

HOW TO BE A BETTER REVIEWER



RESPONSIBILITIES of a Section Editor



Key Responsibilities

When a manuscript is submitted to a section of the journal, the Section Editor first determines whether or not the paper meets the scope of the section, passes readability in English, and contains appropriate formatting. If a manuscript meets all of these criteria, then the Section Editor goes about selecting and inviting reviewers to review the paper.

Once the paper begins the review process, the Section Editor is responsible for monitoring the reviewer's timetable, ensuring the deadline for the review's completion is met.

Upon the completion of all reviews for a given manuscript, the Section Editor then examines all reviewers' comments to make the first decision on a paper: accept, revise, or reject.

If a revision is requested, the Section Editor then determines what to do with the paper once a revision is received. Those decisions are then passed along to the Editor-in-Chief.

Workload

The workload varies depending on which section of the journal you are a Section Editor for. There are many sections in the journal of *Poultry Science*® for example, but Nutrition is the largest section in that it receives the most manuscript submissions and has the most editors.

The workload of a Section Editor is dependent on how fast a reviewer completes a review and how active the Section Editor is on a regular basis.

TIPS

for Being a Good Section Editor

Basic Qualifications

- More than just a technical moderator of the editorial process.
- Have a higher level of experience and overview of the field.
- Does **not** have to be an expert in all areas.

Time Allocation

- Roughly 3-6 hours per week dedication.
- It is time-consuming, especially when you receive many manuscripts.
- A manuscript should be reviewed from start to finish in the time allotted. Do not work on the same manuscript several times.

Sourcing Reviewers

- Maintain a list of good reviewers for each area.
- Avoid reviewers who do not respond to invites.
- Encourage your reviewers, Giving priority to manuscripts submitted by authors who are good reviewers and by giving acknowledgments are great tools for encouragement. This does not mean authors who review are subject to a different quality of assessment, but instead a "fast as possible" process.
- Networking is important! Attend meetings, read many papers, and be known in your field.

Communication

- Providing reviewers reminders is beneficial.
- Be flexible with giving reviewers extensions.
- Keep in touch with Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Editorial Manager, reviewers, and authors.

Improving as a Section Editor

- Attend relevant trainings.
- Provide suggestions for how to improve the review process including how to encourage more reviewers, make quicker work of the review process, and adding more section editors to high volume sections of the journal.



THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

A Section Editor's Take



1. Once a manuscript is submitted, PSA's Managing Editor reads it, looking for a variety of concerns including readability in English and formatting. If the manuscript does not meet this criteria, the paper will be sent back to the author with suggestions for improvement before it can be considered any further.

If the Managing Editor finds no issues, then the manuscript is assigned to a Section Editor based on the section selected when the paper was submitted.
2. Section Editors must process the manuscripts they are assigned. Processing includes reviewing the manuscript and then assigning reviewers. Reviewers are typically searched for, but authors are encouraged to submit suggested reviewers with their submissions. Once reviewers are identified, they are invited to review.
3. Reviewers who accept the invitation to review have their review process monitored by the Section Editor to keep the reviewer on task to meet the review's deadline. After a manuscript's reviews are completed, the Section Editor reads reviewers' comments and makes a decision on the paper. If a paper is in need of a revision, then the revised version is reviewed along with any rebuttal letters from the author to make a decision.
4. Following the peer review process, the Editor-in-Chief makes the final decision on a reviewed manuscript.
5. Accepted manuscripts are processed by PSA's Managing Editor and transferred to the publisher for publication.

THE PRE-REVIEW PROCESS

A Section Editor's Initial Look

Aside from monitoring the progression of the peer review process, it is also the Section Editor's duty to give each assigned manuscript a pre-review. This first-level quality assurance of a manuscript helps to determine if the paper is worth sending to review. If serious problems are found, then the manuscript will be rejected, but the author will be provided with relevant comments and reasoning for the decision. The pre-review saves time for the editor, reviewers, and authors.

Pre-Review Entails:

1. Determining the paper meets the scope of interest for the audience of the journal.
2. Formatting guidelines are met.
3. Ensuring the manuscript passes the Similarity Check in Editorial Manager. This process checks for plagiarism within the manuscript.
4. Reviewing to ensure the paper does not contain any fatal flaws in experimental design, randomization, proper replications, data analysis, results, etc.
5. Confirming the writing passes readability in English. However, Section Editors and reviewers are not responsible for teaching the author appropriate scientific writing. This responsibility falls on academic mentors and senior authors. Unprofessionally written manuscripts should be rejected.



