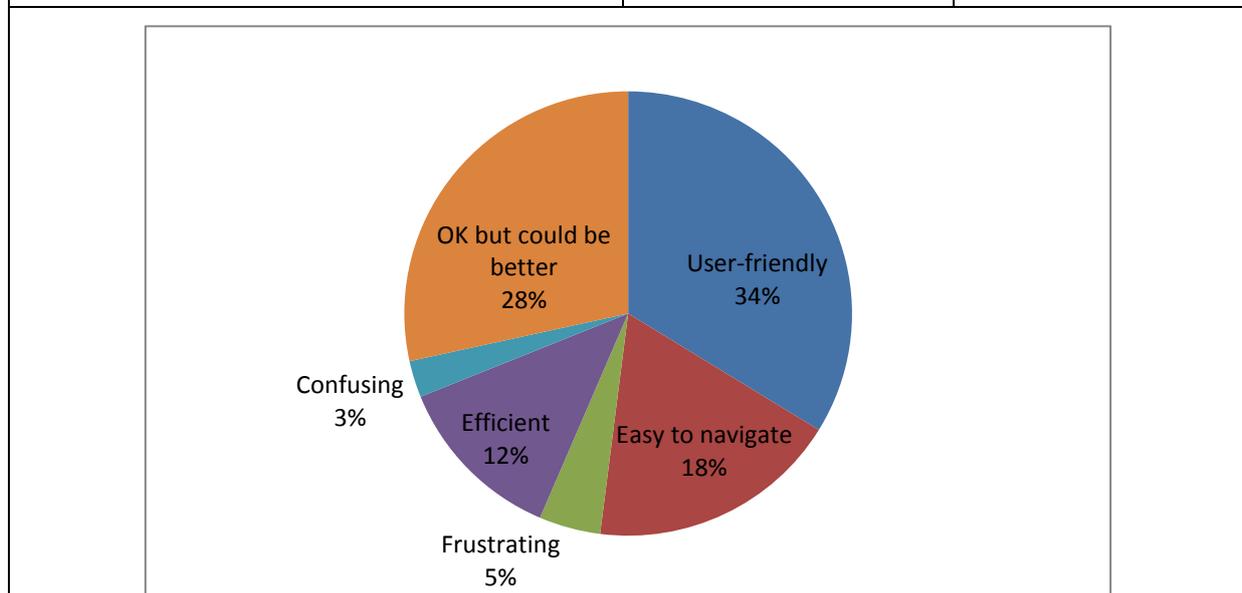
## Detailed results and respondents' comments

### Question: Which word best describes your experiences using Manuscript Central?

Much to my surprise, most respondents had neutral or positive comments about Manuscript Central. Only 16 of the 223 people who had used it found it either confusing or frustrating, although some respondents found it difficult to use, and noted that it would discourage them from submitting another article (Figure 1).

Problems included frustration in trying to load large image files, being asked too many (unnecessary) questions, difficulty working out which buttons to click to go through the review process, and problems accessing the papers to review, for reviewers who do not have the email with the original link.

Answer	Number	% of those who used Manuscript Central
User-friendly	76	34
Easy to navigate	41	18.4
Frustrating	10	4.5
Efficient	28	12.5
Confusing	6	2.7
OK but could be better	64	28.7
Incomprehensible	0	0
Never used it	15	
	<b>238</b>	<b>223</b>



**Figure 1. Which word best describes your experiences using Manuscript Central?**

Some of the specific suggestions can be addressed by updating the 'Instructions for authors and reviewers' information that is currently available. A summary of the specific suggestions and comments includes:

- an initial check-list of what's needed for submissions to prepare ahead before logging in to submit
- instructions for authors and reviewers to be available on the journal website pages accessed directly from Manuscript Central when reviewing manuscripts
- ability to make edits and comments directly onto the Word document
- clearer instructions for the submission process, including revisions
- remove need for line numbers given that Manuscript Central also adds these
- More clarity of the status of the paper
- clarify image format requirements
- confirmation emails are confusing because the automatic response always comes as if any submission was a first submission regardless of the submission status

- problems with slow satellite connections
- consider a more graphical interface
- messages sent by editors to reviewers appear to come direct from them but actually come from the Manuscript Central site, which triggers blocking of those emails – it is difficult to get the Manuscript Central site recognised as a 'White Site'
- develop a guideline along the theme of 'so you are thinking of writing your work up for the AVJ'
- send timely reminders to tardy referees
- more papers to go online-early before print version
- for first time authors and reviewers consider an on-line 15 minute demonstration
- create an automated email feedback system to let authors know the progress and status of their submission
- the 'Notes to authors' pages and the journal website pages should advertise their average 'time to acceptance' and 'time to publication' times, to assist authors in deciding whether they can afford the time it takes to get published with the AVJ
- give feedback on what happened to the papers after review and send the reviewer a free pdf of the published article.

### Respondent comments on Manuscript Central

"Writing and submitted a paper for the journal was new ground for us. Next time we will be better prepared to put our manuscript in the correct form earlier. For those not accustomed, referencing and going back to track down references, used is a huge job. Next time we will collect and write them down as we go..."

