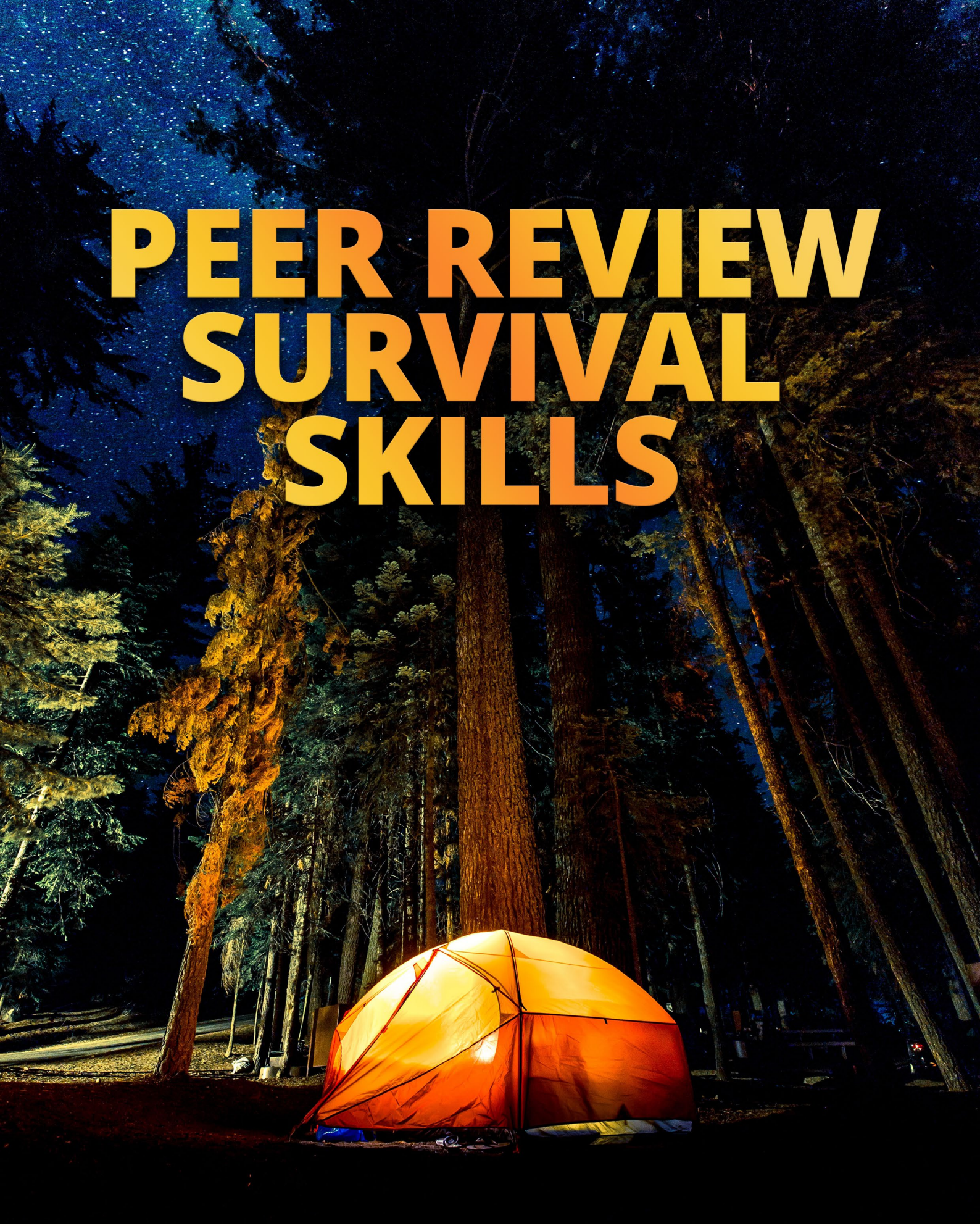


Research Square

Access 2 Perspectives

THE POST-SUBMISSION BLACK BOX
UNDERSTANDING THE JOURNEY OF AN ARTICLE *BETWEEN* SUBMISSION AND ACCEPTANCE: A PEER REVIEW SURVIVAL GUIDE

What happens when you submit an academic paper to a journal? What do the editors do? And most importantly, **what happens during the peer review process?**

Research Square, Scholastica, and Access 2 Perspectives have joined forces to bring you this Survival Guide.

OUR GOAL: TO HELP YOU MAXIMIZE THE POTENTIAL OF YOUR NEXT PAPER

The aim of this guide is to help you understand the post-submission journey of a paper. We'll talk about editors' primary concerns during initial manuscript review, the choices they make, and the stages of peer review at most scholarly journals so you'll have a better chance of success the next time you submit a paper.

You're a researcher, an expert. You're well-versed in writing up your work, selecting a journal, and getting papers ready for submission. But what happens after that? Most authors tend to find that the time between manuscript submission and (hopefully) acceptance remains a bit of a mystery — the "black box" of academic publishing, so to speak. Something happens to papers after submission. The question is: What?

The aim of this guide is to help you understand the journey of a paper from submission to either rejection or acceptance.

We'll cover the peer review process and types of editorial decision letters you'll likely receive from journals as well as how you can write effective response letters to address with comments on your paper. We'll also talk about the steps you can take after a final decision to ensure your paper achieves maximum impact and how you can monitor this variable.

WHAT IS PEER REVIEW?

