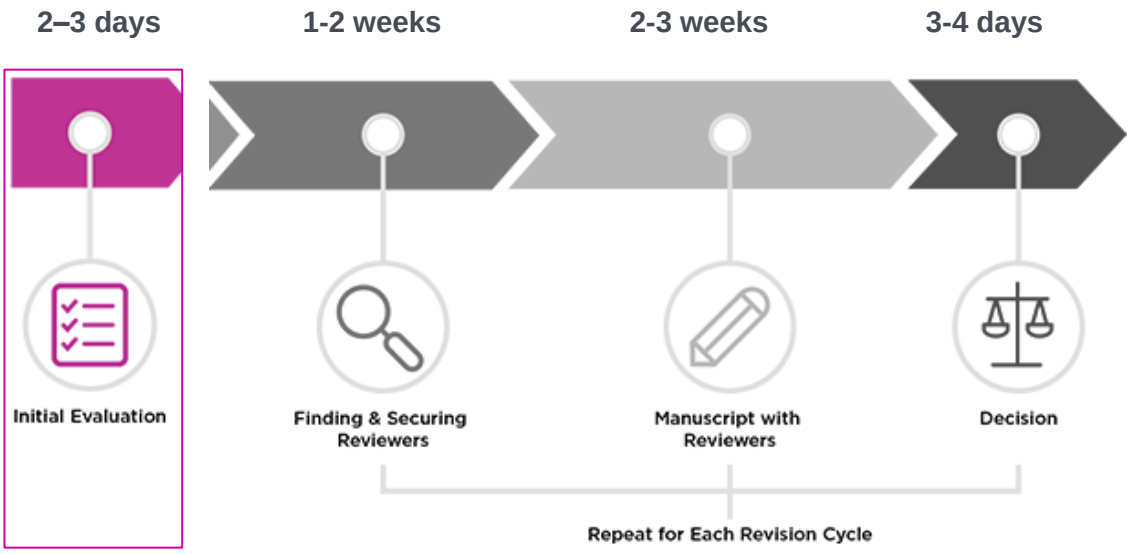
PLOS Biology

Quick Guide

Initial Evaluation



Process

- Assess the manuscript within **2-3 working days** using:
  - Information provided by staff editors in the Editorial Manager discussion
  - Your own subject area expertise
  - The *PLOS Biology* publication criteria
- Decide whether to recommend sending out for peer review or rejection without review, and provide your comments in the Editorial Manager discussion

If sending out to peer-review

- Recommend 7-10 expert reviewers that cover the different aspects of the paper and aren't obviously conflicted (staff editors will do thorough competing interests vetting).

- Keep in mind that very senior people tend to decline and it is a good opportunity to suggest young PIs or senior postdocs.
- Also keep in mind that we would like to expand the diversity of our reviewer pool. A diversity of perspectives enriches the process

If recommending rejection

- Please provide a brief text explaining the basis for your recommendation, which will be paraphrased in the decision letter.

Portable Peer Review

As part of our goal to attract strong submissions to the journal and improve the efficiency of peer review, our team of staff editors are encouraging transfers from journals perceived to be upstream from *PLOS Biology* with existing reviewer reports. Some of you have already worked with us on such submissions and we have published excellent papers through this route.

How it Works

We ask the previous journal to share the reviews with us and, subject to agreement from all parties, original reviewer identities. However, often the upstream journal confirms peer-review but will not share reviewer identities, so the reports are anonymous.
If an article meets our editorial criteria for consideration, we ask that you use these reports to avoid starting the process from scratch, arbitrating them directly whenever possible, thus avoiding further peer-review unless strictly necessary.

Review Commons

Review Commons is a platform for high-quality journal-independent peer-review in the life sciences run by the editors of EMBO Press. Articles that come via this route to *PLOS Biology* are accompanied by reviewer reports and identities.

Sometimes we receive a manuscript that has been revised already, and other times we receive the authors' revision plan alongside the reviewer reports.

How it Works

If an article meets our editorial criteria for consideration, we ask that you use these reports to avoid starting the process from scratch, arbitrating them directly whenever possible, or going back to the same reviewers with the revised study. We avoid contacting additional reviewers unless strictly necessary.

Publication Criteria

This editorial outlines our thought process when reading an initial submission and some recently-launched article types and may be useful.

When you are conducting your initial evaluation, please keep in mind the following criteria:

1. **PLOS Biology is a selective journal that aims to give voice to significant advances that will be widely read, built upon and drive future discovery.**
   We consider that significant advances are those that push science forward in a sizeable, meaningful way, also when they report, for example, exciting but preliminary findings, or null or negative results that are important for their field.
2. **We assess the importance of the research question being asked, rather than the results obtained.**
3. **Work must also demonstrate a high standard of scientific rigor in its methodology, reporting, and conclusions.**
4. **Scooping Protection or "Consideration of complementary research": Results**

reported have not been published elsewhere.

Manuscripts that confirm, replicate, extend, or are complementary to a recently published, significant advance are still eligible for consideration in PLOS Biology and may be submitted up to six months after the first article's publication date. The complementary manuscript must present equally or more rigorous findings than the published study and meet our criteria for publication listed above. More information can be found in this editorial.

5. **The research meets all applicable standards for the ethics of experimentation and research integrity.**
6. **The article adheres to appropriate reporting guidelines and the data is fully available, unless exempted under our policy (e.g. third-party data or patient data).**
7. **Some article types have especial criteria for consideration:**
    a. **Methods and Resources:** Methods must be new or a substantial improvement over previous methods and thoroughly validated. Resources should be of general interest and provide exceptionally value for the community that could spur future research. However, novel biological insight is not required.
    b. **Discovery Reports:** describe novel and intriguing initial findings with the potential to lead to a significant new result for the field. While the research may be preliminary, obvious alternative interpretations should have been ruled out and work should be orthogonally validated if possible.
    c. **Update Articles**: develop a previous PLOS Biology study by significantly adding to the original article; e.g. providing new, robust mechanistic insight, or identifying the biological or physiological significance of the previous findings.
    d. **Pre-registered Research Articles** (also known as **Registered Reports**): the study design and proposed analyses are peer reviewed prior to conducting experiments, data collection or analysis. More information can be found in this editorial.
    e. **Meta-research Articles**: we welcome both exploratory and confirmatory research that has the potential to drive change in research and evaluation practices in the life sciences and beyond.

Relevant Links

Links to more detailed information about:

- *PLOS Biology*
- our publication criteria
- our different article types
- our editorial and publishing policies

Need help?

Contact the specific staff editor that is handling the manuscript and has emailed you or plosbiology@plos.org – if you have general queries unrelated to a specific manuscript

More Resources for Editors