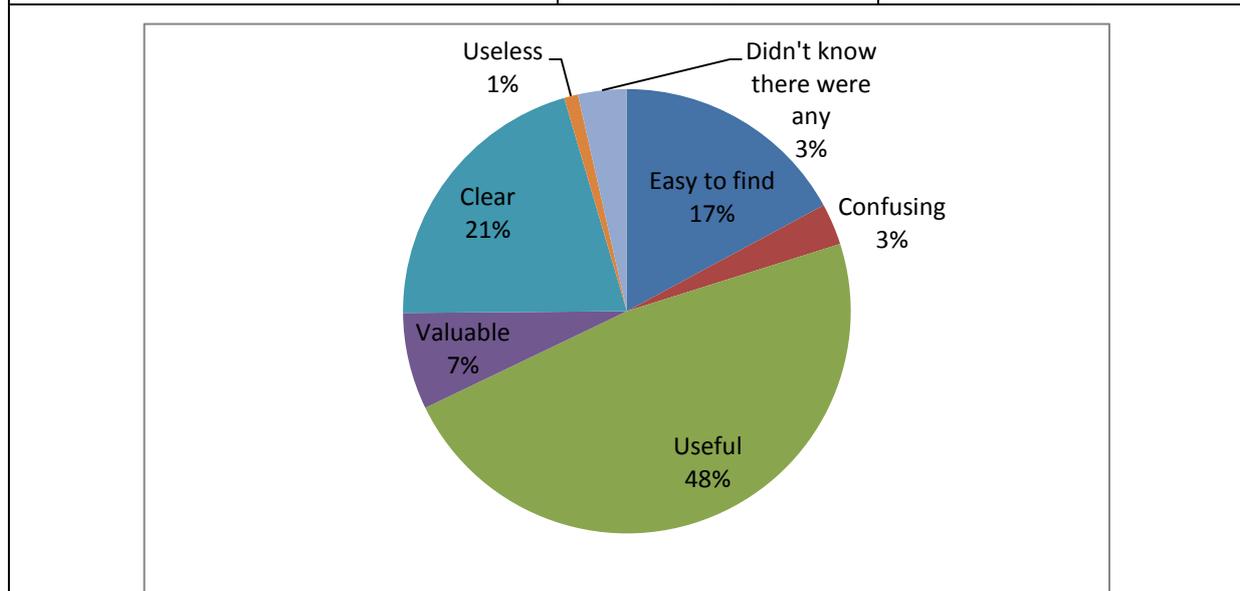
**Question: Of the options below, which words best describe our instructions and checklist for the reviewing process?**

With the instructions for reviewers, 7 respondents didn't know there were any, 2 thought they were useful and 6 thought they were confusing. The other 184 thought they were easy to find, clear, useful and valuable (Figure 2).

Suggestions for improvements included:

- structure the reviewers reports using the additional questions headings, providing detailed comments as appropriate under each, rather than as extra questions
- guidelines for required level of assessment for statistical analysis
- easy route to requesting a statistician review a paper or automatic review of complex stats
- refine the reviewer instructions
- ability to view the instructions at same time as the manuscript.

Answer	Number	% excluding those who have never been a reviewer
Easy to find	34	17.1
Confusing	6	3.0
Useful	95	47.7
Valuable	14	7.0
Clear	41	20.6
Useless	2	1.0
Didn't know there were any	7	3.5
I have never been a reviewer	36	
	<b>235</b>	<b>199.0</b>

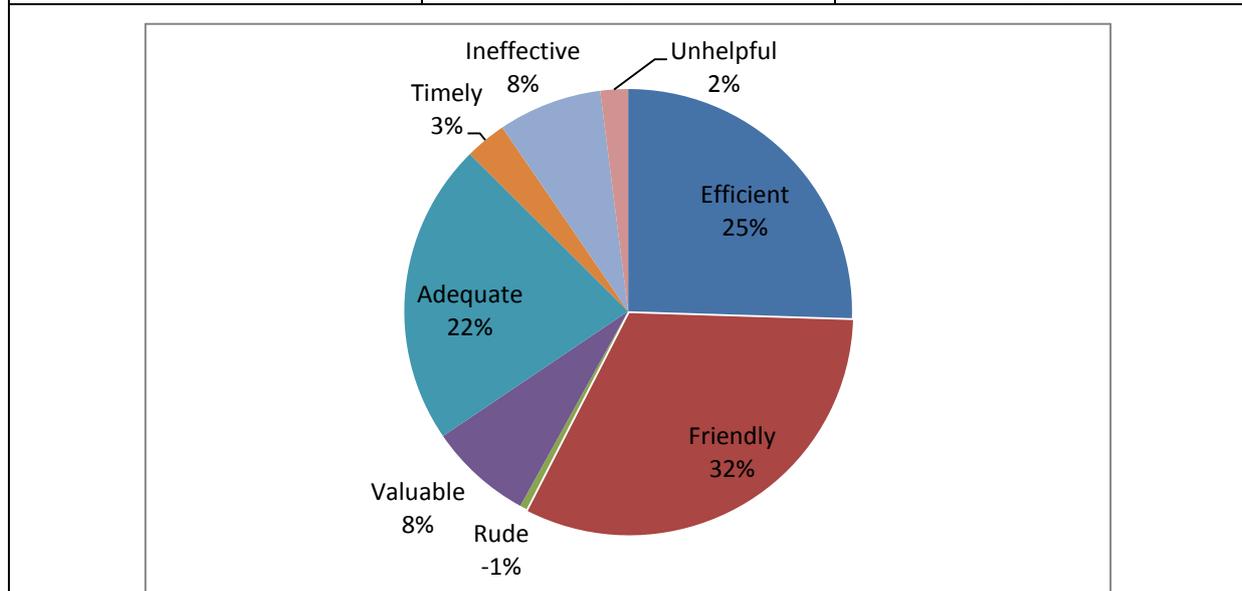


**Figure 2.** Which words best describe our instructions and checklist for the reviewing process?

**Question: Of the options below, what words best describe your experiences with the editorial office? Please select all that apply.**

Of the 180 respondents to the question on their experiences with the editorial office, 15 thought it ineffective, 4 unhelpful and 1 rude. The remaining 90% gave positive feedback (Figure 3).

