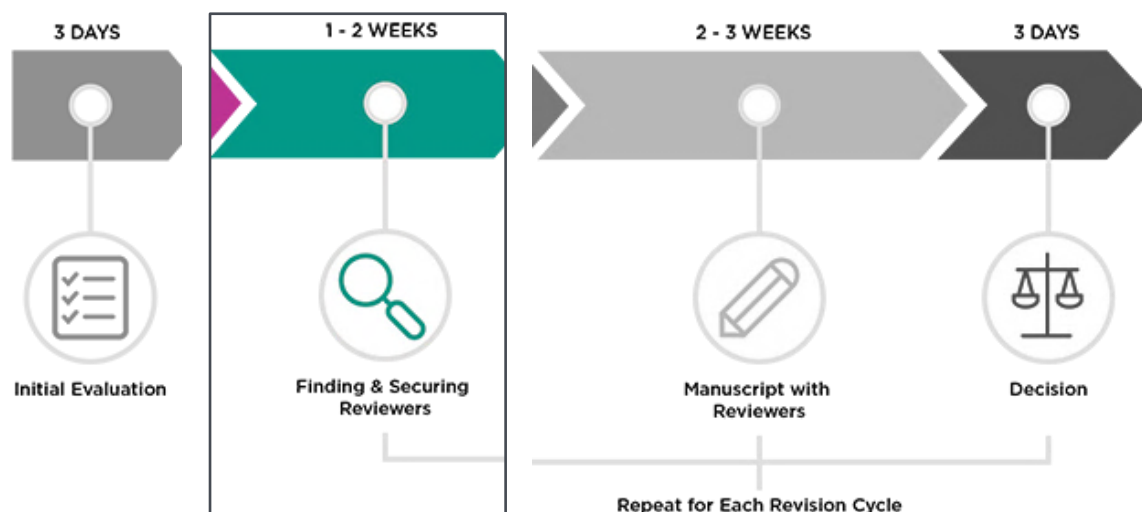


Finding and Securing Reviewers

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

- All accepted manuscripts must have external reviewer besides yourself. Suitable reviewers have expertise in the subject matter and methodology, are actively publishing, and are unbiased

Go to: [Suitable Reviewers](#)

- Securing reviewers can be challenging. Editorial Board members have identified strategies and tips that can help.

Go to: [Reviewer Invitation Tips from Editors](#)

- Reviewers are invited and invitations are managed in Editorial Manager

Go to: [Inviting Reviewers in Editorial Manager](#)

Suitable Reviewers

Suitable reviewers are those who can provide a qualified and unbiased assessment of the scientific rigor of the manuscript. Please ensure that you invite a reviewer or combination of reviewers that encompass the necessary expertise on both the topic and methods reported in the submission or, if necessary, thoroughly assess this yourself. **All manuscripts must be evaluated by external reviewers (preferably three) before they are accepted for publication.**

Suitable Reviewer Checklist

Appropriate Qualifications and Expertise

The below list provides general guidelines on what makes a suitable reviewer. See our [Additional Tips](#) below for further strategies that can help secure reviewers.

- ☐ Have published 5+ papers on the topic, preferably as corresponding or last author
- ☐ Have expertise in the research area and, if possible, also the methodology
- ☐ Are at the postdoctoral or equivalent degree level
- ☐ Are affiliated with an academic, government, not-for-profit, public/private research institution, or company

Avoid Competing Interests and Unbiased Perspectives - Required

The below list are items you **must** check for before inviting a reviewer to assess a manuscript. Read more about our policy on [Editor and Reviewer competing interests](#). We recommend you avoid inviting reviewers with a competing interest unless it is necessary (for example, to review a rebuttal). If you make an exception and choose to invite a reviewer with a competing interest, they must declare their competing interest(s) on the review form. You should also ensure that you receive input from at least one additional objective reviewer who does not have a competing interest.

- ☐ Do not work at the same institution as any of the authors
- ☐ Are not listed in the Opposed Reviewers section of the submission
- ☐ Have not collaborated or published with any of the author during the past 5 years
- ☐ Are not located at the same institution as another reviewer

Reviewer Invitation Tips from Editors

Generally speaking, Editorial Board members approach finding reviewers in three “stages.”

1. Researchers you know

Because they know you, it stands to reason they are more likely to accept an invitation to review. Additionally, you are familiar with their work and relevance to the paper. Just be mindful of [competing interests](#) and avoid over-relying on the same individuals across manuscripts.

2. Researchers whose work you know

These are people whose work you might know from the literature, conferences, etc. You may not know them personally, but you know their experience is on-topic for the manuscript.

3. Broader search

- The Web of Science Reviewer Locator tool can provide a list of suggested reviewers (be sure to run them through the [checklist](#) before inviting.)
- Using databases such as [PubMed](#), [Google Scholar](#), and [Web of Science](#), you can find articles similar to the one you’re working on and consider inviting the corresponding and/or last author.
- You can also check out the reference list in the article; just be mindful of [competing interests](#).

