

From Review to Publication : The Manuscript Review and Response Process

When the journal receives a submission, the editor will review for applicability to the journal and put the manuscript through the “plagiarism” or overlap detection process. The editor may “reject” the manuscript outright, particularly if plagiarism is suspected, it is very poorly written or is not a fit (sometimes because the topic has been saturated). Otherwise, the editor may recommend more work before peer review or submit it for peer review.

Typically, at least two reviewers are assigned. They are asked to review the manuscript by a given date, responding to standardized questions and adding comments. In general, the editor and peer reviewers consider issues such as the ones bulleted below. They recommend ultimately the work be accepted, accepted with revision, or rejected.

- Is the topic important, timely, relevant?
- Is the background, review of literature, discussion, and other coverage adequate?
- Is there a logical organization of ideas/content?
- Is there congruence and fit between the components?
- Is the overall writing style clear and consistent?

My experience is that immediate acceptance without any questions or suggested revisions is rare. Most reviewer requests for edits can run from very minor changes to major revisions (at least from the author’s perspective). Take a deep breath and review the feedback, even if acceptance is based on pending response to questions or edits. THIS IS USUAL. All authors must be prepared for constructive criticism during the peer review process. Often, if you review all the feedback carefully, you will see it is not as onerous as originally thought. Minor edits or grammatical errors are easily fixed.

In the event you are asked for revisions, a deadline is usually given. Carefully consider recommendations. Consult the editor for areas of misunderstanding or conflicting feedback. You can question any recommended changes. In responding, you can also identify review recommendations which are not accurate, whether it is a grammatical or factual issue. Remember, this is your work and the editor will entertain your feedback in how, if at all, revisions are appropriate.

The image on the following page is something that I created for my use when responding to peer review comments. The second column in the table includes typical feedback from peer reviewers, such as a request to reword a paragraph for clarity, question of some factual detail, and recommendation to reorder paragraphs for clarity. It allows me to gather the questions or comments in one area with space to document what, if any, changes I made based on recommendations. When I resubmit, I upload this table to facilitate the editor’s review.

Remember that during the submission process you attested the manuscript was not submitted elsewhere. While it is in review, that agreement must be honored. If the manuscript is rejected, you may choose to submit it elsewhere. If you choose not to consider the peer review feedback, you must let the editor know you are withdrawing it.

Feedback	Plan	Edits
Feedback #1	Reword paragraph xyz	Section edited to reflect suggested changes
Feedback #2	Discuss with editor, believe correct as written	No changes made. Reviewed content and stand by as written
Feedback # 3	Move this section to beginning of the project description	Reordered content in this section. See line 385

Copy-Editing Period

Once the editor has reviewed your feedback and/or edits, a notice will be received regarding the final decision—hopefully that it is accepted. Once that happens, the manuscript goes into a series of steps to prepare for a specific issue. During this time, the article is type-set and copy-edited. This can take weeks or months after your acceptance notice.

Once it is type-set, a copyeditor may contact you to question or confirm some details detected in the new “article” format. For instance, they may question a word, an abbreviation, or spelling. They may have detected a missing reference or citation. Usually this is VERY minor, and they are asking for a quick turnaround as the article is being readied to go in an issue. If you are swamped with other responsibilities and cannot meet the deadline, let them know immediately. But do respond as this is a critical part of the editorial process intended to improve your work in a new layout. The fact that they use copyeditors to double check material once the manuscript has been formatted as an “article” is a badge of a good publisher.

Being published is a big deal. You spend a lot of time on the manuscript. Editors and volunteer reviewers spend a lot of time to provide feedback. This is an important mark of professionalism and each step, from identifying a topic to being published, helps you get your work visible to hundreds or thousands of readers. A small minority of any profession achieves professional publication. At this point, self-congratulate, celebrate, and start thinking of your next effort!