Authors tend to view the peer review process as somewhat of a nightmare — an ordeal they need to survive to get work published (finally!). It is, therefore, with a sense of great relief, that papers eventually get accepted. You have survived peer review! We hope to turn such perceptions upside down with this guide and provide some solutions to many of the challenges authors face during the peer review process.

In academia, we often start our workshops and training sessions on peer review and the post-submission process by asking colleagues: What is peer review? So let's begin there.

WHAT IS THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS?

Is it to:

- help an author improve the quality of their paper?
- give journals/reviewers a chance to look through all the data?
- ensure esteemed professors get their work into the best journals?
- help maintain the integrity and quality of scholarly publications?

Many researchers vote for the top option: The reason for peer review is to help authors improve the quality of their papers. However, the main reason for the peer review process across academic publishing is to maintain the integrity and quality of scholarly work (see this **brief history from F1000**). The other choice is a happy bi-product.

Journals around the world use the peer review process as a mechanism to maintain the integrity and quality of scholarly publications. All authors should aim to get their work published in peer-reviewed journals; otherwise, they may end up wasting their research efforts. That's because individuals and organizations in and outside of academia (e.g., news outlets) are generally more likely to trust research that has been peer reviewed, and, in academia, peer-reviewed works are much more likely to be cited.

Overall, peer review filters and improves content for researchers. What goes into the funnel — a research paper submitted to a journal — is parsed down to a final published version that is more usable and trusted.

WHEN DID PEER REVIEW START?

The peer review process is actually not as old and deeply established as you might think. Although the **first journal** known to have employed this process was the *Royal Society of Edinburgh* in the 18th century, most journals didn't start applying peer review until much later, in the **latter half of the 20th century.** *Science*, the journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, only began using peer review in the 1940s, and *Nature* didn't implement peer review until much later in 1967.

Here's an amusing story. Did you know that one of the best-known scientists of all time, Albert Einstein, **submitted a paper** to a journal (The Physical Review) in 1936? No big deal, you might think, but the journal editor sent his article out for peer review. Einstein got upset and demanded that the paper be withdrawn. How dare someone send his work out for review without asking first! Nevertheless, Einstein calmed down and did, in the end, take the comments he received into account to improve the article.

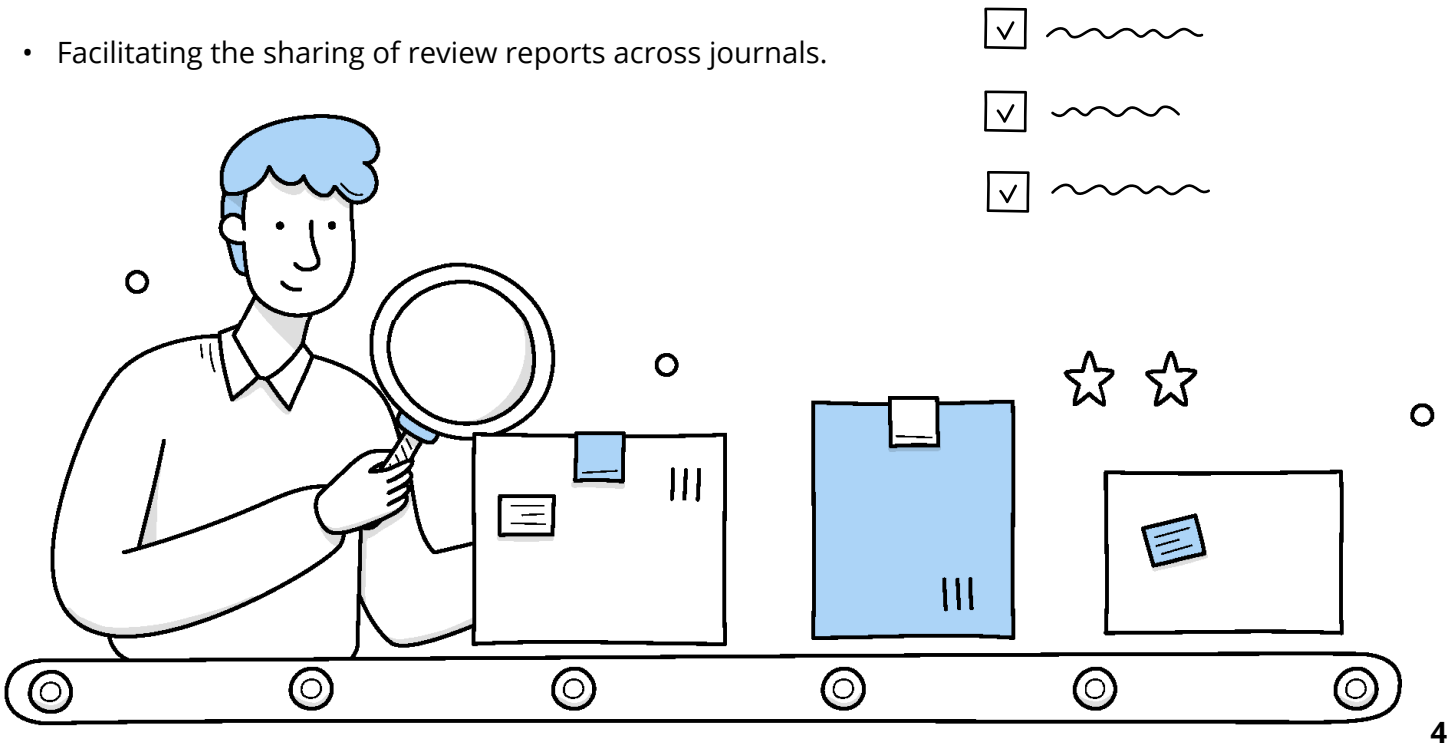
However, helping authors improve articles (even if they don't initially feel receptive to that perspective) is not the most important function of peer review. As we have discussed, the primary purpose of peer review is to control the quality — and thus the trustworthiness — of the academic literature.

