

# PLOS Section Editor Guide



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## 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 Associate Editors with expertise in their discipline.

SEs oversee a greater number of manuscripts than Associate 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 Associate Editors or reviewers.

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

### Edit

- Oversee up to five manuscripts at a time
- Assess the quality and scope of new submissions within three days
- Secure an Associate 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

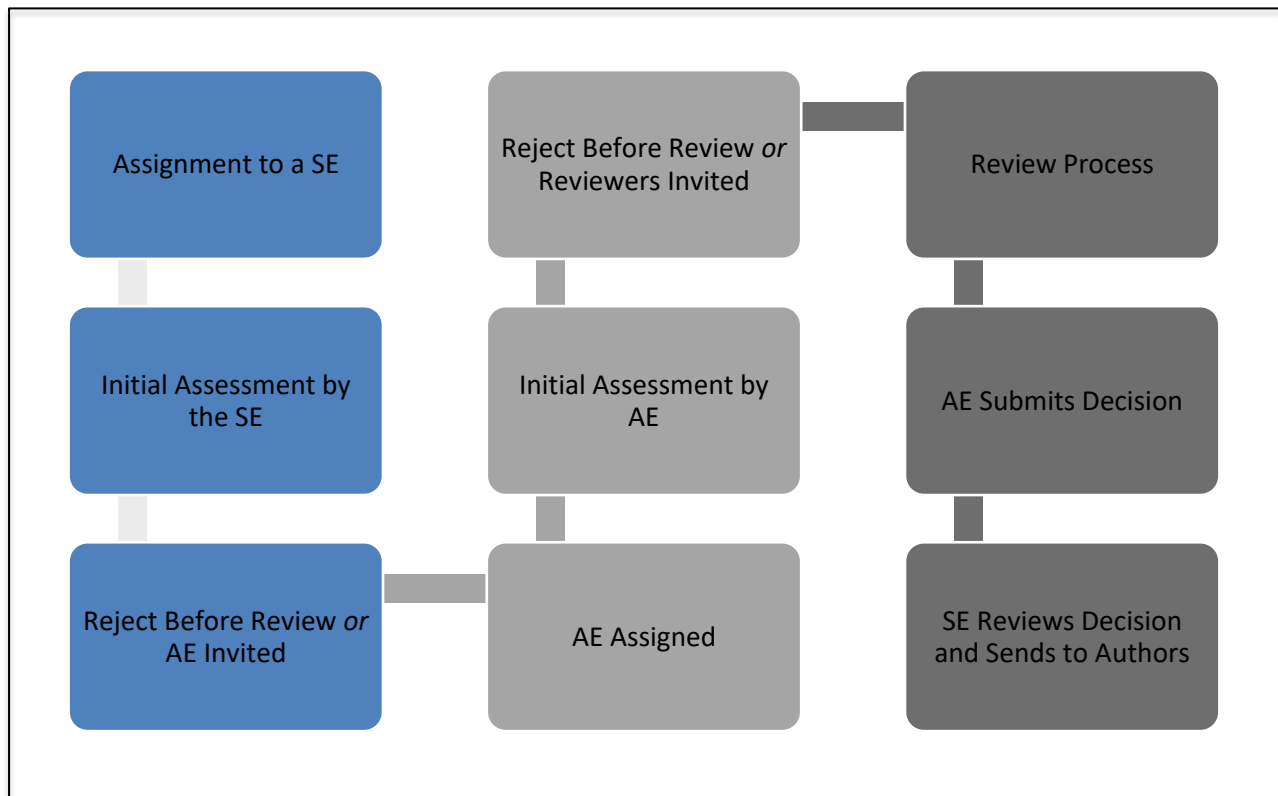
- Act as a leader or co-leader of a section
- Support and advise Associate Editors in their section in editorial decision making and more broadly by providing editorial guidance
- Assist in the editorial development of their section and the journal as a whole, including content curation, solicitation of submissions and selection of content for promotion within their disciplines
- Recommend potential candidates with expertise in their discipline to serve as Associate 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



## THE EDITORIAL PROCESS



### Manuscript Assignment

- The PLOS journal team assigns papers direct to Section Editors (SEs) daily, based upon your areas of expertise and the number of papers you are already handling.
- You will receive an email notification if a new submission has been assigned to you.