Answer	No	% of those that contacted the office
Efficient	51	28.3
Friendly	64	35.5
Rude	1	0.6
Valuable	15	8.3
Adequate	44	24.4
Timely	6	3.3
Ineffective	15	8.3
Unhelpful	4	2.2
I have never contacted the office	44	
	<b>234</b>	<b>180.0</b>



**Figure 3. What words best describe your experiences with the editorial office?**

#### Respondent comments on editorial office

"Approachability and communications with editorial team above that of other journals."

"Overall the service is comparable with other international journals."

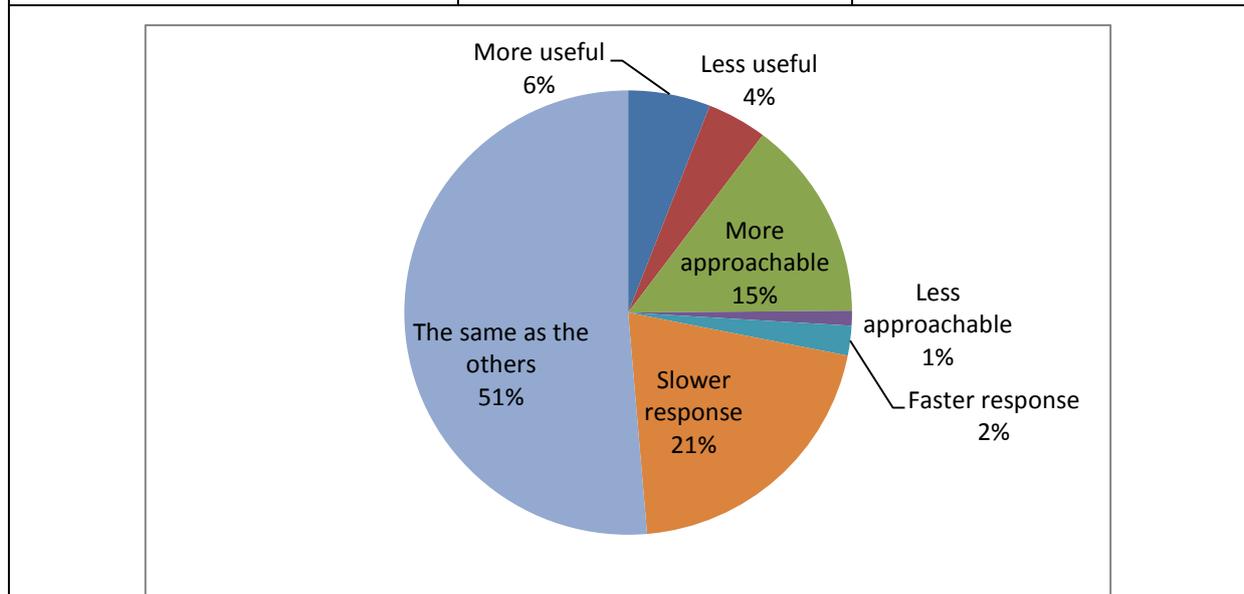
"Delays in reviewer assessments being returned were frustrating on occasion, but editorial office were always extremely helpful."

"I think the review times are longer than other journals. I sometimes ring the editorial office to follow up on articles. The editorial office is always friendly and helpful."

**Question: Compared to other journals, which words best describe our customer service? Please select all that apply.**

When comparing our customer service with that of other journals, just over half of the 185 people who said they had contacted us said we were the same as everyone else, and 21% said we were more approachable and useful. Of the 38 respondents who said we were slower, it is difficult to work out if that actually relates to the long turnaround time for papers, as the comments suggest (Figure 4).

Answer	No	% of those who contacted the office
More useful	11	5.9
Less useful	8	4.3
More approachable	27	14.6
Less approachable	2	1.1
Faster response	4	2.2
Slower response	38	20.5
The same as the others	95	51.4
Nnever contacted the office	48	
	<b>233</b>	<b>185.0</b>



**Figure 4. Which words best describe our customer service?**

**Respondent comments on customer service**

"Friendly and helpful response - please keep up the great work."