Additional Tips

- **Early career researchers** tend to have more time and willingness to review than senior researchers.
- **Personalizing** the invitation template can help secure reviewers.
- Setting up **alternate reviewers** saves you from multiple visits to EM. Alternate reviewers are automatically invited when a previous reviewer declines or doesn't respond. You can even link reviewers with similar expertise to each other.
- We encourage **co-reviewing** as a great way to gain peer review experience under the mentorship of an experienced reviewer. Consider inviting a more senior researcher with encouragement to co-review.
- Watch our [video](#) on how to use the free [Dimensions](#) tool to find reviewers

Best practices to encourage diverse perspectives:

- Avoid repeatedly going to a small pool of reviewers
- Approach reviewers outside your own institution where possible
- Utilize databases outside of Editorial Manager

See also our [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Guide](#)

Inviting Reviewers in Editorial Manager

All contact with reviewers occurs through Editorial Manager (EM). **EM is an uncuration database of contact information only; we do not recommend it be used to search.** If a reviewer already has an account in EM, you'll be able to see some basic statistics on their past contributions.

View the “Invite Reviewers” section of the [PLOS Academic Editor’s Guide to Editorial Manager](#) for screenshot steps to look up reviewers by email, check reviewer invitation statuses, and manage secured reviewers.

Setting Expectations

- **Securing reviewers can be challenging;** people are busy. Aim to start inviting reviewers as soon as possible. For every 8 reviewer candidates, expect to spend about an hour searching for them and navigating Editorial Manager.
- **Be sure to check your email.** All manuscript communications including reviewer status updates and important reminders occur over email. It’s your role as Academic Editor to manage the peer review process and ensure the timely securing of reviewers for the authors.

Frequently Asked Questions & Comments

How many reviewers should I invite at once?

We recommend inviting 8 reviewers the first round and queueing the rest as alternates. Editorial Manager will check the status of the completed/agreed reviewers before inviting your alternates. This ensures you don’t end up with too many completed reviews, which can be excessive for authors, creates extra work for yourself evaluating those comments, and may overburden your colleagues and reviewer network.

Can I use PLOS’ reviewer database to search for reviewers?

To enable proxy registration by Editorial Board members, the Editorial Manager (EM) database is uncurated and therefore not set up to search effectively. Please verify expertise and current contact information in an external database and then use EM to send invitations and manage peer review interactions.

14 days is a short turnaround time for reviewers. Is there flexibility in this?

Reviewers may request extensions on the standard 14-day due date. These requests come through the journal office and if they are longer than 2 weeks, they are sent to you for approval.

Do I have to send reminders to reviewers?

Editorial Manager is set up to support you and the reviewers by sending them automated reminders so that you do not have to.

- **Invited** reviewers are sent an initial invitation plus two reminder emails before being automatically uninvited if they do not respond. If an invitation expires, you can reinvite that reviewer again if you wish.
- **Agreed** reviewers are sent reminders before the due date, on the due date, and when they are overdue before finally being unassigned. At any time along the process, they can reply to those emails requesting an extension. We automatically grant extensions less than two weeks and anything above that, we check with you first for approval.

Why was a late reviewer terminated?

Reviews are due, by default, 14 calendar days after agreeing with an additional grace period for a late review. After receiving a series of reminder emails, secured reviewers are automatically unassigned if they are excessively late to submit. If you are sure that reviewer is going to submit their review, you can reinvite them in Editorial Manager.

All the invited reviewers declined. Can I reject a paper if I can't secure any reviewers?

Can I review the paper myself if I am having trouble securing reviewers?

Rejection decisions must be made on the basis of the publication criteria only, and difficulty securing reviewers is not an acceptable reason to reject a paper. However, you may want to re-evaluate the manuscript against the publication criteria and situations in which to reject without review as outlined in our [Initial Evaluation Quick Guide](#).

If you can secure feedback from two reviewers, you can consider proceeding to a decision. While three is preferred, our official policy is that **all accepted manuscripts must be reviewed by at least two external reviewers** besides yourself as the editor. You may review the manuscript yourself as a second reviewer but you **must sign your name in the review or add your comments directly in to the decision letter** so the authors know they are yours.

If no one has agreed to review after 4 weeks have passed and you have exhausted all sources of potential reviewers, contact the journal office to discuss the next course of action.

Next **Quick Guide**: [Assessing Reviews & Making Decisions](#)

Links to more Resources for Editors

[PLOS Complex Systems](#) | [PLOS Computational Biology](#) | [PLOS Digital Health](#) | [PLOS Genetics](#)
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Need help? Contact

complexsystems@plos.org | ploscompbiol@plos.org | digitalhealth@plos.org |
plosgenetics@plos.org | plosntds@plos.org | plospathogens@plos.org |
sustaintransform@plos.org

edboardsupport@plos.org