From the editor's POV: Increasing trust in peer review

As research "gatekeepers," scholarly journals and their publishers are arguably on the frontlines of quality in peer review and have the potential to lead the way in addressing many of the research integrity challenges currently faced across disciplines. These include biases against null and negative results, the potential for research spin, and the ongoing replication crisis.

What steps are scholarly journals and publishers taking to fortify peer review and build trust in the process? This **Scholastica blog** post looks at how increasing peer review transparency can help, including:

- Valuing research questions and methods over findings;
- Employing more open peer review practices;
- Developing shared peer-review standards and taxonomies;
- Facilitating the sharing of review reports across journals.



DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEER REVIEW: THE MODELS USED BY JOURNALS

In this section, we'll discuss the different kinds of peer review used by journals. These fall into four broad categories: Single-anonymized, double-anonymized, transparent (or open), and transferable. Each type of peer review has advantages and disadvantages (of course) for both authors and reviewers. We'll address those in turn. Journals may use one peer review type or a combination. One of the key things to understand as a submitting author is that you often can manage aspects of the peer review process.

The different kinds of peer review

The first and most common kind of peer review that journals use is **single-anonymized peer review.** It's referred to as such because, as the name suggests, the reviewer remains anonymous to the author. You'll not know who worked on your article.

The second kind, in contrast, is referred to as **double-anonymized.** In this case, both the authors and reviewers are unknown to each other. Many people think this is a fairer method; we'll talk about why in a moment.

The third main kind of peer review we see in journals is **transparent or open peer review.** As the name suggests, this is where reviewer comments are published alongside an article, while the fourth type we'll discuss is referred to as **transferable.**

In this latter case, comments (good or bad) are moved from one journal to another in the event of rejection. This approach tends to be very popular with authors, as it can dramatically speed up article processing — Why wait for another set of comments if you already have some relatively positive ones in hand?

Returning to **single-anonymized** peer review, let's consider some of the benefits and issues inherent to this approach. First, reviewers are often more comfortable working on papers under this model because their identities are protected from authors. Reviewers feel they can be more open and honest about the work under review. Authors also do not need to worry about ensuring their articles are fully anonymous, as is the case in **double-anonymized** peer review.

In the **double-anonymized** peer review process, no one knows who is whom! Or do they?

Double-anonymized peer review has historically been considered the most unbiased peer review process type because reviewers can analyze papers critically without concern of backlash, and authors often feel there's less bias during review. However, there are issues with this model, as reviewers may be able to figure out author identities through anonymization errors or other clues. That's why it's so important for authors to ensure their manuscripts are fully anonymized.

Be vigilant of maintaining confidentiality in your documents if you do submit to a journal with a double-anonymized peer review model. First, your title page and acknowledgements must be distinct and separate from the main manuscript. From there, you must be sure to anonymize all place names (e.g., regions, nationalities, hospitals) and make sure there are no identification marks in your metadata. You'll also want to change the document author settings in your document editor or PDF creation software so that it's not clear that you were the writer — "changes by Gareth J Dyke" give the game away!

In the same vein, it's also essential to be mindful of how you write when working on a manuscript that will be **double-anonymized for** peer review. That will also be a dead giveaway. **Double-anonymized** peer review requires more care on the part of authors.

HOW DO AUTHORS FEEL ABOUT DOUBLE-ANONYMIZED PEER REVIEW?

Numerous publishers now offer double-anonymized peer review options. Many journals also give authors a choice between single-anonymized or double-anonymized peer review. Uptake has been interesting: **Across *Nature* and related journals**, the uptake of double-anonymized peer review has been **around 10% from authors** across the board. Far less than you might have thought. Why is this?

It turns out that lots of authors prefer for reviewers to know who they are, put simply. But there are exceptions: Other surveys of submitting authors have found that those from "developing" countries, especially China and India, tend to opt for double-anonymized peer review in much larger numbers. That clearly relates to a perceived bias amongst authors: Colleagues from some countries obviously feel that their papers will have a better chance of "a fair go" after submission if their institution is hidden from reviewers.