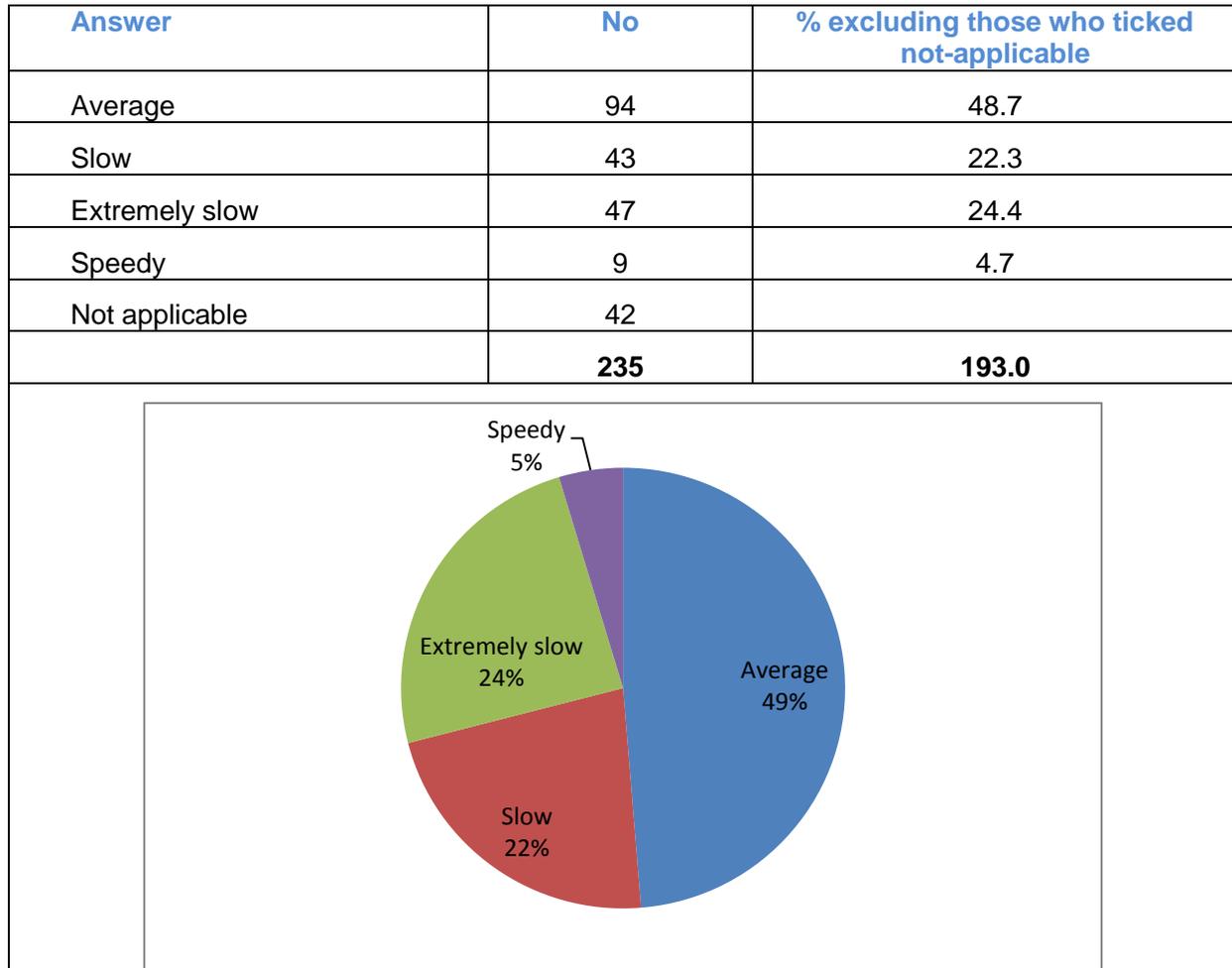
"Turnaround time slow but overall the editorial staff was empathetic and approachable."

"Once I received advice re the outcome of submission of my paper there was no invitation or opportunity to engage further with the office re this - the online system provides an effective firewall!"

### Question: Compared to other journals, what best describes our time for reviewing papers?

The AVJ has always had a reputation for being slow to review. This question was included to get feedback on people's perceptions on where the delays occurred, and any suggestions for what we could do to improve it.

Nearly half (94 of 193 respondents) thought that time to review was average and 9 thought we were speedy. However 90 respondents thought we were slow or extremely slow (Figure 5). The AVJ Office have already had a meeting with Wiley to change the times available for review.



**Figure 5.** Compared to other journals, what best describes our time for reviewing papers?

### Respondent comments on time for review

"The time taken to get manuscripts submitted, peer reviewed and finally printed is far too long making recent research findings somewhat dated when they finally get to print."

"I serve on the editorial board of 3 journals and review about 60 manuscripts per year. I thought the AVJ did an excellent job in the review process."

"The time given to review for most journals I review is between 2-4 weeks."

"Used to be much better."

"Process author submissions quickly and efficiently. Ensure all reviewers have their reviews done in 3 weeks (like other journals)."

"As both an author and referee, I regularly find a huge chasm between demands on referees for timeliness (almost unreasonable at times) and yet an extremely tardy response to authors, with long periods for any feedback."

"Most journals demand that articles submitted add/update the current body of knowledge. In some case the topics at hand evolve very quickly and over a year turn around can render a publication obsolete."

"2 months between original submission and return of first review. 2 months between revised submission and 2nd review. 7 weeks between 2nd revised submission and acceptance."

"Slowness (I would assume) is due to difficulty in finding reviewers. This is a growing problem that I experience in my role as Editor at other journals. Very frustrating that some individuals want the advantages of the publication process (i.e. publications) but do not help with the other equally necessary side (reviewing)."

"As a reviewer, the time frame given was insufficient."

