PLOS Section Editor Guide

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

Contents

SECTION EDITOR ROLE

Section Editors (SEs) are an integral part of the journal and its operation. They are experts in the fields of research they serve, experienced in the peer review process, ambassadors for Open Science, and active participants in their communities. Section Editors lead the subject sections within the journal scope and advise a group of Academic Editors with expertise in their discipline.

SEs oversee a greater number of manuscripts than Academic Editors (AEs) but are not required to take a hands-on role in the review process. The invitation process works differently as well: Section Editors are not "invited" but are assigned incoming manuscripts in their area of expertise by the staff.

The SE position requires less hands-on time with manuscripts, but it is a role with a greater degree of responsibility and authority. The final decision on manuscript acceptance lies with the Section Editor, and we rely heavily on our Section Editors to resolve difficult issues, provide advice to their fellow Section Editors, and to assist us in preventing delays caused by unresponsive Academic Editors or reviewers.

To foster a partnership between the journal and the research community, Section Editors strive to:

Edit

- Assess the quality and scope of new submissions within three days

- Secure an Academic Editor or Guest Editor on manuscripts as needed

- Submit a decision within three days of receiving a recommendation

- Adhere to editorial best practices

Advise

- Provide counsel on journal policies, including scope, research ethics, community standards, and reporting guidelines within their discipline

- Advise on the suitability of a manuscript for publication at any stage of the peer review process and in relation to any aspects covered by the publication criteria (scope, study design, ethics, etc.) within their discipline

- Adjudicate on difficult editorial decisions and advise in appeals as needed

Lead

- Act as a leader or co-leader of a section

- Support and advise Academic Editors in their section in editorial decision making and more broadly by providing editorial guidance

- Assist in the editorial development of their section and the journal as a whole, including content curation, solicitation of submissions and selection of content for promotion within their disciplines

- Recommend potential candidates with expertise in their discipline to serve as Academic Editors

Represent

- Actively promote and maintain the integrity, reputation and high editorial standards of the journal

- Liaise with journal staff, Editorial Board members, and in the community as the voice of their section

Ambassadorship

Our editors are PLOS ambassadors who are empowered to use their expertise to spread awareness of our mission and values in the global research community, forge inclusive relationships, guide and encourage a diverse group of prospective and current contributors, reflect community needs, and increase goodwill.

Code of Conduct

In addition to these role expectations, all editors adhere to PLOS's Code of Conduct for Editorial Board Members.

🖱 **Navigating Editorial Manager: Getting Started**

Login

- Log in to Editorial Manager:

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

  When you joined the Editorial Board, the Editorial Board Services team set up your profile with Editor permissions.

- Enter your Username and Password and click **Editor Login** to access your editor mainmenu.

*If you log into EM as a reviewer or author, you can change your role to Section Editor using the **Role** drop down menu after clicking on your name in the top navigation bar.*

Indicate Your Areas of Expertise

This step is critical to help match submissions to your areas of expertise. **Personal Classifications** and **Personal Keywords** help guide invitations.

- Click on your name in the top navigation bar then **Update My Information**

- Navigate to **Areas of Interest or Expertise** and indicate your areas of expertise using **Personal Classifications** and **Personal Keywords**.

- Click **Select Personal Classifications**.

- This will ask you to select terms from a pre-defined taxonomy. You can browse the taxonomy or use the search bar to find and select available terms.