WHY BEING A SECTION EDITOR IS IMPORTANT

Challenging & Rewarding

The Challenges and Needs

Section editors and reviewers are not paid for the work they do. Because these are volunteer positions, they can be challenging to incorporate into already busy schedules. However, the peer review process is crucial to help further develop the scientific society and promote academic development through rigid quality control in a fair environment. Additionally, peer review provides constructive criticism to authors and triggers new thoughts and perspectives. The entire process encourages authors to become even better scientists.

How It Can Be Rewarding

Section Editors broaden their knowledge and thinking through the responsibilities of the role. Editors also stay up-to-date on the latest Poultry Science subjects, enhance their own writing skills, and gain a unique view of the discipline.

A job well done can enhance a Section

Editor's reputation within the scientific community in which they serve. Management of duties, maintaining organization, and efficient communication skills all contribute to the individual's reputation. Furthermore it is an honor to serve as a Section Editor in your field of expertise.

The Poultry Science Association is grateful for those who dedicate their time to the requirements of the Editor role, therefore, some additional benefits come with taking on the position. Section Editors for both *Poultry Science*® and *The Journal of Applied Poultry Research* receive complimentary annual membership within the Association as well as complimentary registration to attend the PSA Annual Meeting every summer.



Q & A with Section Editor Wei Zhai, PhD

Transcribed from Presentation on July 21, 2020 at 12:30 PM CST

What percent of manuscripts do you reject immediately?

Not too many, but there are some. Maybe 20%. Most papers rejected outright are due to fatal flaws in experimental design without proper replications.

What would you say is the most challenging part of being a Section Editor?

I would say the time. Especially with the nutrition being the largest section of the journal, I have processed over 100 manuscripts each year. I've heard in previous discussions that someone had processed over 300, so that's a lot of time. I want to do a good job so I always preview the manuscripts, and that takes a good amount of time.



What is the major aspect of a manuscript that causes it to be rejected right away?

As I had mentioned earlier, it is mainly because of the experimental design. After I receive a manuscript, the first thing I look at is the experimental design, then I look at the replications, data analysis, and then the results. If any issues arise there, we consider that fatal flaws and they cannot be fixed, so I will send back to the authors with reasons.

What makes a reviewer a good reviewer?

If you can provide a thorough review with suggestions. I recall when I started out as a reviewer, I was concerned about having a different opinion from another reviewer. However, I learned that when it comes to the quality of a paper, pretty much everyone seems to be on the same page and can identify a good paper. So then, it turns to providing suggestions that help make the author better and provide constructive criticism in a way that insights through from a different view.

Q & A with Section Editor Wei Zhai, PhD *(Continued...)*

Do you select reviewers only suggested by the author or do you select a mixture.

No, I wish I could only go off of the suggested reviewers. But I encourage everybody to provide reviewers when you submit your manuscript. It would be even better if the reviewers that you suggest will review your manuscripts.

Does the language of the manuscript matter in the aspect of rejection?

Yes. If the language prevents the reviewers to understand what you are trying to talk about, then it will affect the decision of the manuscript. However, if you are talking about a typo or something of that sort, we understand that. If you are not a native English speaker, you may want to consider hiring an editor to help enhance the language, but not change the data, of your manuscript.

Aside from having good experimental design, is there anything else we can do when writing a manuscript to make it easier to review?

A lot of schools will provide some sort of writing courses for their students to help them with writing a scientific paper. Those courses are extremely helpful with your writing technique.

How to evaluate the performance of a section editor, aside from the number of manuscripts processed per year? Such as evaluating duties?

Because this is a volunteer role, there really is not an evaluation process. However, for me, I try and do my best and move things faster. The Editor-in-Chief can provide a push or assistance if things seems to be hindered by the review process, however, there are no evaluation on section editor duties.

How do you handle a bad review?

We can give the reviewers scores that only fellow section editors can see. So, when I go to select a reviewer, I look at that score and see how many times they decline a review invitation and how fast they are at reviewing. Of course, I always kind of know in my mind who the good reviewers are and who the not-so-good reviewers are.

TIPS

Ten DOs & DON'Ts of a Reviewer

1. Expertise.

If you are asked to review a paper, ensure that you have the expertise within at least one major area of the paper if not all areas of the paper. If you lack the necessary expertise, be direct in your response back to the editor. If you believe additional reviews are necessary, suggest a specific reviewer in a particular area. Aim at helping to continue the review process by offering these types of suggestions.

2. Conflict of Interest.

Do not accept a paper to review if you have a conflict of interest. This is crucial, as accuracy is needed in the review you are performing.

3. Review System.

Be sure to find a method of reviewing a paper that is not only efficient and effective but suits you best. If your best review system is too time-consuming for a review assignment at a given time, be transparent about that so another reviewer can be found.