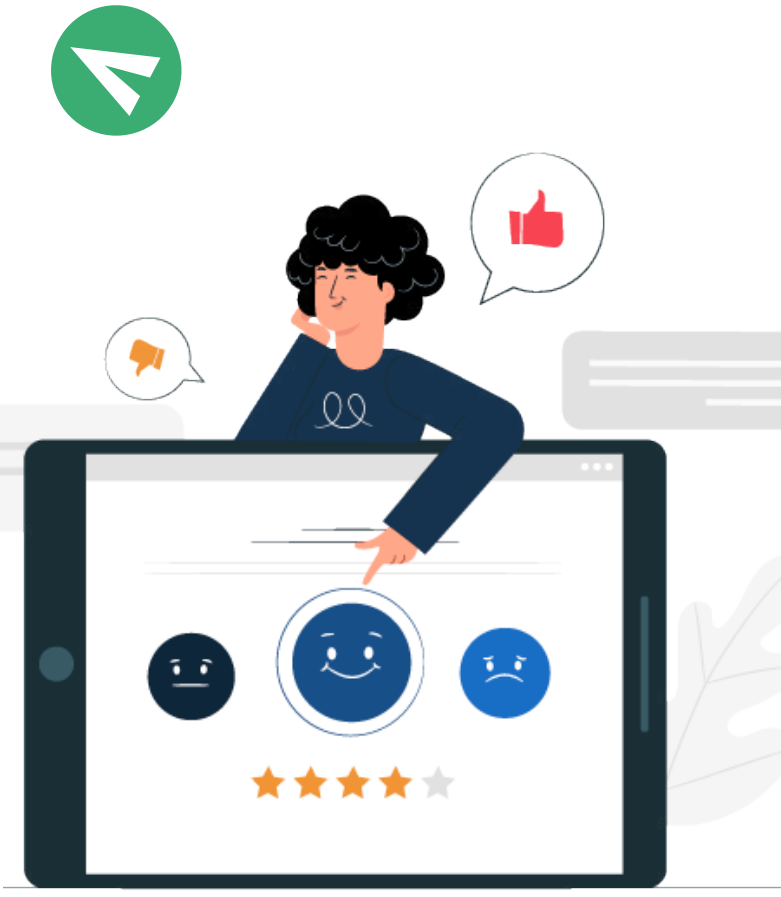
A quick anecdote from Dr. Gareth Dyke at Research Square who notes: "I must admit, at this point, that I've experienced the above scenario: Even though I am a white, male, native English speaker. I used to work in Ireland and then moved to work at a much higher-profile university in the United Kingdom. My acceptance rate went through the roof. Much higher than when I worked in Ireland. And I started getting more high-impact factor papers even though my research program remained the same. I then moved to Hungary and started working for a university in Romania. Suddenly, I had much less immediate success".

Peer review bias is human nature. It exists. One of your key decisions when aiming for submission will be which model to pursue and which kind of peer review is best for you in terms of fairness and impartiality.

It's well worth thinking about.

TRANSPARENT PEER REVIEW

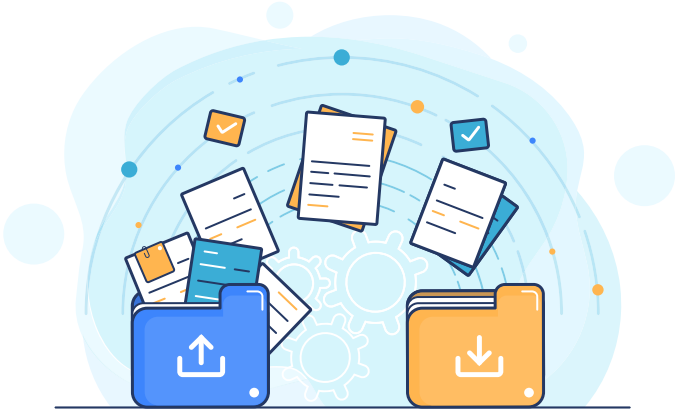
Transparent, or open, peer review is where information and data about the peer review process is openly shared for all to see (and potentially comment on). Transparent peer review comes in different flavors. In some cases, the term may refer to authors and reviewers knowing each other's identities, whereas, in other cases, it may mean publishing reviews alongside articles either with or without reviewers' identities (and potentially with commenting options). The benefits of transparency include that everyone can see what a paper went through before publication. Thus, a reader can be confident that experts evaluated the study. Reviewers may also be inclined to write more thorough and constructive comments knowing that what they say will be public information.



Interestingly, given the opportunity to participate in transparent peer review where review comments and author responses are published as supplements on journal/publisher websites, more than 60% of authors opt in (per a recent *Nature* study). Transparent peer review processes tend to be popular, likely because people want to understand the process through which a paper underwent on the road to publication.

Findings suggest that transparent or open peer review does not compromise the inner workings of the peer review system. Indeed, researchers have not seen significant effects on the willingness of referees to work on papers, the quality of their recommendations, or the turnaround times. Publicly published review reports have also proven more constructive in many cases. Of course, if you had to write a review and knew it would be published online (along with your name), you'd likely also be more constructive and less aggressive!

TRANSFERABLE PEER REVIEW



Our fourth peer review model is "transferable." In this case, journals and potentially publishers share peer review comments with each other when manuscripts move between titles.

Imagine: You submit to one journal, get rejected, but get good comments back – perhaps a soft rejection. It would be great if those comments, and your responses, could be moved to your next journal of choice. That's the idea of transferrable peer review. The approach tends to be extremely popular with authors and reviewers because it can save both parties significant time and energy.

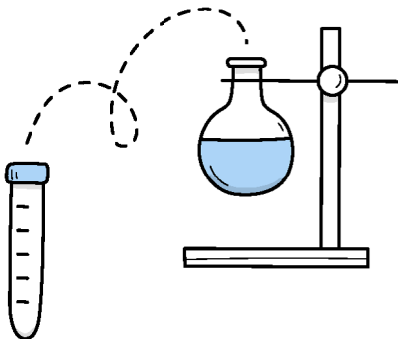
Transferrable peer review has not been adopted to a great extent outside of individual publishers transfering reviews when cascading submissions between their journals. Casading submissions is when the editors of one journal decide a manuscript isn't the best fit for that journal but is potentially better suited to another title from the same publisher. In this case, when transferrable peer review is employed, the original, most likely positive, reviewer comments are transferred from the first journal to the other title in that same publisher portfolio.