- When you've found your term, select it and click **Add ->** to add it to your Selected Classifications. This will also select and add the higher-level terms above them.
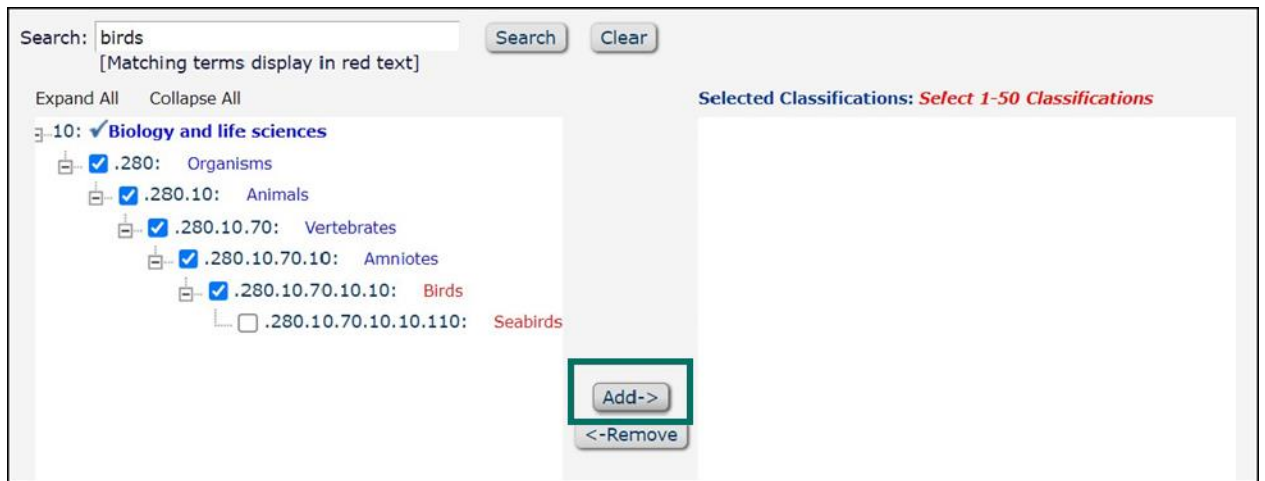
- You must click **Submit** to save changes.

- If a term is not available in the **Classifications**, you can add free text **Personal Keywords** by clicking the **Edit Personal Keywords** button.
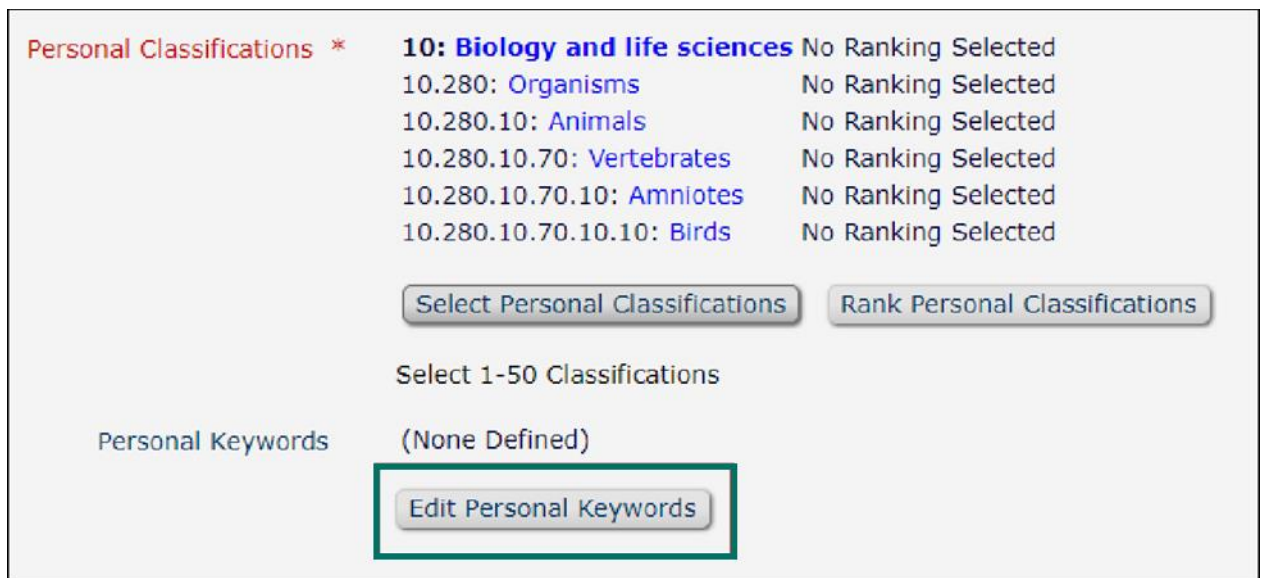
- Type free text into the **New Keyword** box then click **Add**.

- These terms save as they are added so you can close the window as normal when you are done.