4. Inherent Bias.

Do not accept a paper to review if you have an inherent bias towards one or more of the authors or one of the particular research areas within the paper. Make sure that your perspective does not inhibit you from performing an honest and objective review.

5. Confidentiality.

Be sure that all the information derived from the manuscript is considered and kept confidential. The information within the manuscript belongs to the authors in that form.

6. Responsive.

Do not ignore the inviting editor. Of course an accepted review assignment is preferred, but a declined invitation is also appreciated so the review process is not hindered and the editor can find a different reviewer. If an extension is needed, the time to ask for one is before the deadline occurs. Typically, reviewers are given two weeks to complete a review.

7. Constructive Criticism.

Be stern in your review and be sure to justify what you are putting down as the critiques of the article.

8. Do NOT Search for Fatal Flaws.

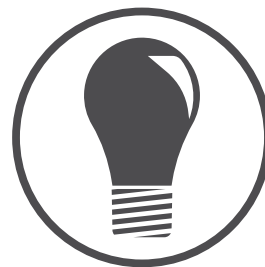
The main goal is to address major, moderate, and minor issues that you find with the science. If you are constantly looking for ways to debunk or reject the science, then you are not providing a proper review.

9. Journal Guidelines.

Have an acutely familiar understanding of the author guidelines set forth by the publisher for the specific journal you are handling. As a reviewer, you are also asking authors to adhere to the style guidelines of the journal.

10. Additional Critiques to Section Editors.

Do not be afraid to provide additional manuscript critiques directly to the Section Editor. There is a specific place to provide these when submitting your review so that the author does not see them. This allows you to provide more guidance and suggestions to the Section Editor when making a decision about the paper you have reviewed.



THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

A Reviewer's Take

Performing a Review

It is extremely important to remember that reviewing a paper can take several hours. Reviewers should only accept a review if they know that the necessary time can be dedicated to completing the review by the deadline. The reviewer is encouraged to add the review's deadline to his or her own calendar upon accepting the invitation to review.

When the time comes to perform a review, a reviewer should plan to dedicate 2-3 hours to the task. Reviews are best performed in a place with minimal distractions so the manuscript can be given a good read. For the first read, it is best to read the manuscript without writing anything down. This allows the reviewer to capture thoughts on a highlevel and prepare an overall paragraph that articulates what the reviewer got out of the paper's experimental objectives and main findings. This overview paragraph is also an opportunity to address any issues with document style, writing and grammar, flow, interpretation of findings, command of literature, and overall conclusions. This may also just be 3-5 bullet points or particular themes the reviewer has noticed in the overall manuscript.

After the first read, the reviewer is to then re-read the manuscript a second time for technical details and critiques of the science. This is the opportunity to mark up the paper with line-item input for the authors. With line-item input, the authors are able to interpret specific instruction and feedback from the reviewer with a specific reference to where it is located in the manuscript.

Things to Avoid in the Second Read

- Diving too deep into technical details such as grammar, spelling, style, etc. This ends up becoming overwhelming for the author. If there ends up being so many issues, it is best to recommend to the Section Editor the manuscript be rejected along with feedback.
- Spending too much time on a specific paper. It can be easy for a reviewer to go down reference rabbit holes. However, it is important to not spend an extensive amount of time dissecting everything.

- Providing broad or vague recommendations and critiques. Reviewers are to be very specific with their requests. If a particular line does not make sense. For example, it is better to provide a recommendation for how to rewrite a line to make a point clearer or for the author to provide a reference to support a particular claim.
- Suggesting that an author cite work from your own laboratory. A reviewer is chosen for the review due to expertise in his or her area, however, that does not mean the reviewer is the only expert in that area.

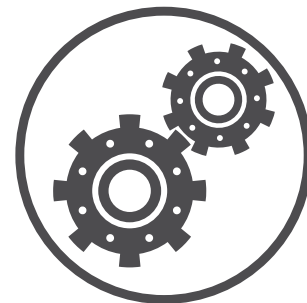
Fundamentals of Peer Review

Peer-review can be viewed as an implicit social contract to perform an independent evaluation of the science. It is done in a way that can protect identities and provide the freedom to express where improvements can or should be made. This also provides an opportunity to stop science that is believed to have a fatal flaw (something within it that is not quite accurate).

Not only does peer-review improve the quality of the publications, it also increases networking possibilities within specific research communities.

Little has changed with the peer-review process in the last 300 years. However, movements to increase transparency in the science is causing some shifts. Examples of such are: Open Access journals, open peer-reviews (where the reviewer's identity is revealed once the paper is published), and publicly accessible datasets and code used to analyze.

