Assessing Reviews & Making Decisions

3 DAYS  1 - 2 WEEKS  2 - 3 WEEKS  3 DAYS

Initial Evaluation  Finding & Securing Reviewers  Manuscript with Reviewers  Decision

Repeat for Each Revision Cycle

Key Takeaways & Contents

→ You’ll receive the reviews in a structured form. There may be discrepancies in reviewer feedback.
   Go to: Assessing & Adjudicating Reviewer Feedback

→ There are four available decisions. See a guide for when to choose each one and what happens next.
   Go to: Making Your Editorial Decision

→ A good decision letter provides the authors with clear context to the reviewers’ comments and the reasoning behind your decision.
   Go to: The Decision Letter
ASSESSING & ADJUDICATING REVIEWER FEEDBACK

PLOS uses a structured reviewer form to help reviewers focus on our publication criteria. You’ll receive their reviews in the same structured format.

We provide guidelines for PLOS Water reviewers. The journal-agnostic PLOS Peer Review Center also hosts free training and resources for peer reviewers.

Peer review is an opportunity for scientific debate. It’s likely that you’ll encounter a situation where a review is unfocused or where two or more reviewers disagree on what the outcome should be for a manuscript.

In these situations, you have the authority as Academic Editor to contextualize the reviews and issue decisions. In these situations we recommend you:

- Decide which reviewer comments are necessary for the authors to address in order to meet the publication criteria and which are not essential. Do not edit the reviewer comments directly; in your comments explain to authors which parts of the review they can disregard.
- Give weight to reviewer comments based on individual expertise. If the reviewers you’ve selected have specialized backgrounds that may be better suited to address some aspects of the paper more than others, assess their feedback on those aspects accordingly.
- If you cannot make a decision on your own, consider asking the reviewers to expand their comments or, as a last resort, seek help from an additional reviewer.

Find suggested actions and template text for common peer review situations in our Adjudicating Decisions Guide (PDF | Interactive).

Reach out to us at water@plos.org and our staff editors can provide guidance or help facilitate a consultation with another Editorial Board member.
MAKING YOUR EDITORIAL DECISION

Combine your assessment of the reviewer feedback with the *PLOS Water* publication criteria to issue a decision. In your decision letter you will frame reviewer comments to provide context for the authors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Options</th>
<th>Render this decision if...</th>
<th>What happens next</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Revision</strong></td>
<td>The manuscript has the potential to be published but may not be accepted if the authors do not address substantive issues.</td>
<td>Authors have 45 days to revise and resubmit. When you receive the revision, you may choose to re-invite the original reviewers for another look or proceed to a final decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minor Revision</strong></td>
<td>The manuscript is suitable for publication but needs some minor adjustments.</td>
<td>Authors have 45 days to revise and resubmit. Upon resubmission, you verify that requested changes were made and usually accept the manuscript.</td>
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| **Accept*** | The manuscript is appropriate for publication exactly as is.  
* All manuscripts require at least one external review before an accept decision can be issued | The manuscript is sent to production and published. |
| **Reject*** | The manuscript does not meet the publication criteria or requires substantial changes.  
*If appropriate, you may issue a reject decision but encourage the authors to resubmit after substantial revision | No further action required unless authors request an appeal.  
*If you invited the authors to resubmit and they chose to do so, the manuscript is considered a new submission. We will first approach you to be the Academic Editor before inviting others. |
After the authors return a revised manuscript, you may determine that:

→ The manuscript is ready for publication and issue an accept decision.

→ The authors have not adequately responded to the comments from the previous round of review and issue another revision decision or a rejection.

→ The submission should be sent back to reviewers for further input before making a decision. (Try to avoid inviting new reviewers at this point unless it is absolutely necessary)

We recommend that you aim for no more than two rounds of revision.

THE DECISION LETTER

The decision letter provides critical guidance to the authors on the next steps with their manuscript. We provide template decision letters in Editorial Manager that contain journal requests and auto-populate reviewer comments, but it is your responsibility to customize these letters with context to the reviewer comments and reasoning behind your decision.

In all Minor Revision, Major Revision, and Reject decision letter templates you will see placeholder text as abbreviated below. You must replace this text with your own comments:

ACADEMIC EDITOR: Please insert comments here and delete this placeholder when finished. [...] = == == == == == == == == == == == == == == == == == == ==

A good decision letter:

- Keeps the authors in mind - What kind of constructive feedback would you like to receive if you were the author?

- Gives context to the reviews - Call attention to or note disregard of specific comments as appropriate. Reviewers also receive a copy of your decision letter. Your comments are helpful for reviewers to understand your reasoning.
• Provides clear direction for the authors to action - Indicate which comments are essential for the authors to address and which are optional prior to publication. Authors should be able to revise the manuscript based on the guidance of your decision letter and if they do so appropriately, the manuscript should be suitable for publication.

• Makes clear which publication criteria the manuscript fails to meet - A clear explanation in a reject decision provides finality or guidance on how to substantially revise and resubmit as a new submission.

Setting Expectations

→ You are expected to handle manuscripts through to a final decision (reject or accept). If you are not able to complete your assignment(s) for any reason, please let us know as soon as possible by contacting water@plos.org.

→ Journal staff conduct routine review of decisions to ensure transparency and high quality feedback. We may reach out about decision letters especially if perceived conflicting interests are noticed, there are no reviews on an Accept decision, or other clear policy violations.

→ Authors can opt-in to publish their peer review history alongside their accepted manuscript. If they do so, your decision letter will be published, along with any peer review comments, and the author responses for each revision.

More Resources for Editors

Need help? Contact water@plos.org