### Navigating Editorial Manager: Finding Your Assignment

- Log into Editorial Manager (EM)
- Ensure the tab is on Editorial and click **New Assignments** from your Section Editor Main Menu

Editorial Proposal Menu

## Section Editor Main Menu

**Submissions With:**

0 Reviews Complete 1	1 Reviews Complete 0	2 Reviews Complete 0	3 Reviews Complete 0	4 Reviews Complete 0
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**Search**

[Search Submissions](#) | [Search People](#)

**Editor 'To-Do' List**

- My Pending Assignments (38)
  - New Invitations (0)
  - New Assignments (1)**
  - Submissions with Required Reviews Complete (0)
  - Submissions Requiring Additional Reviewers (0)
  - Submissions with One or More Late Reviews (0)
  - Submissions with Active Discussions (38) **5**

→ Click **View Submission** from the manuscript action links to download the manuscript and related files.

Action	Manuscript Number	Article Type	Section Category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>View Submission</li> <li>Details</li> <li>Initiate Discussion</li> <li>History</li> <li>File Inventory</li> <li>Assign Editor</li> <li>Unassign Editor</li> <li>Invite Reviewers</li> <li>Solicit Commentary</li> <li>Similar Articles in MEDLINE</li> <li>Search Publons Reviewer Finder</li> <li>Submit Editor's Decision and Comments</li> <li>Send E-mail</li> </ul>	P D-20-00817	Research Article	Neuroscience



Before proceeding, please check that you have no [conflicts of interest](#) (COI) with any of the authors that would prevent you from handling the submission without bias. If you have a COI or cannot handle the paper for other reasons, please notify the journal to have the paper reassigned.



Please do not hesitate to [email the journal](#) if you feel you are handling too many or too few papers.

## Initial Assessment

- 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 (particularly if they are rejected without review) although this may take longer, particularly if there are editorial discussions
- At this stage you can:
  - ◆ Reject before review
  - ◆ Invite Associate Editors
  - ◆ Initiate a discussion

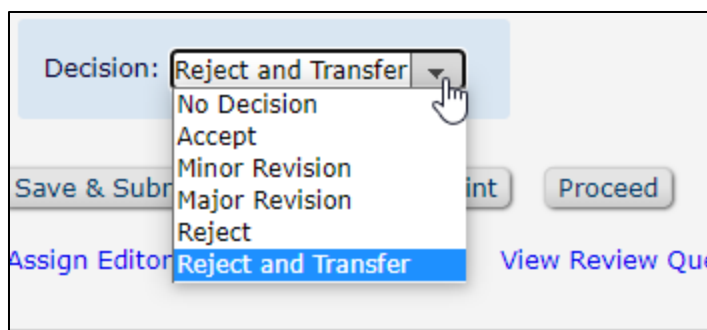



## Navigating Editorial Manager: Reject Before Review

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

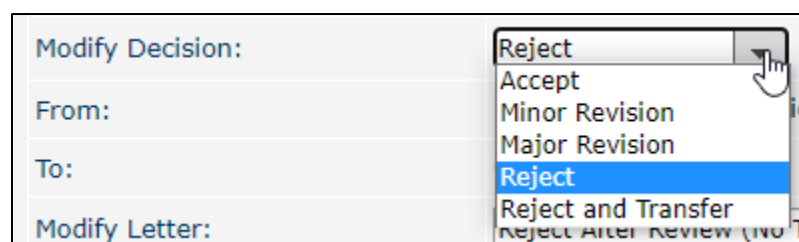
Action	Manuscript Number	Article Type	Section Category
<a href="#">View Submission Details</a> <a href="#">Initiate Discussion History</a> <a href="#">File Inventory</a> <a href="#">Assign Editor</a> <a href="#">Unassign Editor</a> <a href="#">Invite Reviewers</a> <a href="#">Solicit Commentary</a> <a href="#">Similar Articles in MEDLINE</a> <a href="#">Search Publns Reviewer Finds</a> <b><a href="#">Submit Editor's Decision and Comments</a></b> <a href="#">Send E-mail</a>	PCOMPBIOLTEST D-20-00817	Research Article	Neuroscience

- On the next page you are able to add comments to clarify your reject decision in the **Comments to Author** section. These will automatically pull into the decision letter.
- Next select your decision (**Reject and Transfer** or **Reject**) and click **Proceed** and **Proceed** again on the next screen. These decisions contain the template decision letters for before and after review, you will have further refinement options on the next screen.