The concept of peer-review is simple but requires participation in order to remain sustainable. It is encouraged to review more papers than you publish.



WHAT MAKES FOR A GOOD REVIEW?

It is All About the Feedback

A good review is thorough, thoughtful, and provides timely feedback for the author. The review is also written in such a way that the Editor can easily render a decision whether to accept, request a revision, or reject the manuscript. Every review should include a recommendation along with feedback to support it.

Feedback should be honest and straightforward critiques of the science without disenfranchising the author. Reviewers must keep in mind that there are ways to deliver bad news so that it does not hinder the author from maintaining his or her passion for science. Even if the manuscript contains fatal flaws, the critique should still be made in a positive manner and include suggestions for the authors.

Good reviews are to always include feedback to the Editor directly. This is feedback that could potentially come off negatively to the authors, but is only for the Editor to see. This gives reviewers the opportunity to be direct and even more honest with the Editors about recommendations on any given manuscript.

When reviewers submit their reviews, Editorial Manager has a special section in the review submission to include notes just for the Editor.

One of the most important things for a reviewer to remember is to treat all manuscripts in the same manner that he or she would want his own submissions to be treated. That includes how feedback is provided, the timeliness of the review, and in confidentiality.

Key Points for a Good Review

1. Provide constructive criticism and feedback that is thorough and thoughtful.
2. Offer suggestions for critiques; be kind.
3. Always provide comments directly to the Editor along with your recommendation.
4. Provide reviews in a timely manner.
5. Treat all manuscripts in the same manner you would want your own to be treated.

Q & A with Reviewer Ryan N. Dilger, PhD

Transcribed from Presentation on July 21, 2020 at 12:30 PM CST

Can you elaborate on what you mean by not looking for fatal flaws in the research?

A fatal flaw would be something that would prevent the science from moving forward. We often get too absorbed in looking for that one piece that makes the science imperfect, but we need to remember that no science is going to be absolutely perfect.

How long does it typically take for you to review a manuscript that is in your area of expertise versus a paper that is not necessarily in your area, but you are familiar with? Is it normal to research other papers and learn from quick reading to be able to give a good review?

It comes back to the concept that we are not experts in every topic. To be a good reviewer, you may have to become familiar with the literature to understand what the norms and best practices in a particular area of science are, and you may have to bolster your own expertise in that area. That is what we do as scientists, we are always learning and growing.

From that perspective it does take longer if it is not in your area of interest or expertise. That is why you must consider these things and read the abstract before accepting an invitation to review. If you end up believing that you are not strong enough in a number of areas, then you should decline a review invitation. It definitely takes longer to complete a review if you are not an expert in the areas outlined in the paper.

Typically 1-2 hours to review a paper. If it is taking you 3 or more hours to review a paper, then it is probably because you are having to learn a lot more than you initially thought.

What advice would you give an author submitting their paper for the first time?

What your job is as the author is to make sure there is as little as possible that a reviewer could grab a hold of and criticize. Again, adhere to the style guidelines of the journal and maintain consistency in language and formatting.

Q & A with Reviewer Ryan N. Dilger, PhD (Continued...)

If a paper uses a given statistical method that you are unfamiliar with, how do you make sure that you are still providing a good review of that manuscript?

Again, we're not all experts in a given area. In these instances, you can reach out to the Section Editor and mention that you are not familiar with a given set of statistics and suggest that the manuscript might need a specific statistical review. This way, the Editor can reach out to a third or fourth reviewer on the paper and specifically on the statistical model section.

What are the major reasons you may suggest rejecting a paper outside of fatal flaws and scientific issues?

Because we are to be objective, we are to only be looking at the evidence provided in the manuscript. Sometimes there may be reasons related to conflict of interest, but there are policies outlining these potential issues so that they can be avoided.

Sometimes it can be difficult to identify whether a manuscript is in need of a major or minor revision. How can you better identify between these two when submitting your review?

Minor issues may be something as simple as changing a few words here or there, or it could be the interpretation of a particular piece of, or it could be something as simple as adding another table. Sometimes grammar and spelling can be an issues, but that does not need to be chalked up to individual instances, instead it could be summarized as needs to review grammar and spelling. For major issues, it may be something such as a fatal flaw that should be grounds for a major revision. It is ultimately subjective for how the reviewer determines something as major or minor and how you relay that to the Section Editor.

Is there an initial step(s) a graduate student should take in order to serve as a reviewer?

Excellent questions as we need more reviewers. Reaching out to your major advisor and they reach out to the Section Editors or even the Editor-in-Chief. Typically it is at the end of your PhD that you would have amassed enough expertise to be a good reviewer, but it is great to express that to a Section Editor and get you into the system.