There are some shining-light exceptions, however (and we hope for more), including the Neuroscience Peer Review Consortium (NPRC). As the name suggests, the NPRC is a cross-publisher alliance of neuroscience journals (spanning several different publishers) that accept peer reviews from other journals within the group. So, if you get rejected from one, you can move your comments and initial responses to another journal within the family. The NPRC, as an example, currently includes 68 journals.

From the Editor's POV: The many models of peer review.

There are many current and emerging iterations on the four core types of peer review above, such as varying degrees of transparent or open peer review, as discussed.

What new takes on peer review are journals testing out? And how are editors approaching new model pilots? In this Scholastica blog interview, Pippa Smart, President and Founder of PSP Consulting, discusses some of the latest advances.



HOW ARE REVIEWERS SELECTED, AND WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR WHEN THEY ASSESS PAPERS?

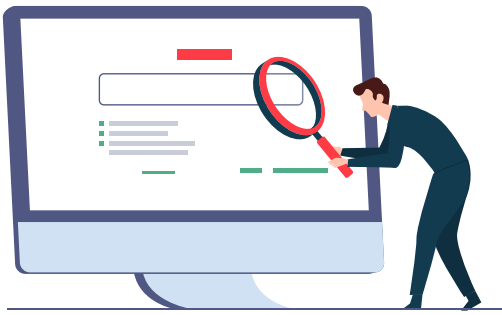
One of the main areas of confustion for authors globally is not only "How does my paper get evaluated?" but also "How are peer reviewers selected?". Moreover, how does the external review process work?

Actually, one of the most important responsibilities performed by journal editors is effectively selecting peer reviewers. Editors, above all, are looking for credibility and subject area expertise in reviewers (of course).

A good and effective peer reviewer has technical expertise and knowledge in the field and a fair and constructive attitude. They must, of course, have no potential conflicts of interest (something we will return to). Attractive peer reviewers are also familiar with journal standards and have good attention to detail while seeing the bigger picture.

Editors, therefore, seek to increase diversity in the reviewer pool, honor author exclusions (where possible), involve as many reviewers as needed (usually three, but could be more), and remain alert to inappropriate behavior.

Reviewers evaluate "the study" as well as "the manuscript".
It's important to keep these two variables in mind as an author.



Indeed, reviewers must comment on your findings, methods, objectives, conclusions, presentation, and references — the whole article package.

Objectives:

In terms of reviewer **objectives**, one of the primary ones is to establish that a piece of research is novel. Reviewers are asked to evaluate the extent of the scientific advance and likelihood of overall interest in the field. It is, therefore, critical to emphasize the current state of the field, your specific research objective, and which research gaps your own research fills in your abstract and introduction.

Methods:

In terms of **methods,** reviewers are looking for a rigorous experimental design, appropriate up-to-date methods, and proper controls. It is, therefore, essential to read the latest literature in your field to be familiar with how other colleagues construct their methods sections. Clearly write your methods section in line with disciplinary standards and norms.

As you'll know from AJE and Research Square's other e-books and training content, the Methods section is the key area of academic writing. This portion of your article is where you stand or fall. Most academic articles are rejected on the basis of real or perceived issues with the methods section. Be as transparent as possible, and ensure you put enough information into the methods so that a qualified reader can replicate your study.

Findings:

You'll need to ensure that your reported findings are accurate, valid, and reproducible to have the best chance of successfully passing through peer review. That means ensuring the appropriate presentation of data and clearly organizing your results and figures. It's also worth consulting with a statistician regarding any tests you include before submission. Many journals will check your work with an in-house statistical reviewer or, at least, use software to ensure your outcomes and P-values are meaningful given any tabulated data.

Conclusions

Reported conclusions need to be based on the evidence presented in your article. Don't go further than your data allow. It's important to make sure you do address the research questions outlined in your article as well as to make clear recommendations for further work and outline implications for your field.

Reviewers will be looking to ensure you support all your conclusions with evidence. They will also check to ensure that you are aware of how your study limitations might affect conclusions.

Presentation

In terms of presentation, it's key to transparently report all your methodologies and findings. One way to make sure you are doing this effectively (depending on the research area, of course) is to use the **EQUATOR Network** checklists to ensure all relevant information is included in your study design, methods, and results.

EQUATOR Network

The EQUATOR Network checklists provide excellent and easy-to-follow guides for structuring a paper. Figures, graphs, and tables must be properly structured, well-written, and clearly labelled. Data presentations need to be easy to understand and navigate. That may sound obvious, however you'd be amazed how many papers journals receive for review that contain low-quality or poorly labelled figures and graphs.

Editors will also direct peer reviewers to refer to their journal's author guidelines, so you'll also need to ensure you've read them carefully and formatted everything appropriately before submission. One of the key pre-peer review steps that journal editorial offices perform is checking that submissions conform with basic journal formatting and author instructions, if these are required. You don't want to get rejected on the basis of a technicality and not even get your work sent out for peer review!