"I have always been given a reasonable turnaround time to complete a review. It is very important that the authors not be subjected to unreasonable periods in which a paper is allegedly being reviewed. A reviewer has an obligation to the authors to turn submitted papers around quickly."

"When reviewing for other journals I have often been given short return times of 2 weeks and asked to not accept if I can't be sure to have it done in that time. I know it's hard to balance between getting sufficient competent reviewers to accept manuscripts and then putting pressure on them to expedite the process. However I think this is one of the important issues at the moment."

"Usually faster turnaround compared overseas specialist journals."

*There were specific recommendations on devising and enforcing rules about timeliness and increasing reviewers in various sub-disciplines.- AJ*

"I have been submitting manuscripts to the AVJ for over 30 years my experience is that the old independent manual editorial system gave a much faster turnaround time...."

"I think the AVJ is making some great changes and I think the submission/reviewing process is comparable to other top journals."

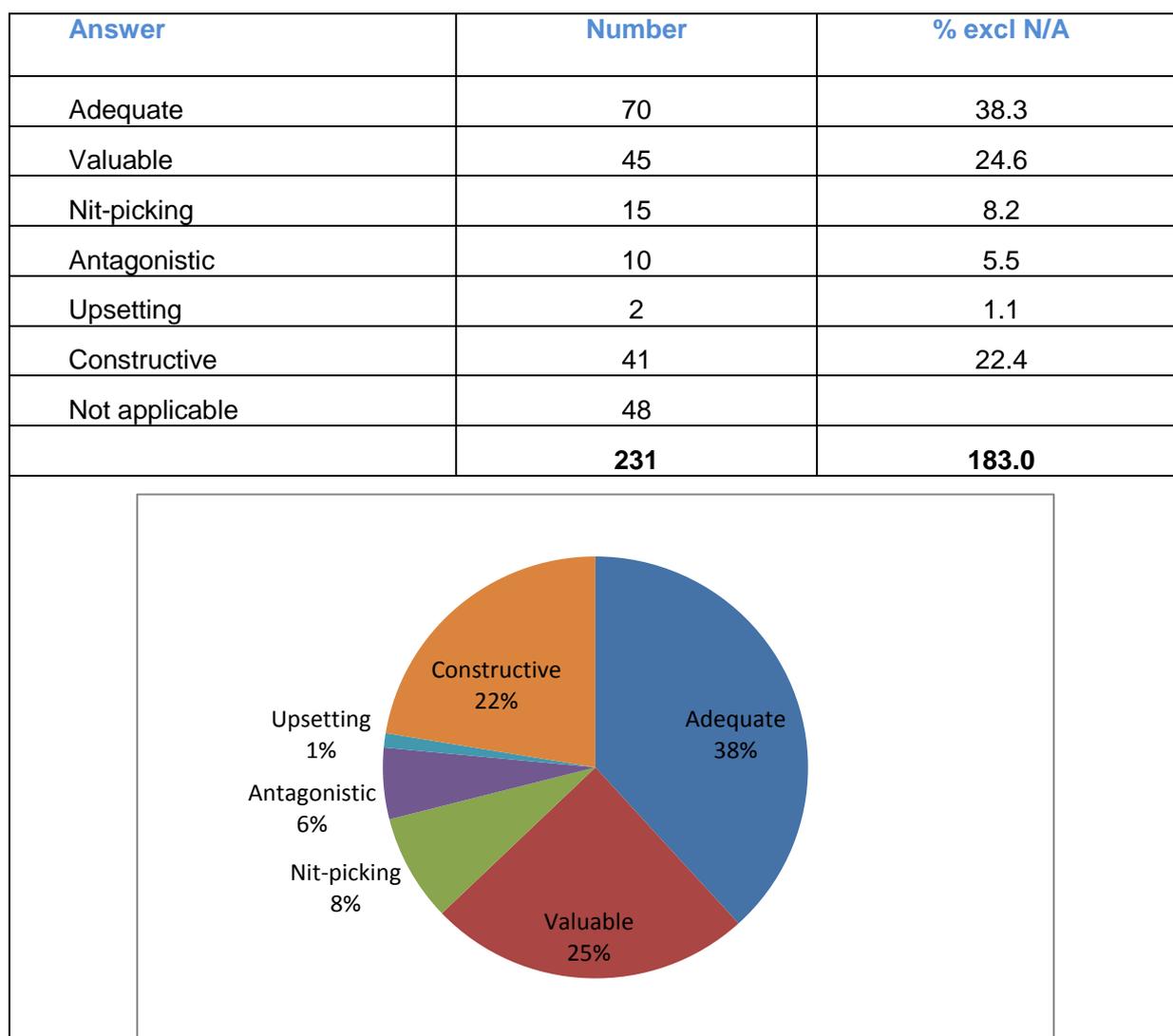
*There was confusion over authors being able to suggest possible reviewers. The wording on the Manuscript Central site is confusing – when papers have been sent out to numerous reviewers, we ask the authors for more suggestions. In general this means that the paper will be rejected eventually as there is no interest from reviewers.*

*Another author noted that they check the annual reviewer list to make sure that their suggested reviewer was used. In fact we use this method to increase our reviewer database and do not use all the suggested reviewers in this way, we try to also send out to someone independent.-AJ*

**Question: Compared to other journals, which words best describe the extent and quality of the reviews? Please select all that apply.**

Many authors, especially those who had paper rejected, were very forceful in their comments about the reviewers, although only 15 of 183 respondents found them nit-picking (*as an editor I think is a positive, not a negative*) and 12 found them to be antagonistic and upsetting. Another 70 found them adequate and an encouraging 86 found them to be constructive and valuable (Figure 6).