ORCID

In the **Personal Information** section you can link your ORCID to your Editorial Manager account. Clicking **Fetch/Register** will open a new window where you can login to ORCID and authorize.

Personal and Institution Related Information

You can update your personal information at any time. Required fields are in red text and have an asterisk next to the label. You must click **Submit** at the bottom of the page to save changes.

Unavailable Dates

In the **Additional Information** section at the bottom of the page you have the option to select **Unavailable Dates**. Use these when you will be away, very busy, or otherwise unavailable to accept new invitations. Please indicate if you are available to handle the revised submissions you have already been working on.

- Click **Unavailable Dates.**

- Click **Add New Unavailable Date**.

- Add in a **Start Date**, **End Date**, and **Reason,** specifying whether you can handle revisions of your current assignments. You must click **Submit** to save changes. You do not have to enter any substitutes.

THE EDITORIAL PROCESS

Assignment to a SE

Reject Before Review or Reviewers Invited

Review Process

Initial Assessment by the SE

Initial Assessment by AE

AE Submits Decision

Reject Before Review *or* AE Invited

AE Assigned

SE Reviews Decision and Sends to Authors
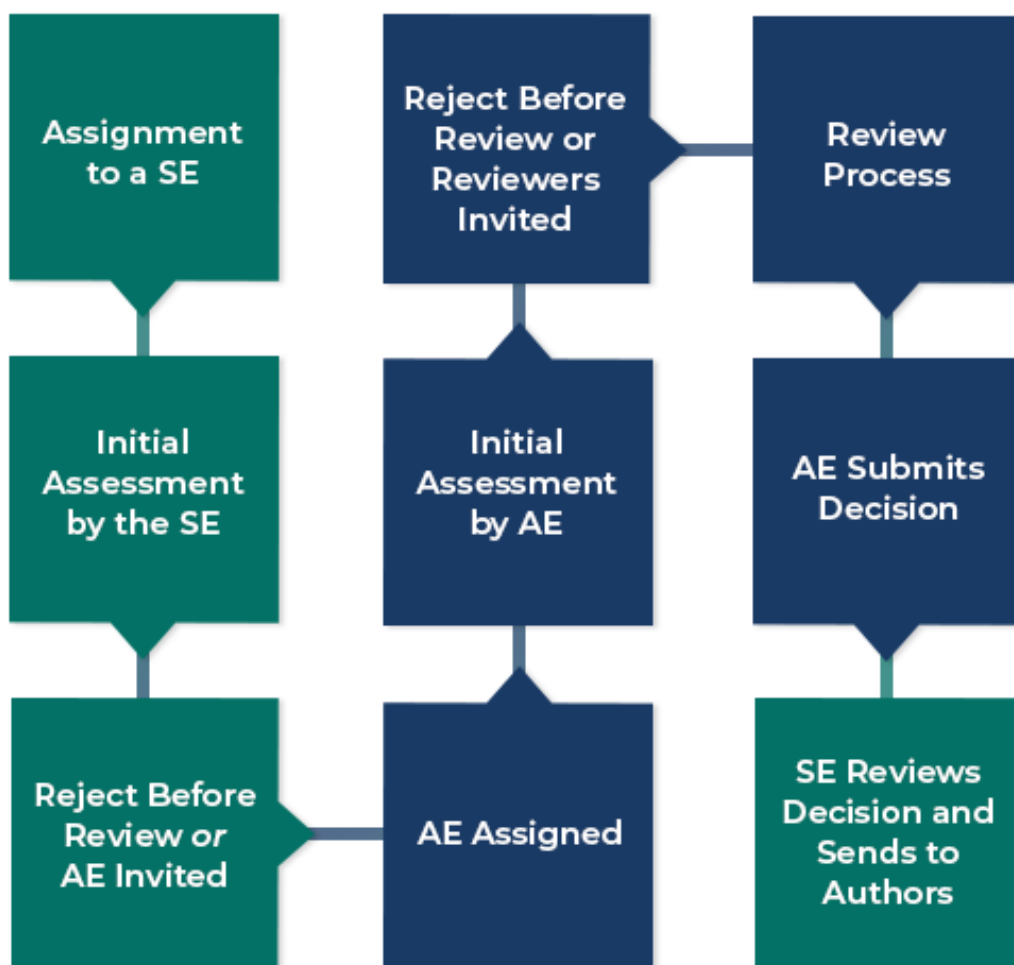
■ - Section Editors
■ - Academic Editors

Assignment to a SE

- The PLOS journal team assigns papers direct to Section Editors (SEs) based on the section you are in and the number of papers you are already handling.