References

Reviewers will be tasked with checking your article to ensure that any references are up-to-date and that you cite broadly from authors around the world (to show your work has global relevance). It's also important to avoid unnecessary self-citation: Only include essential articles and review papers in your reference list and ensure that your citations are recent, from within the last few years. Ensure you cite broadly to demonstrate you are familiar with your field.

From the Editor's POV: How to Write Constructive Peer Review Comments

As a researcher, you will likely receive invitations to serve as a peer reviewer for various journals over the course of your career. Taking on peer review assignments is a great way to stay up-to-date on the latest scholarship in your field and is also an act of goodwill (after all, peer review is a primarily volunteer-based system!).

Like the art of tightrope walking, writing helpful peer review comments requires honing the ability to traverse many fine lines. What steps can you take to ensure you are writing constructive peer review comments and keep honing your abilities? **Here are 7 tips from the editor's perspective.**

THE WAITING GAME: HOW LONG SHOULD PEER REVIEW TAKE?

One of the most common questions authors ask is — "how long should I expect to wait for my paper to pass through the editorial and peer review systems?" No-one likes to wait, but this often happens in the peer review process. **One survey by Springer Nature showed that 37% of authors** ended up waiting more than one year for their reviews to come back from a journal, while an astounding 10% had to wait for more than three years.

Obviously, this is not ok: This is your career, and you cannot afford to sit and wait for review comments to come back for an unacceptably long period of time.

The question is: What is an unacceptably long period of time?

To answer this question, let's look at standard publication times. Under optimal conditions, it usually takes about one week for an editor to receive and process a submission and then another week to select reviewers and send the paper to them for comments. Allow around four weeks for the peer review process, and then give your editor another one or two weeks to process, write, and send you a report. These timescales mean that the whole process should take about seven or eight weeks if all goes smoothly.

Publication times in an ideal world

The problem is: Peer review often does not go smoothly. Editors forget. Editors can't find peer reviewers to work on submissions. Peer reviewers don't respond to editorial requests or write and submit their reviews in a timely fashion.

We recommend that after around 12 weeks, it's time to write to your journal editor and politely ask for an update on your paper if you have no news. Be polite and professional. Make sure you write your email in such a way as to give something back to the editor, to help and support them, rather than being aggressive or angry (as so many authors are in these situations).

Author letters, good and bad

You should aim to make your editor's role as easy as possible. Ensure you put all necessary information into your inquiry emails: Names of authors, the title of your paper, its initial manuscript number, and the date of submission. If you had initially included the names and emails of peer reviewers in your cover letter (as you should have done), now is the time to suggest a few more. A well-positioned inquiry email to an editor about a paper should ideally contain a number of additional peer reviewer suggestions. It's highly likely that the journal has failed to secure reviewers or that existing colleagues in the system are taking a long time, explaining the delay to your paper.

EDITORIAL DECISION LETTERS: WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

Editorial decisions aren't democratically made. Editors arbitrate between reviewers, but, in the end, they make their own decisions. So, if an editor likes a paper and thinks it is well-written and well-argued, they may lean towards more favorable reviews received and perhaps put less weight on more negative comments.

On the flip side, two acceptances and one rejection from three reviewers doesn't necessarily mean that a paper will get accepted. The two acceptances might be very short (this happens all the time), providing just cursory comments, while an argument to reject might be comprehensive, citing lots of evidence. What would you do as a reviewer? Naturally, in this case, it's more likely that the eventual outcome for this article will be negative, even though two-thirds of the reviewers opted to accept.

Editors, not reviewers, are responsible for journal decisions. Editors often face contradictory recommendations, and they don't count votes. Rather, they consider arguments. Editors are also often trained to be alert to inappropriate reviewer behavior (especially at higher profile, higher impact journals that employ professional editorial teams) to ensure that decisions are made based on sound, well-reasoned advice. Overrule is always possible in both positive and negative directions.

DECISION LETTER STRUCTURE AND WORDING

One insight to keep in mind: Journal decision letters are often not written personally by editors. They are usually templates sent automatically via journal management systems. So once you know the wording to look for in these letters, you can much more effectively manage peer review as an author. A "rejection" letter might not actually be as bad as it seems, while "major revisions" or "reject and resubmit" letters also mean specific things.

The structure of a decision letter takes the following form. First, the letter will state the decision for the author at the top of the letter (e.g., reject, accept, minor or major revisions required to ensure further consideration). Second, it will outline a reason for the decision made. Third, you'll get the chance to read a series of comments made during the peer review process.

The wording is important. Let's take a look at some wordings used in editorial response letters that imply a journal might ***very well be interested*** in considering your work:

- The reviewer comments we received are ***not entirely negative***
- It is not possible to consider your paper in its ***current form***
- I hope the information provided will be helpful to ***revise your paper in the future***
- I regret that the outcome of this review has not ***so far been favorable***

In contrast, here are some wordings used in recent editorial decision letters that imply a journal editor is ***definitely not interested*** in looking more at your paper:

- We ***cannot*** publish your paper
- Your study ***does not contain*** novel results that merit publication in our journal
- We appreciate your interest in our journal. However, we ***will not further conside***r your paper for publication

And perhaps clearest of all:

- We wish you luck ***publishing your results elsewhere.***

Soft rejections

As you can see, decision letter wording matters. Indeed, for many reasons, journal editors often send out so-called “soft rejections” these days. In this case, your paper gets “rejected,” but that does not mean that you cannot revise it and return it to the same journal (usually as a new submission). Why? Under pressure to keep rejection rates as high as possible (as this is one metric that feeds into journal impact factor calculations), editors send out “soft rejection” emails that are more-or-less equivalent to asking for “major revisions.”