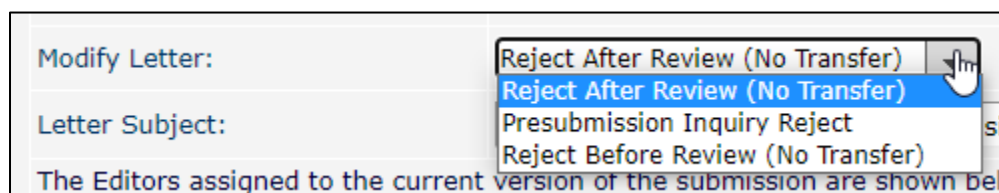



 If you select **Reject and Transfer** you will also have to select which [PLOS journal](#) you are recommending transfer to.

→ This next screen shows you the decision letter. At the top of the screen you can change your decision if you have selected the wrong option via the **Modify Decision** dropdown.



→ If the decision is correct you can switch between the before and after review varieties of the template reject letters using the **Modify Letter** dropdown (shown here with the reject without transfer options).



 Regardless of whether you offer the transfer, the Reject template letter will automatically be selected select **Reject After Review** and you will need to switch this to **Reject Before Review**

→ Read the decision letter at the bottom of the page to ensure it is accurate and that your comments have been pulled in correctly. We encourage editor comments where

possible to improve the author service. 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.

→ Once complete, click **Send Now**.



You can save the decision if you are not ready to submit it and come back to it later.



## Navigating Editorial Manager: Inviting Associate Editors

→ If you feel that a paper is worthy of further consideration you will send it on to an Associate Editor (AE) from the [Editorial Board](#).



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. We will reach out to them about joining the Board as either Associate Editor or Guest Editor to handle the manuscript.

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

Action	Manuscript Number	Article Type	Section Category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>View Submission Details</li><li>Initiate Discussion History</li><li>File Inventory</li><li><b>Assign Editor</b></li><li>Unassign Editor</li><li>Invite Reviewers</li><li>Solicit Commentary</li><li>Similar Articles in MEDLINE</li><li>Search Publons Reviewer Finder</li><li>Submit Editor's Decision and Comments</li><li>Send E-mail</li></ul>	PCOMPBIOLTEST: D-20-00817	Research Article	Neuroscience

→ Choose an Associate Editor (AE) using the search fields (first or last name, email, keywords, etc.) As the Editorial Boards develop there will also be Guest Editors (GEs) to search for an invite as well.

Criterion	Is/Is not	Selector	Value	
E-mail Address	is	Contains		OR Remove
Last Name	is	Begins With		Remove
<input type="button" value="Add"/>				



- ◆ Consider an AEs availability by looking at the column **Available during next 7 days** (on the right). If an AE is listed as **Unavailable**, click this link to find out the specific dates.
  - ◆ Check their number of **Current Assignments** to ensure they aren't overloaded.
- Choose the AEs/GEs you would like to invite by checking the box in the far left column next to their name and customise the invitation order. We recommend selecting at least **3 or 4 editors** to invite.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text" value="1"/>	Associate Editor
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text" value="2"/>	Guest Editor
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text" value="3"/>	Associate Editor

- Click either **Customise letters and Submit Queue** to customise some or all of the standard letters or **Submit Queue without Customising Letters** for the standard invitations only.
- EM will invite the first Editor to the paper 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 you have run out of invitations please contact the journal office to close the queue before adding more, otherwise it will be 2 days before the additions are invited.