- You will receive an email notification if a new submission has been assigned to you.

We distribute assignments among Section Editors to maintain equity across the section. Please email the journal office for reassignment if:
- You feel a manuscript is too far outside of your area of expertise
- You are currently handling too many assignments
- You have a real or perceived competing interest
- You cannot handle the paper for other reasons

Navigating Editorial Manager: Finding Your Assignment

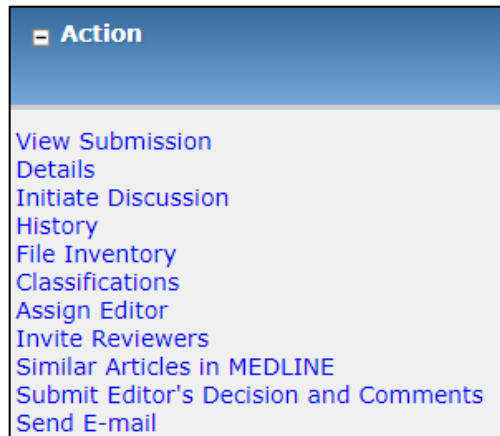- Log in to Editorial Manager:

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

- You will find all of your Pending Assignments in the **Editor 'To-Do' List** section of your **Section Editor Main Menu**. Click on the relevant link to access your manuscript assignments.

Navigating Editorial Manager: Manuscript Actions

> **▬ Action**
>
> View Submission
> Details
> Initiate Discussion
> History
> File Inventory
> Classifications
> Assign Editor
> Invite Reviewers
> Similar Articles in MEDLINE
> Submit Editor's Decision and Comments
> Send E-mail

- **View Submission** is where you download the full submission PDF.
  - You can access high-resolution versions of each figure by selecting the blue link at the top of the page each figure appears on.

    > Click here to access/download;Figure;Fig 1.tif ⬆

  - You can find Supporting Information files and Related Manuscripts (if included) via blue links at the end of the submission PDF.

- **Details:** This page contains information about the manuscript including "Information for Editor" notes from the journal office, authors, keywords, abstract, reviewer statuses, and more.

- **Initiate Discussion:** Open a discussion with other members of the Editorial Board to solicit their advice. More details on this action.

- **History:** This page contains a chronological listing of the manuscript's status and correspondence history.

- **Assign Editor:** Use this link to invite Academic Editors (AEs). More details on this action.

- **Invite Reviewers**: Used by AEs to find, secure, and manage reviewers.

- **Submit Editors Decision and Comments:** On this page that you will issue your Decision - either reject before review or after the AE's decision has come to you for approval.

Initial Assessment by the SE

- After assignment, conduct an independent assessment of the manuscript to decide whether the manuscript fits within the journal scope and publication criteria.

- Ideally, you will issue an initial decision within **48 hours** of a paper being assigned to you although this may take longer, particularly if there are editorial discussions

At this stage you can take one of the following actions:

a) Issue a Reject decision

b) Invite Academic Editors

c) Initiate a discussion

Navigating Editorial Manager: Reject Before Review

- Click **Submit Editor's Decision and Comments** from the manuscript Action links.

- Select your Decision - either **Reject** or **Reject and Transfer** - and add comments to clarify your reject decision in the **Comments to Author** section. These will automatically pull into the decision letter. Click **Proceed** and then **Proceed** again.
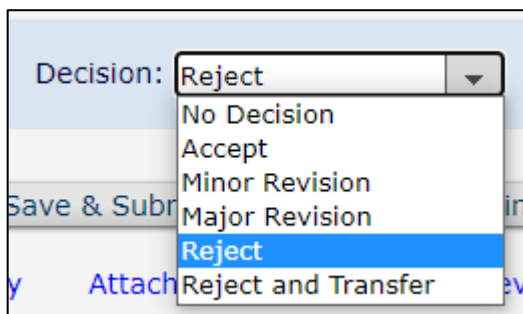
> 💡 If you select **Reject and Transfer** you will also have to select which PLOS journal you are recommending transfer to.