Soft rejections give authors a limited time to make their changes and then return the paper as a new submission to the same journal. In this case, editors hope you will revise and resubmit it as a new paper. One clear clue that your editorial decision email is, in fact, a “soft rejection” is that it includes a resubmission link with instructions on how to send in a revised article (and even a due date).

From the Editor’s POV: Peer review email templates most every journal has

With how often journal editors send near duplicate messages to authors and reviewers, it’s no wonder many editorial teams use peer review software with email templates to save time. How do editors make the call on when to use email templates and when to send personal responses? Which types of email templates do most journals have? And how are decision letters formatted?

This blog post from Scholastica provides a window into 9 peer review email templates every journal should have and why (with examples).

REVISIONS AND EFFECTIVE RESPONSE LETTERS

Have you received review comments back on a paper and are now thinking about how to respond? The most important things to do are to be clear, thorough, comprehensive, and polite when writing back to the editor.

One tip here is to take the comments received from reviewers and group them strategically so you can manage all the comments about the references at the same time, all the comments about the methods, all comments about the figures, and so on. This is one effective way to manage the revision process. Peer reviewers and editors will commonly ask for changes to experiments and potentially for new experiments or analyses. Reference-related changes are also common, where reviewers ask for additional studies to be cited or for articles to be removed or added to the list. Changes to the manuscript writing style are also common, especially for non-native speakers. Reviewers might ask the author to add or remove information and make changes to improve readability.

Another piece of advice before you start working on your revisions is to ensure you understand what they're asking you to do. If you have any doubt, write to the editor before you start revising your paper. It would not be good to spend ages working on making changes only to return your manuscript and find that they're not what the reviewers intended.

Don't guess! Ask the editor if you're unsure about what you need to revise or if you feel you cannot realistically make a particular change. For example, requests for you to do additional experiments or travel might require more budget and, therefore, be impossible.

Your revised document should be as easy as possible for an editor to follow so they can quickly understand the changes you made. Use tracked changes, a new font color, or the strikethrough tool to highlight changes to your text.

One of the best ways to ensure your paper has the highest possible chance of acceptance is to write a comprehensive response letter that extends appreciation to the editor and peer reviewers. Communicating appreciation is one of the most powerful things you can do because it demonstrates you show respect for other people's opinions. It's easy to do this if you agree with review comments but much more difficult if you disagree. However, regardless of your opinion on the matter, it's beneficial to show appreciation and respect for the reviewer's time spent working on your paper. Here are some examples to use when you *agree* (or can at least pretend to agree) with comments received in review:

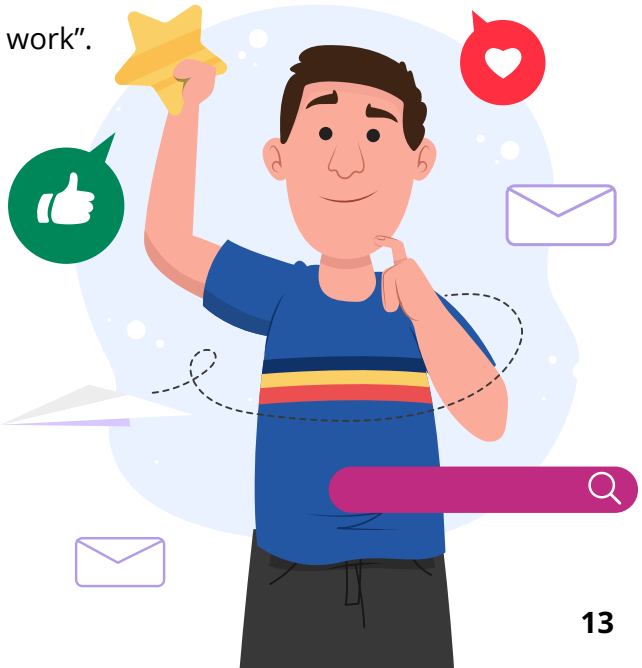
"I appreciate the time spent working on my paper".

"Thank you for the insightful and thorough comments on my work".

"This is an excellent suggestion".

"We appreciate the insightful suggestion".

"We are grateful for the reviewer's input".



It's much harder, however, to show your appreciation in polite writing when you disagree with comments:

"This is an insightful point; however …".

"We appreciate this suggestion very much; however …".

"Although we agree with this interesting suggestion, we nevertheless disagree ….".

There are ways to phrase your responses so as to not come across as petulant or angry that someone else has critiqued your work. It's hard but possible. These skills can be developed to increase your chances of publication success.

It's also key to keep in mind that "a person's name, to that person, is the sweetest and most important sound in any language". Address your editor personally. "Dear Prof x, or Doctor y …". Another good trick is to promote people in your letters. Always default to Professor, as that can be perceived as flattering when written in text.

For example:

"The reviewer's comments were highly insightful and enabled us to greatly improve the quality of our manuscript. In the following pages are our point-by-point responses to each of the comments".

And:

"Revisions to the manuscript are shown as **red text.** In accordance with the first comment, the title has been revised to".

Two key points here: Appreciate reviewers and highlight those major changes. Doing these two things in your response letter will dramatically increase your chances of publication success.