## Navigating Editorial Manager: Initiating a Discussion

- Open a discussion with other members of our Editorial Board to solicit their advice. Select **Initiate Discussion** from the Action links of the paper

Action	Manuscript Number	DOI
<a href="#">View Submission Details</a> <a href="#">Initiate Discussion</a> <a href="#">History</a> <a href="#">Technical Information</a> <a href="#">File Inventory</a> <a href="#">Edit Submission</a> <a href="#">Solicit Commentary</a> <a href="#">Classifications</a> <a href="#">Unassign Editor</a> <a href="#">Notify Editor</a> <a href="#">Invite Reviewers</a> <a href="#">Set Final Disposition</a> <a href="#">Assign Editorial Task</a> <a href="#">Initiate Production</a> <a href="#">Search Publons Reviewer Finder</a> <a href="#">Send E-mail</a> <a href="#">Linked Submissions</a>	PCOMPBIOLTEST-D-20-00807	



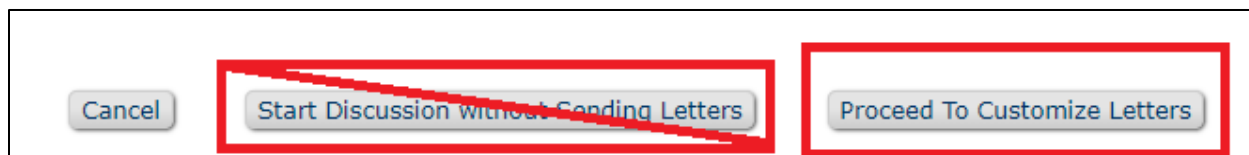
If the paper has previous discussions, the **Initiate Discussion** link will be replaced with **Discussion** and you will be taken to an intermediary page. On this page you will need to click **Start New Topic** to initiate a separate discussion


- 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 message into the **Initial Comments** box.

Choose Topic Template:

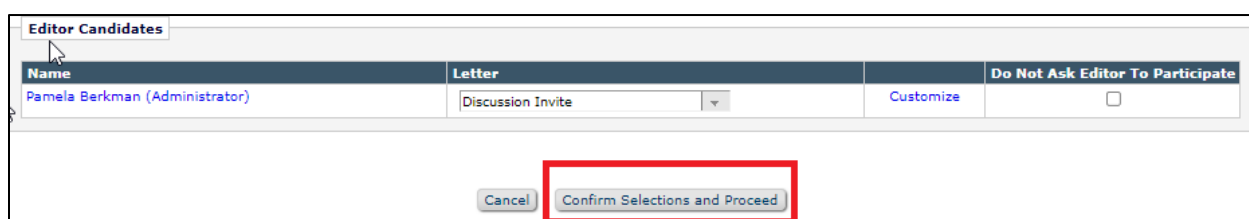
<b>Topic</b>	
<b>Initial Comments</b>	

- Once your comments are ready you can add other participants via the search. When using the search it is best to search by last name or email. You may see they are listed as unavailable, please avoid adding anyone who is unavailable.
- When you have found the people you are looking for, tick the box next to their name. You will then be able to initiate the discussion via the **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 Send Letters**.



→ This starts the discussion. You will receive an email when anyone responds in the discussion.

## Reviewing Associate Editor Decisions

- After the paper is assigned to an Associate Editor (or Guest Editor) they can either recommend reject without consulting reviewers or they can send the paper out for review and make their decision when the reviews come back in.
- When the AE or GE has made their draft decision it will move to you for approval.



### Navigating Editorial Manager: Reviewing Associate Editor Decisions

- Decisions ready for review will be in your **Submissions with Required Reviews Complete** folder on your main menu

**Editor 'To-Do' List**

My Pending Assignments (3)

- New Invitations (0)
- [New Assignments \(2\)](#)
- [Submissions with Required Reviews Complete \(1\)](#)
- Submissions Requiring Additional Reviewers (0)
- Submissions with One or More Late Reviews (0)

Reviews in Progress (0)

- Reviewers Invited - No Response (0)
- Submissions Under Review (0)

→ Select **Submit Editor Decision and Comments** from the action links.