- This will take you to the decision letter templates. Select the **Reject Before Review** letter in the **Modify Letter** dropdown.

Modify Letter:	Reject Before Review (No Transfer) ▼
	Reject After Review (No Transfer)
Letter Subject:	Presubmission Inquiry Reject
	Reject Before Review (No Transfer)

- Read the decision letter at the bottom of the page to ensure it is accurate and that your comments have been pulled in correctly. If you did not add your comments to the Comments for Author box, you can edit the letter to add them now. Be sure to remove the placeholder text.

- When you are ready, click **Send Now** to send the decision letter to the authors.

Navigating Editorial Manager: Inviting Academic Editors

- If the manuscript fits within the journal scope and meets the publication criteria you will send it on to an Academic Editor (AE) from the Editorial Board.

- Click **Assign Editor** from the manuscript action links.

- Choose an AE or Guest Editor (GE) using the search fields (first or last name, email, Personal Classifications, etc.)

> 💡 Consider an AEs workload in the **Current Assignments** and **Open Invitations** columns and their availability in the **Available during next 7 days** column. Do not invite an AE or GE if they are already handling a high volume or are unavailable.

- Choose the editors you would like to invite by checking the box next to their name, customize the invitation order, and then **Add to Queue**. We recommend selecting at least 3 or 4 editors to invite.

Select	Invitation Order	Editor Role
☑	1	Academic Editor
☑	2	Academic Editor
☑	3	Guest Editor

- Click **Submit Queue without Customizing Letters** to send standard invitations or **Customize Letters & Submit Queue** if you would like to modify the invitation templates.

- EM will invite the first Editor to the paper immediately and the next will be invited when the first declines, or when 2 days have passed, whichever happens first. When someone agrees, all existing invitations will be closed and the editors notified.

- If an Editor declines you will receive an email with any comments they supplied.

> If there isn't an AE with the time or appropriate expertise and you know of someone who would be suitable, contact the journal office with their **name** and **email address**. We will reach out to them about joining the Board as either an Academic Editor or Guest Editor to handle the manuscript.

Navigating Editorial Manager: Initiating a Discussion

- To begin a discussion select **Initiate Discussion** from the Action links of the paper.

- If the paper has previous discussions, Initiate Discussion will be replaced with **Discussion** and you will be taken to an intermediary page. On this page you will need to click **Start New Topic**

- Once you have initiated the discussion or started a new topic you will see the discussion box. There is no need to choose a template. Fill out the **Topic** and then your **Initial Comments**.

- Once your comments are ready you can add other participants via the search function. It is best to search via last name or email. When you have found the people you are looking for, tick the box next to their name. Then click **Proceed to Customize Letters**.

  - Do not select **Start Discussion Without Sending Letters**. If this is selected the discussion will start but no one will be notified and you may not get a response.

- Then select **Confirm Selections and Proceed.**
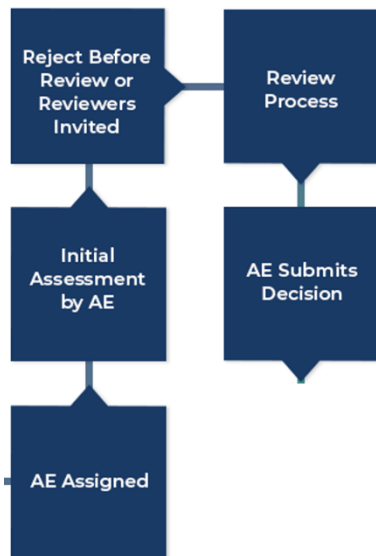
AE Responsibilities

- Academic Editors are responsible for conducting an initial assessment of their own where they too can decide whether to reject without review or invite reviewers. If they decide to send out for peer review, they are then responsible for finding and securing reviewers, and evaluating reviewer comments to issue a decision. Read more about Academic Editor actions and advice in our Academic Editor Guide