Of course, you do not have to agree with every suggestion that a reviewer makes, but responding politely will help you when you want to refuse a suggestion or two. How you respond to reviewers and editors can also go a long way toward a favorable decision about your manuscript. When you engage in a civil and objective discourse with reviewers, you signal your commitment to scholarship and willingness to allow the peer review system to improve your manuscript.

WHEN AND HOW TO APPEAL DECISIONS AFTER PEER REVIEW?

Sadly, we often receive comments on our papers we don't agree with. Perhaps a peer reviewer has not understood your work correctly or is just being nasty. In these situations, if you feel you have not been treated fairly in the journal peer review process, consider sending an appeal. After all, the paper has already been rejected. What's the worst that could happen?

Appeal letters must be carefully constructed and polite. Explain to the editor, using clear evidence such as data and additional citations, why you feel that one of the peer reviewers has either not been even-handed or that further explanations are needed. Appeals are worth considering because, very often, editors do change their minds and agree for papers to be sent out again for future peer review.

You've only got one career, after all. Don't miss the chance to get your work published in a leading international journal just because one of your peer reviewers does not understand one aspect of your work. For this reason, of course, pre-peer review of papers by colleagues and co-workers is also important to try to pre-empt any issues before submission.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

The peer review system is simultaneously rewarding and frustrating, with good suggestions for improving your manuscript often hidden among less helpful comments. What do you do when responding to a reviewer who clearly didn't read part of your manuscript or misunderstood one of your conclusions? It can be tempting to tell the reviewer that they didn't read the paper thoroughly and not leave any other response. But that's not the best course of action.

Peer reviewers are working in good faith and provide a critical service to the advancement of discovery worldwide, so give them a thoughtful and thorough response. Reviewers offer a fresh take on your work and can sometimes find critical flaws before your manuscript reaches a broader audience. In the end, the author gets the credit for the final product, but reviewers often contribute substantially to shaping the manuscript. They deserve appreciation too.

The role of journals and authors in promoting research integrity

Fostering research integrity at every stage of scholarly publishing (including pre- and post-publication) is the basis of upholding trust in the literature and furthering new advancements across disciplines. That all starts with researchers, editors, and publishers having the necessary knowledge and tools at their disposal to ensure the scholarship they're submitting, peer reviewing, and disseminating is as ethically and materially robust and transparent as possible.

To help academic journals and their submitting authors implement and expand current standards and initiatives, Scholastica and Research Square launched a joint blog series on **research integrity tools** for journals and authors for Peer Review Week 2022. You can access the full Toolkit, including an infographic highlighting top tips in this blog post.

RESOURCES SELECTION

Becoming a peer reviewer

https://www.aje.com/arc/gaining-peer-review-experience/

https://www.aje.com/arc/how-to-become-a-peer-reviewer-for-journals/

https://blog.scholasticahq.com/post/how-to-write-helpful-peer-review-comments/

The ethics of peer review

https://www.aje.com/arc/ethics-peer-review/

https://blog.scholasticahq.com/post/pillars-quality-peer-review/

https://blog.scholasticahq.com/post/why-every-oa-journal-should-have-peer-review-policies-on-website

Managing peer review, especially rejection

https://www.aje.com/arc/responding-reviewers-you-cant-always-say-what-youd/

https://www.aje.com/arc/peer-review-resource-things-to-consider/

https://www.aje.com/arc/how-to-write-summary-in-response-to-reviewers/

https://www.aje.com/arc/final-hurdle-persuasive-responses-peer-review/

https://www.aje.com/arc/your-paper-was-rejected-what-next/

How much time does peer review really take?

https://www.aje.com/arc/peer-review-process-15-million-hours-lost-time/

https://blog.scholasticahq.com/post/how-many-rounds-of-peer-review-should-my-journal-have/

https://blog.scholasticahq.com/post/avoiding-revise-and-resubmit-merry-go-round/

Training and collection selection

Open Peer Reviewers in Africa Workshop Trainer Guide

eLife. Collection of Peer Review articles

Everything You Need to Know About Peer Review — The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

Diversity and inclusion in peer review

Joint commitment for action on inclusion and diversity in publishing

COPE's Diversity in Peer Review: Survey Results

How can we support reviewer diversity?

The case for (more) diversity in peer review

ABOUT RESEARCH SQUARE

Research Square

Research Square lets you share your work early, gain feedback from the community, and start making changes to your manuscript prior to peer review in a journal.

As a division of Research Square Company, we're committed to making research communication faster, fairer, and more useful. We do this by developing innovative software and high quality services for the global research community. Our growing team is made up of researchers and industry professionals working together to solve the most critical problems facing scientific publishing.

ABOUT SCHOLASTICA

Scholastica is a scholarly publishing technology solutions provider with easy-to-integrate software and services for every aspect of publishing academic journals — from peer review to production to hosting and discovery support. Our mission is to empower journal publishers of any size to make quality research available more efficiently and affordably in order to facilitate a sustainable research future. Over 1,000 journals across disciplines use Scholastica.

ABOUT ACCESS 2 PERSPECTIVES

Access 2 Perspectives

Bridging Academic Landscapes.

We provide novel insights into the management and communication of Research. Our goal is to equip researchers with the skills and enthusiasm they need to pursue a joyful career.

We guide you in your complete research workflow toward state-of-the-art research practices and in full compliance with funding and publishing requirements.