Many of the comments noted that they covered a wide range in quality, and highlighted the problems we have in having such a broad scope of papers submitted. The majority of comments related to faster and more constructive feedback.



**Figure 6. Which words best describe the extent and quality of the reviews?**

**Respondent comments on the extent and quality of the reviews**

"I suspect that there is too small a pool to call from to ensure deep and adequate review, plus everyone probably knows each other."

"While some reviews tend to get a little too finely focussed, I have found that most AVJ reviews are reasonable, relevant and valuable."

"Reviews were constructive and helpful. The manuscript was improved as a response to the reviewer's comments."

"Experienced both higher and lower quality reviews with other journals, particularly regarding methodology/statistical analysis."

"In today's world of "publish or perish" mentality it is important for the editor to be very keenly aware of the politics with research and publications etc."

"At times the reviewers were very helpful and constructive. However, on occasion comments were upsetting and antagonistic."

"I had one paper reviewed by 4 different people, all with differing opinions. Many comments that were neither constructive or aimed at improving the manuscript were passed on to me." *(This is a difficult problem. I remove as many vitriolic comments when I see them, but editing comments then annoys the reviewers, who think that we don't value their time and expertise. Also, it is difficult to edit all the reviewers comments, as we have well over 1000 to send out annually. - AJ)*

"The biggest challenge where voluntary peer review is concerned is with the selection of reviewers and ensuring that they are consistent and constructive in their review of each and every paper and not influenced by person biases and opinions. With the current system, this will be the biggest challenge."

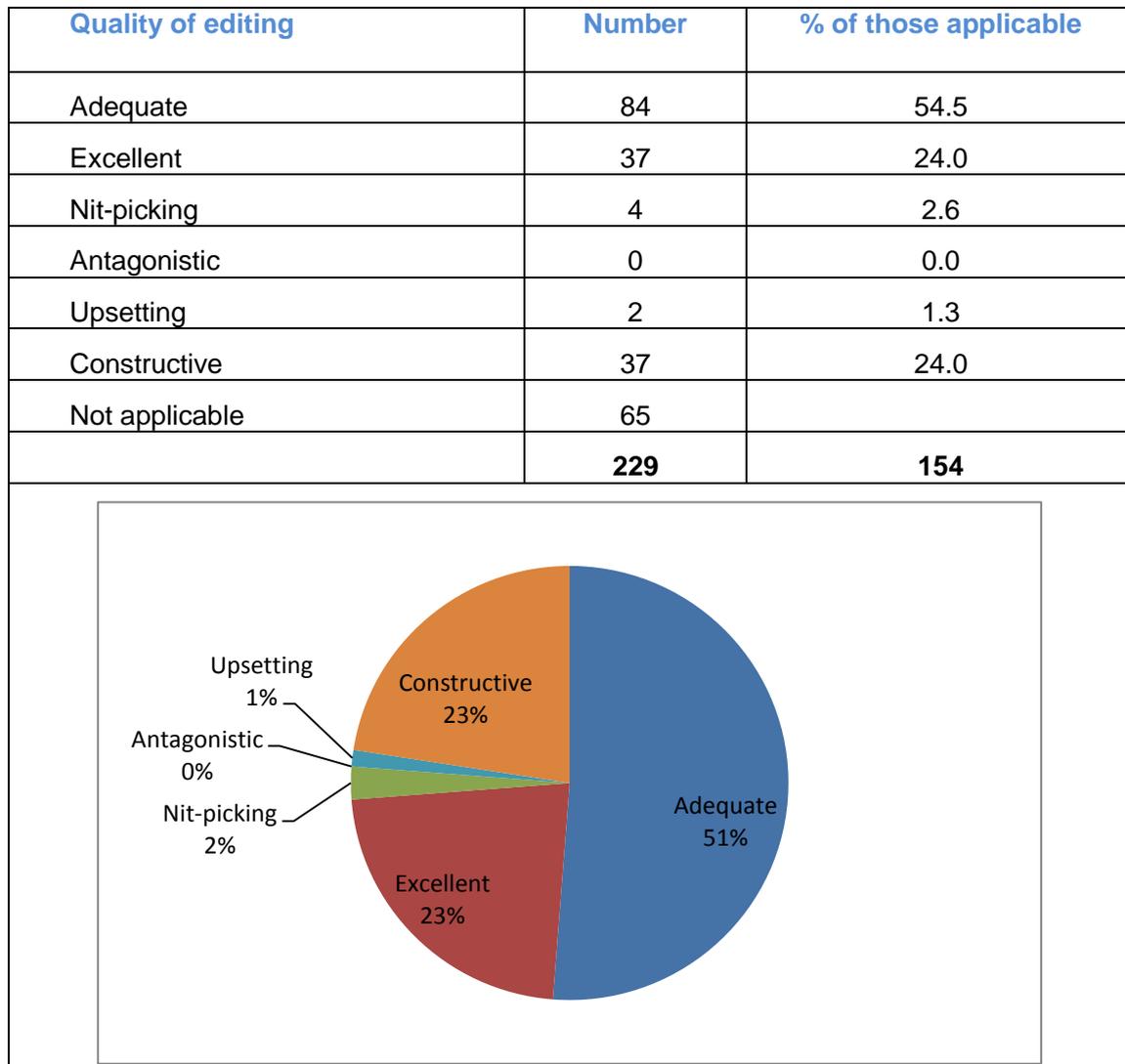
"I think twice about submitting articles because based on past experience there may be a chance they will need a major rework or not be accepted, but this helps ensure the quality of what is published. With the plethora of information and misinformation on the internet the peer review process is more relevant than ever."