Action	Manuscript Number	Article Type	Section Category
<a href="#">View Submission Details</a> <a href="#">Initiate Discussion History</a> <a href="#">File Inventory</a> <a href="#">Assign Editor</a> <a href="#">Unassign Editor</a> <a href="#">Invite Reviewers</a> <a href="#">Solicit Commentary</a> <a href="#">Similar Articles in MEDLINE</a> <a href="#">Search Publons Reviewer Finder</a> <a href="#">Submit Editor's Decision and Comments</a> <a href="#">Send E-mail</a>	PCOMPBIOLTEST D-20-00817	Research Article	Neuroscience

- This next screen shows you the decision letter the Associate 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 to discuss the correct decision.
- You can select **Submit New Decision** to change the decision letter if required.
- When you are ready, please select **Send Now** which will send the decision on to the authors.

## Revisions

- When authors submit their revised manuscript, it will be automatically reassigned 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 either be in the form of an email, or 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.

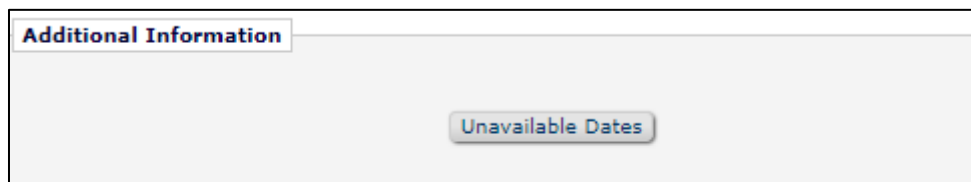


### Navigating Editorial Manager: Setting Unavailable Dates

- Set unavailability by going to **Update My Information** at the top of the page in EM.

HOME • LOGOUT • HELP • REGISTER • **UPDATE MY INFORMATION** • JOURNAL OVERVIEW  
MAIN MENU • CONTACT US • SUBMIT A MANUSCRIPT • INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS • PRIVACY

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





## POLICIES

### Conflict of Interest (COI) and Ethical Publishing Practice

- We are diligent to avoid any potential or perceived editorial conflicts of interest between SEs, AEs, reviewers and authors
- If you become aware of a possible breach of an editorial or publishing policy, please notify the journal team immediately.

### Code of Conduct for Editorial Board Members

- PLOS Editorial Board members follow PLOS Ethical Publishing Practice policies, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) [Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers](#), and PLOS journal policies. Read the full [Code of Conduct for Editorial Board Members](#).

### Flagging Issues to Staff

- Please forward any correspondences that occur outside of Editorial Manager with authors to journal staff that requires attention
- 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
- Author ethics issues like suspected image manipulation or plagiarism
- At accept, please notify staff if you accept a paper that is particularly press-worthy or otherwise notable.
- During Review, please notify staff if you have serious concerns over a reviewer's behavior or the content of their review.



## RESOURCE LINKS

PLOS SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSFORMATION	PLOS DIGITAL HEALTH
<p>Contact us: <a href="mailto:SustainTransform@plos.org">SustainTransform@plos.org</a></p> <p><a href="#">Scope</a></p> <p><a href="#">Publication Criteria</a></p> <p><a href="#">Competing Interests</a></p> <p><a href="#">Ethical Publishing Practice</a></p> <p><a href="#">Corrections, Expressions of Concern, and Retractions</a></p> <p><a href="#">Submission Guidelines</a></p> <p><a href="#">Guidelines for Reviewers</a></p> <p><a href="#">Editorial Board</a></p>	<p>Contact us: <a href="mailto:digitalhealth@plos.org">digitalhealth@plos.org</a></p> <p><a href="#">Scope</a></p> <p><a href="#">Publication Criteria</a></p> <p><a href="#">Competing Interests</a></p> <p><a href="#">Ethical Publishing Practice</a></p> <p><a href="#">Corrections, Expressions of Concern, and Retractions</a></p> <p><a href="#">Submission Guidelines</a></p> <p><a href="#">Guidelines for Reviewers</a></p> <p><a href="#">Editorial Board</a></p>