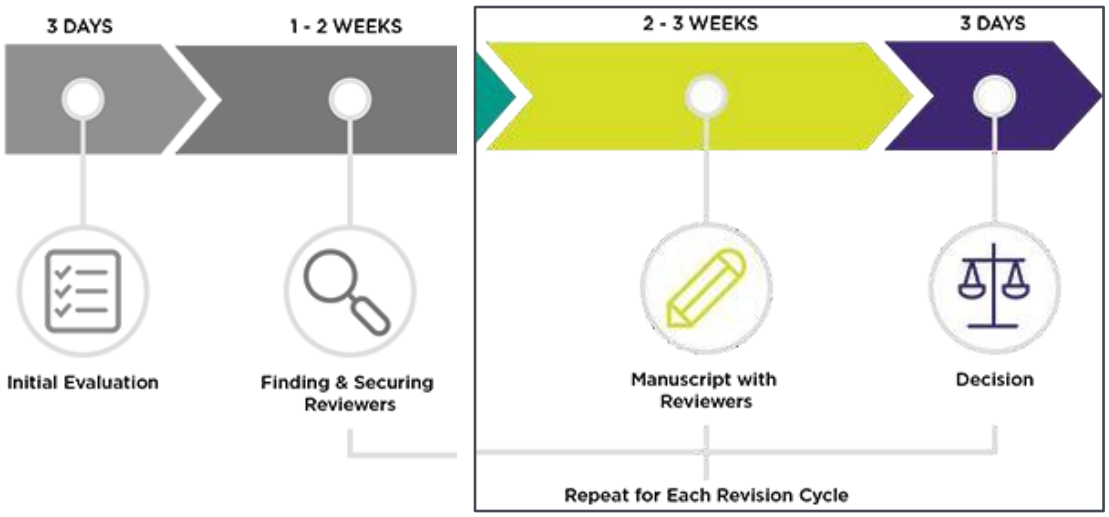
Quick Guide

Assessing Reviews & Making Decisions

Applies to: ***PLOS Complex Systems*** | ***PLOS Computational Biology*** | ***PLOS Digital Health*** | ***PLOS Genetics*** | ***PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*** | ***PLOS Pathogens*** | ***PLOS Sustainability and Transformation***



Key Takeaways & Contents

- You will receive the reviews in a structured form. There may be discrepancies in reviewers' feedback. [**Go to**: Assessing & Adjudicating Reviewer Feedback]
- There are four main 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 reviewers, including what to consider for different article types. To see what reviewers are asked to evaluate, visit the Guidelines for Reviewers page for your journal. 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 are **split** 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 avoid considering the reviews as votes to be tallied and instead:

- **Decide which reviewer comments are necessary** for the authors to address 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 report they can disregard at the same time respecting the reviewer's integrity.
- **Give weight to reviewer comments** based on individual expertise. If a reviewer you've selected has a specialized background 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. You can send emails to the reviewers directly from the **Send E-Mail** action link on the manuscript.

Find suggested actions and template text for common peer review situations in our interactive Editor's Guide to Adjudicating Decisions.

If you need a second opinion, open a discussion with the Section Editor. Instructions on how to open and participate in a discussion are in our Guide to Editorial Manager.

What types of ethical issues should Academic Editors watch for during peer review? Consult our Publication Ethics FAQs for Editorial Board Members

Making Your Editorial Decision

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

Decision Options	Render this decision if…	What happens next
Major Revision	The manuscript has the potential to be published but may not be accepted if the authors do not address substantive issues.	Authors have 60 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.
Minor Revision	The manuscript is suitable for publication but needs some minor adjustments.	Authors have 30 days to revise and resubmit. Upon resubmission, you verify that requested changes were made and usually accept the manuscript.
Accept*	The manuscript is appropriate for publication exactly as is.	The manuscript is sent to production and published.

Reject and Transfer	The manuscript is better suited to another PLOS journal. You will select which journal you are recommending transfer to.	Authors may choose to accept or decline the transfer. The PLOS office will review and facilitate the transfer.
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 handle the submission before inviting others.

R1+ manuscripts: After the authors return a revised manuscript, you may determine that:

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

b) The original reviewers should be re-invited to the revision for further input before making a decision. (Try to avoid inviting new reviewers at this point unless it is absolutely necessary)

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

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

After the authors submit their revision, the manuscript goes to the journal office for a technical check and temporarily disappears from your account. **You will receive an automated email once the manuscript is back in your account and ready for you to take the next action**.

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.

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 the journal office.

- **You may encounter publication ethics concerns in the review process including excessive self-citation requests.** We expect you to notify PLOS in these situations, add a note to the decision letter that including the requested citations is not a requirement for publication, and do not reinvite these reviewers to review future manuscripts.

- Journal staff conduct routine review of decisions to ensure transparency and high-quality feedback. We may reach out about decision letters especially if perceived competing 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.

- **Reviewers also receive a copy of your decision letter**.

Links to more Resources for Editors

PLOS Complex Systems | *PLOS Computational Biology* | *PLOS Digital Health* | *PLOS Genetics* | *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* | *PLOS Pathogens* | *PLOS Sustainability and Transformation*

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