"Unhappy with quality of reviewers and their petty criticisms with evidence of occasional apparent bias against our work including rejection of a paper that was immediately accepted by another journal and has been widely sought and complimented."

"I think most reviewers are constructive. I think most authors are antagonised by the review process because of the amount of work put into the manuscript and a blinkered view of their ability as authors. Sorry to all authors."

**Question: After the papers have been accepted we do copy editing on all papers for style and grammar, then proof reading. Compared to other journals, what best describes the quality of our editing?**

Only 6 of 154 respondents thought the copyediting was upsetting or nit-picking. Half thought it was adequate but 74 thought that the editing was constructive or excellent (Figure 7).



**Figure 7. What best describes the quality of our editing?**

**Respondent comments on editing**

*There was confusion over whether authors get to properly review the copy editing. All proofs are sent to authors, with any final questions we have found during editing. If we make substantive changes, then we send the track change Word documents to the authors first. All proofs are sent to authors, with any final questions we have found during editing. If we make substantive changes, then we send the track change Word documents to the authors first. – AJ*

"I have had extensive experience as a reviewer and editor for several international journals, The AVJ compares favourably in most aspects and is superior in relation to checking style and grammar."

"Occasionally sentences changed such that meaning may be altered but generally very good and thorough, articles published rarely seem to have errors and are clearly understandable to the reader."

Others thought there should be more latitude in giving authors the opportunity to write in their own style, or thought that they "Didn't need any style or grammar changes- authors were both +40 yrs old, so were taught grammar and clear writing at school."

"It is really important that any [substantive changes] are clearly evident to the authors. This was the case with my most recent paper, where editorial changes were shown to the authors using Track Changes. Please keep doing this. (Some journals don't do this!!)"

"I did have to contact the AVJ office on a few occasions and was always helped out with my query very efficiently and were great to speak to. Access to the editor was easy and she was very helpful..."

"The work of the editor was very good at improving the manuscripts."

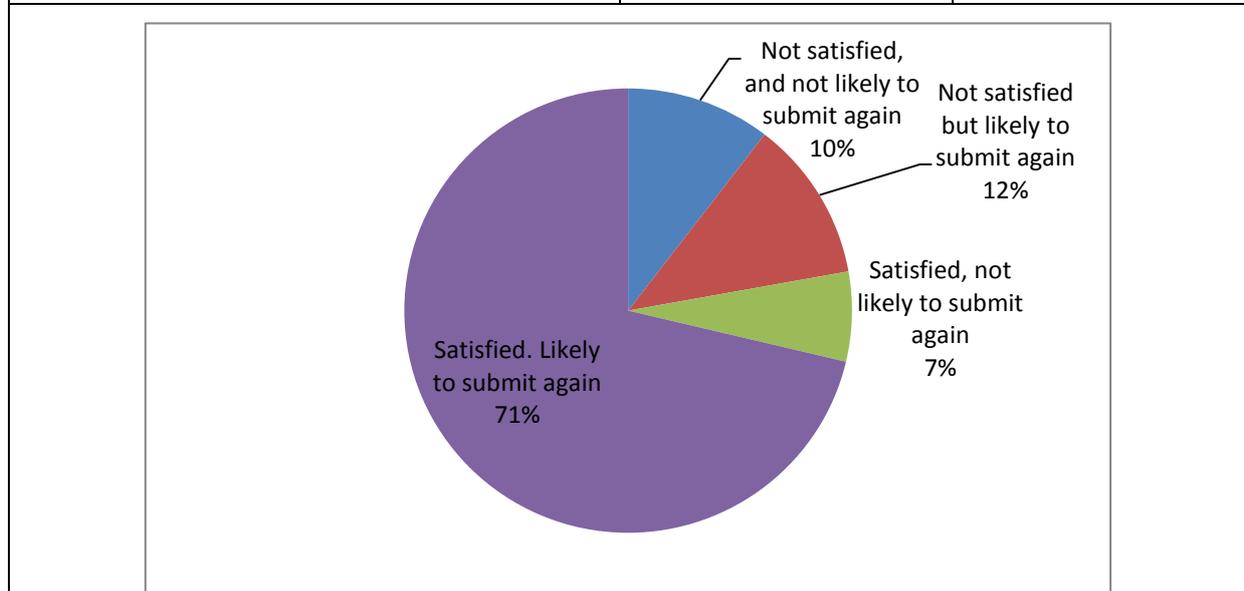
"I found the editors to be courteous and approachable, with an admirable ethos."

**Question: Overall, were you satisfied with your experiences with the AVJ? Yes/No**

**Are you likely to submit papers or review for the AVJ again? Yes/No**

When asked about their overall satisfaction with the process, 71.3% of all respondents, and 65.6% of those who listed themselves as authors only were satisfied and would consider submitting to us again (Figure 8). There are many reasons why people would not submit again, including not having a relevant readership, or better coverage in specialist journals. However, 51 respondents (22.1%) said that they were not satisfied, and I think it is important to work out the reasons for this, so we can concentrate on these areas for improvement.