Are you able to give examples of something that my be written in confidential comments to the Editor?

This is the concept that we have anonymity in submitting those comments to the Section Editor. When writing on the topic to the author it is best to submit that feedback in a proper, constructive way, but you can express the concerns to the Section Editor in its raw form and help emphasize the concerns that should be taken into consideration when making a decision.

How do you draw the line between spending too much time on a paper and getting too wrapped up in the science?

If you find yourself getting wrapped up in the literature and finding interest in the topic, do not count that against the paper. However, if you have spent a lot of time on a paper and there are a number of issues, that is when you need to draw the line and determine if there are too many issues for further consideration.

What has been the most rewarding part of being a reviewer?

The rewarding piece is getting to see all the science. The ability to see different perspectives and interpretations in science as well as the ebb and flow is I find rewarding. Then it is also the ability to share that with the graduate students in my laboratory.



WHAT DOES A PUBLISHER DO?

Publishing, Dissemination, and Archives

Elsevier's role as PSA's publisher is to manage and solicit manuscript submissions through Editorial Manager.

The publisher is also responsible for facilitating the peer review process by providing tools to help keep track of the review process. Additional tools are provided to report on manuscript submission numbers, rejection rates, and editorial times.

Once the peer review process is completed, the publisher then produces, edits, and prepares all manuscripts for distribution. Published articles are disseminated to the appropriate audiences through efforts by the publisher.

The publisher also archives and preserves all articles and issues of journals at independent location.



Q&A with Elsevier's Executive Publisher, Diana Jones

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I'm hesitant to upload an attachment as a reviewer because of the concern of metadata that would identify me as a reviewer. However, the process is supposed to be blind. Is there a legitimate concern?

Editorial Manager will automatically strip any identifying details including metadata from attachments.

What is the biggest cost factor associated with publishing an article considering the review process is on a volunteer basis.

It's really the sum of putting the article together, through typesetting and editing for example, and then marketing and disseminating it out to the right people.

What options are available for authors who may not have the best grasp on the English language?

Elsevier does offer a language editing service where the quality of the manuscript's English can be brought up to a level that peer reviewers feel they can better understand. Keeping in mind that the reviewer should not have to do language editing and reserves the right to send a manuscript back with those notes before giving a comprehensive review.



TIPS & TOOLS

for Peer Review from the Publisher

What to Consider Before Accepting or Declining an Invitation to Review

- Does the manuscript match your specific area of expertise? You should only accept the review invitation if you believe that you can provide a high-quality review.
- Is there a potential conflict of interest? If you believe there is a possible conflict of interest, you should disclose this to the Editor when you respond.
- Do you have the time to review and meet the deadline? Reviewing can be time-consuming work, before you accept an invitation, be sure that you can commit to meeting the deadline.

Once a reviewer has considered the invitation to review, it is best to respond as soon as possible, even if that response is to decline. A quicker response to the invitation helps the Section Editor find another reviewer sooner. This ensures the review process continues to move along.

Reviewers in need of help or guidance in their reviews will benefit from Elsevier's Researcher Academy. This resource provides a variety of beneficial and free tutorials on reviewing manuscripts as well as the peer review process.

Confidentiality

Reviewers must remember that documents being reviewed are confidential and should be treated as such. Information in submitted manuscripts cannot be shared with anyone without the permission of the Editor and the authors. Even once the review process is completed, reviewers are still to adhere to the confidentiality of the paper.

Structuring A Review

An invitation to review a manuscript will have instructions for how to complete the review. Reviewers should keep in mind that reviews should include comments that are courteous, constructive, and void of any personal details including the reviewer's name. The review is to be structured in a way that it helps the Editor make a decision on the paper and also helps the authors improve their manuscript.

Editorial Manager has a set list of questions for each reviewer to complete when submitting his or her review. These questions will be regarding the content and presentation of the manuscript, and there is an opportunity provide an evaluation on the paper's originality and value to the field.

A comments section to send feedback exclusively to the Editor will also be available. These comments will not be made available to the authors.

A Reviewer's Recommendation

There are three different recommendation options for a paper: Accept (without revision), Revise, and Reject.

- **Accept**
The paper is not in need of any revisions and can proceed to the Editor-in-Chief and then the publisher.
- **Revise**
Revisions are defined as either major or minor. The reviewer is to identify which applies to each reviewed manuscript and also note whether or not he or she is willing to review the revision. Revision recommendations are to include clear, sound explanations of why revisions are necessary and suggestions are encouraged.
- **Reject**
The reviewer must clearly explain the reasoning behind this recommendation.