- During this time you may be consulted if the AE has additional questions. For example, fit to scope of the journal, advice on conflicting reviews, etc.
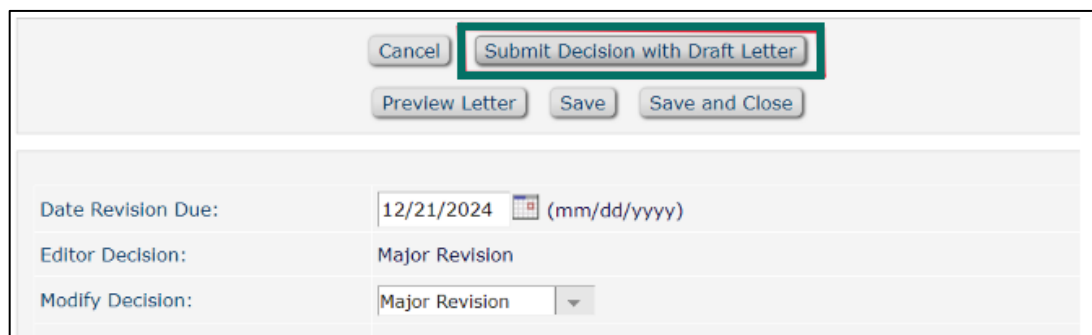
SE Reviews Decision and Sends to Authors

- All draft AE decisions will be sent to you for approval.

Navigating Editorial Manager: Reviewing Academic Editor Decisions

- Decisions ready for review will be in your **Submissions with Required Reviews Complete** folder on your main menu. Please action these within 48 hours.

- Select **Submit Editor's Decision and Comments** from the action links.

- This next screen shows you the decision letter the Academic Editor submitted.

- Please read the decision letter at the bottom of the page to ensure it is accurate and all relevant editor and reviewer comments have been pulled in correctly.

- If the paper is being rejected please double check that the correct letter template (before or after review) has been used.

- If you do not agree with the AE decision or would like to discuss anything with them, please initiate a discussion with the AE.

- When you are ready:

  o For **Major** or **Minor Revision** decisions, select **Submit Decision with Draft Letter** so the journal office can include specific technical requests to the authors

  o For **Accept**, **Reject**, and **Reject and Transfer** decisions, click **Send Now** to send the decision letter directly to the authors

Revisions

- When authors submit their revised manuscript, it will be automatically assigned back to the AE.

- You will be notified once the AE has submitted a decision on the revision. At this stage, you should follow the same process [as above.](#)

> If the AE is unavailable we may contact you via discussion for help to keep the paper moving (e.g. inviting the previous reviewers)
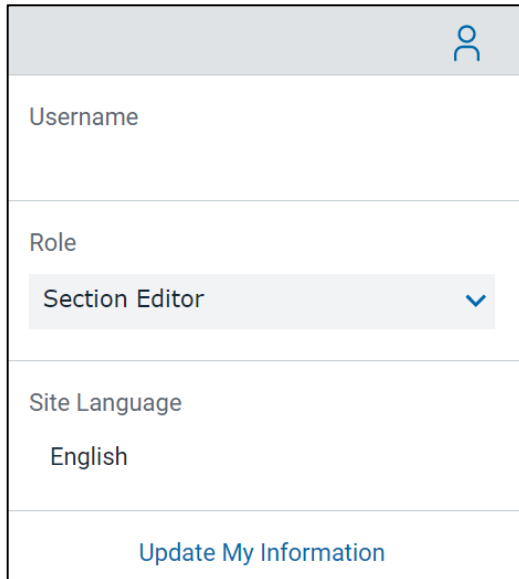
Appeals

- Occasionally, authors will choose to appeal a decision to reject a paper. These requests must go through the journal office, so if you receive any direct queries, please pass them on to us.

- As a general policy, apart from in special cases, we do not reconsider manuscripts that have been rejected before peer review.