All respondents	Total Number	%
Not satisfied, and not likely to submit again	24	10.4
Not satisfied but likely to submit again	27	11.7
Satisfied, not likely to submit again	15	6.5
Satisfied. Likely to submit again	164	71.3
	<b>230</b>	
<b>Listed as authors only</b>		
Not satisfied, and not likely to submit again	22	13.5
Not satisfied, but likely to submit again	25	15.3
Satisfied, not likely to submit again	9	5.5
Satisfied, likely to submit again	107	65.6
	<b>163</b>	



**Figure 8. Were you satisfied with your experiences with the AVJ, and likely to submit papers or review for the AVJ again?**

**Respondent comments on quality of papers**

"This is not really a comment about the AVJ. It seems that most institutions now do not have an internal reviewing process as the journal's referees should not have to point out glaring errors and inconsistencies."

"Authors should be encouraged to write a manuscript and then cut it in half."

### **Respondent comments on quality of the reviews.**

"In one specific case especially, myself and the authors I was involved with felt that the reviewers simply disagreed with our interpretation of the findings."

"The Editor and staff have tried to manage the difficulties and these are derived from faults with all concerned including the submitters who are under increasing pressure from institutions demanding metric driven publishing outcomes. However the editorial staff need to be more aware that there are some reviewers that are just inappropriate to review certain work."

"Paper wasn't accepted."

### **Respondent comments about the process**

"Found the process in general far easier than with other main stream vet journals."

"AVJ is a peer-reviewed and broadly accepted journal and the submission process is straight forward."

"I have always felt that as a reviewer my views were seriously considered by editors."

"I was honoured to have been asked to do this for AVJ."

"I am old and past publishing manuscripts. I never enjoyed the writing process and was very poor at it. I was antagonist to reviewers comments initially but now realise the shortcomings in style and presentation were all mine."

"I will be pleased to review again papers submitted to AVJ in my field of expertise, as it is part on my academic job and the quality of the papers published is generally good and the contents interesting."

"I still appreciate the journal, but I think there should be an editorial committee."

### **Respondent comments on the Australian Veterinary Journal readership compared to specialist journals**

*Some of the respondents will not submit to us again as they favour European or specialist journals to target their specific readership. - AJ*

"Despite long delays, sometimes AVJ is considered the most appropriate when the subject is mostly/primarily for an Australian audience."

"Considering the unpaid volunteers helping produce the AVJ it is of excellent quality and has good international standing."

"Hey- the paper was published- isn't that the end aim?"

"As a vehicle for publishing research/clinical papers in the Australian context the AVJ meets this criterion very well."

"Collegial, constructive, helpful partner in disseminating information."

"Support the AVA."

"Highly respect the journal as representing our profession, so would like to have paper(s) published in the journal."

"It's our Journal; we should be involved in helping to present our perspective of Veterinary Science in Australia."

"It is OUR journal and read not only by researchers but clinical practitioners for whom most of the articles are highly relevant."

"I will always support my local Australian journal and think it imperative that such a journal exists and is relevant to Australian practitioners."

"I generally submit manuscripts about diseases that affect Australian animals to the AVJ as the target audience should derive the most benefit from the information."

"Publication in AVJ gives a "local" flavour to the material which Australian members are more likely to take note of."

"Good to contribute to an Australian journal, ensures Australian GP vets read the article."

"Has relevance with disorders relevant to Australian veterinarians, the journal is Very approachable for advice on submission of manuscripts and has an overall high standard in reviewing papers for submission."

"I think it is important to have a national veterinary journal. I believe the journal is doing well given the limitations."

"AVJ has a good balance between academic study and practical application."

"I enjoy the review process. It gives me a reason to keep up with the literature or at least review it as part of the process. I also feel that as a veterinarian with a great deal of experience it is my obligation to help others via the review process."

"This is an expected responsibility for a registered veterinarian in Australia."

"Overall the quality of papers in the AVJ is of a high quality and improving as indicated by the Journal's IF."

"I will be pleased to review again papers submitted to AVJ in my field of expertise, as it is part of my academic job and the quality of the papers published is generally good and the contents interesting."

"I enjoy making a professional contribution and it helps to sharpen the brain from time to time"

**Question: Do you have any other comments for us? What worked well with your experience with the AVJ? What can we do to improve our publishing processes?"**

Specific suggestions included:

"I think all veterinary journals should have open application for their editorial boards. Yours is typically male-dominated."

"I strongly believe that the AVJ should require papers to address all relevant headings in the CONSORT, STROBE, REFLECT, STARD etc guidelines. This would immediately improve the quality of reporting and ultimately the quality of future research. "

Suggestions for content (summarised):

- Targeted reviews by national opinion leaders.
- More practice oriented articles.
- More of relevance to modern small animal practice.
- An increased small animal content in the journal and reduced non-scientific input.
- Increase readership buy invited reviews, meta-analysis and systematic reviews and continuing education articles
- More wildlife case reports.

"I enjoy the AVJ, little clinical relevance to our practice (feline only) but the AVJ reminds me of the breadth and depth of our profession. Communications from the AVA much improved too."