How to Manage Scientific Review Requests

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Advancing scientific knowledge and maintaining the integrity of scientific literature relies on the peer review process. As stated in a National Academies' publication, *On Being a Scientist*, "The object of research is to extend human knowledge beyond what is already known.... But an individual's knowledge enters the domain of science only after it is presented to others in such a fashion that they can independently judge its validity."[1] Given the unprecedented growth of scientific article submissions, the peer review process is now under stress.

It is a commonly accepted notion that, to sustain a well-balanced peer review process, each author could positively contribute by reviewing at least twice the number of papers they publish in a year. However, the rise of submissions for publication means scientists receive increasing numbers of review requests per week from different journals. Most reviewers carefully manage their review load by accepting selected review requests and turning down requests that they cannot handle because of their busy schedules (Figure 1). Often these reviewers suggest a colleague or senior researcher as an alternative reviewer. The editors appreciate such a quick response of "Agree" or "Decline" to a review request.

Figure 1. Do not let multiple review requests swamp you. Manage your workload with a quick response of "Agree" or "Decline" to a review request. (Image produced using DALL·E 2.)

TRY NOT TO BE A MEGA REVIEWER

In recent years, a small number of reviewers appear to accept most of the review requests from journal editors and submit their reviews quite quickly. A recent analysis using the Publons database concluded that these so-called "Mega Reviewers" engage in reviewing 100−300 papers a year.[2] The obvious question is how a busy researcher can carry out a quality review with a review frequency of 2−6 papers per week! In fact, the study concluded that the reviews by Mega Reviewers demonstrate significantly different characteristics than those by a control group of peer reviewers.[2] The Publons data analysis also indicated that Mega Reviewers have "a significantly greater average number of total publications, citations, receipt of Publons awards, and a higher average *h*-index as compared to the control group of reviewers."[2] Our Editors at *ACS Energy Letters* are aware of such Mega Reviewers who may not provide unbiased and scientifically valid reviews.

BEST PRACTICES FOR RESPONDING TO A REVIEW REQUEST

ACS Publications follow guidance from the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), which provides standards in publications ethics practice.[3] Here are some best practices to exercise when you receive a review request from an editorial office (see also Figure 2):

1. **Accept** the review invitation only if the topic presented in the abstract fits, at least in part, your expertise, and you will be able to provide feedback in a timely fashion. You may request additional review time if you anticipate a delay in reviewing.

2. **Decline** a review request if you are currently reviewing several other papers. In such a case, it is also helpful to suggest alternate expert reviewer from your group or another institution.

3. If you are **seeking feedback** from a senior member of your group, please let the editorial office know, and we will reassign the manuscript to that fellow researcher. This will allow the reviewing person to get full credit for reviewing. (A less experienced reviewer may be
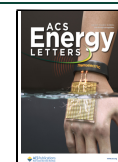
Figure 2. How to respond to a review request.

interested in attending the ACS Reviewer Lab, a free peer review training course offered by the American Chemical Society, that provides guidance to the next generation of reviewers.[5])

4. If you have any **conflict of interest** in reviewing (e.g., a paper from a collaborator, mentor, previous member of your group, etc.), you should decline the request and let the editorial office know the reason for the conflict.

5. **Maintain** confidentiality of the correspondence and the review process.

6. **Refrain** from using AI tools to review manuscripts. AI tools such as ChatGPT cannot serve as a reviewer. They merely tailor the response to the prompted positive or negative question, and the answers are driven by the content in the database.[6]

◼ EDITORS' PERSPECTIVE

Our Editorial Team makes every effort to seek reviewers who are experts in the desired discipline and carry a manageable review load.[4] We seek reviews from the preferred reviewer lists but also from other reviewers who can provide critical and unbiased reviews. If we cannot succeed in getting reviewers in the first round of review requests, we contact a second set of reviewers. Hence, responding to a review request immediately with an "Agree" or "Decline" response can minimize delays in the reviewing process. Our Editors welcome any suggestions for alternate reviewers.

It is quite frustrating when a reviewer agrees to review a manuscript but decides not to submit a review or not to respond to reminders. This inaction simply delays the review process. Once a review invitation is accepted, it is the expectation that the reviewer will submit the review in a timely manner. Reviewers should inform the editorial office if they need additional time. If the reviewer decides not to review the manuscript after accepting the invitation, the editorial office should be notified without further delay.

To all our authors, we would like to ensure you will be provided a fair review process.[7] As an author, if you have received a biased opinion, nonscientific remark, or a request to cite papers from a specific group or a journal in a review, please bring this aspect to the attention of the Editor. Please remember to provide a rebuttal to the points in the review you

(the author) disagree with. Editors will take such issues seriously and will likely not consider such reviewers for reviewing papers in the future.

On behalf of all our Editors, I would like to thank our reviewers for providing scientifically significant reports in a timely fashion. Indeed, we are grateful for all your volunteer service to the journal. Because of your prompt review responses, we can disseminate major findings in energy research with speed (average of 37 days from submission to acceptance). We look forward to working with our authors and reviewers.

Prashant V. Kamat, Editor-in-Chief ⦿ orcid.org/0000-0002-2465-6819

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https://pubs.acs.org/10.1021/acsenergylett.3c00993

Notes

◼ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

◼ REFERENCES

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