- Appeals for manuscripts that are rejected after review are passed to you and the AE who handled the paper. This will be in the form of a discussion and you and/or the AE just need to let us know whether you'd be willing to reconsider the manuscript. PLOS will handle all correspondence with the author.
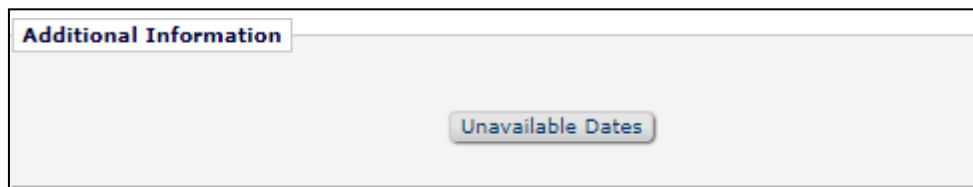
Navigating Editorial Manager: Setting Unavailable Dates

- Set unavailability by going to **Update My Information** after clicking on your name in the top navigation bar.

- Scroll down to the **Additional information** section and input dates via the **Unavailable Dates** button. No new manuscripts will be assigned at this time.

POLICIES

Competing Interests and Ethical Publishing Practice

- If you become aware of a possible breach of an editorial or publishing policy, please notify the journal team immediately.

Competing Interests **for Editors and reviewers**

Editors (professional or academic, paid or unpaid) and reviewers must declare their own competing interests, and if necessary disqualify themselves from involvement in the assessment of a manuscript.

Common reasons for editors and reviewers to recuse themselves from the peer review process may include but are not limited to:

- They work at the same institution or organization as an author, currently or recently

- They collaborate with an author, currently or recently

- They have published with an author during the past 5 years

- They have held grants with an author, currently or recently

- They have a financial relationship with the company who funded the research

- They have a personal relationship with an author that does not allow them to evaluate the manuscript objectively

Code of Conduct for Editorial Board Members

- PLOS Editorial Board members follow the Code of Conduct for Editorial Board Members, all PLOS Editorial and Publishing Policies, and the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers,.

Flagging Issues to Staff

- Please forward any correspondences that occur outside of Editorial Manager with authors to journal staff that requires attention

- o Appeals - This is to help maintain proper records of appeals and author correspondences and ensure that you have the support of the journal when dealing with tricky situations

- o Author ethics issues like suspected image manipulation or plagiarism

- During review, please notify staff if you have serious concerns over a reviewer's behavior or the content of their review.

- We appreciate it when you notify staff if you accept a paper that is particularly press-worthy or otherwise notable.

RESOURCE LINKS

PLOS COMPLEX SYSTEMS	PLOS COMPUTATIONAL BIOLOGY
Contact us: complexsystems@plos.org	Contact us: ploscompbiol@plos.org
Guidelines for Editors	Guidelines for Editors
Editorial Board	Editorial Board
Scope & Publication Criteria	Scope & Publication Criteria
Editorial and Publishing Policies	Editorial and Publishing Policies
Submission Guidelines	Submission Guidelines
Guidelines for Reviewers	Guidelines for Reviewers
Post-Publication Notices	Post-Publication Notices

PLOS DIGITAL HEALTH

Contact us: digitalhealth@plos.org

Guidelines for Editors

Editorial Board

Scope & Publication Criteria

Editorial and Publishing Policies

Submission Guidelines

Guidelines for Reviewers

Post-Publication Notices

PLOS GENETICS

Contact us: plosgenetics@plos.org

Guidelines for Editors

Editorial Board

Scope & Publication Criteria

Editorial and Publishing Policies

Submission Guidelines

Guidelines for Reviewers

Post-Publication Notices

PLOS NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

Contact us: plosntds@plos.org

Guidelines for Editors

Editorial Board

Scope & Publication Criteria

Editorial and Publishing Policies

Submission Guidelines

Guidelines for Reviewers

Post-Publication Notices

PLOS PATHOGENS

Contact us: plospathogens@plos.org

Guidelines for Editors

Editorial Board

Scope & Publication Criteria

Editorial and Publishing Policies

Submission Guidelines

Guidelines for Reviewers

Post-Publication Notices

PLOS SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSFORMATION

Contact us: sustaintransform@plos.org

Guidelines for Editors

Editorial Board

Scope & Publication Criteria

Editorial and Publishing Policies

Submission Guidelines

Guidelines for Reviewers

Post-Publication Notices