Initial Evaluation

Key Takeaways & Contents

→ Assess the manuscript using:
  o The publication criteria
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  o Additional information provided by staff editors
    Go to: Information for the Academic Editor
  o Your own subject area expertise

→ Decide whether to send out for peer review or reject without review
  Go to: Peer Review or Reject?
The publication criteria are the same for PLOS ONE, PLOS Climate, PLOS Global Public Health, and PLOS Water. When you are conducting your initial evaluation, run the manuscript through the following criteria:

1. The study presents the results of original research.
2. Results reported have not been published elsewhere.
3. Experiments, statistics, and other analyses are performed to a high technical standard and are described in sufficient detail.
4. Conclusions are presented in an appropriate fashion and are supported by the data.
5. The article is presented in an intelligible fashion and is written in standard English.
6. The research meets all applicable standards for the ethics of experimentation and research integrity.
7. The article adheres to appropriate reporting guidelines and community standards for data availability.

Details about the publication criteria, article types considered, guidelines, and policies are in the links below:

- PLOS ONE: Publication Criteria, What We Publish, Submission Guidelines, Editorial and Publishing Policies
- PLOS Climate: Publication Criteria, What We Publish, Submission Guidelines, Editorial and Publishing Policies
- PLOS Global Public Health: Publication Criteria, What We Publish, Submission Guidelines, Editorial and Publishing Policies
- PLOS Water: Publication Criteria, What We Publish, Submission Guidelines, Editorial and Publishing Policies

The inclusive mission of these PLOS journals allows for the consideration of all submissions reporting original research or research methods contributing to the base of academic knowledge, and we evaluate submitted manuscripts on the basis of methodological rigor and high ethical standards, regardless of perceived novelty.

PLOS does not copyedit manuscripts, nor do we expect you to. Publication criterion 5 can be a challenging nuance to navigate. If the methodology of the paper is rigorous, we encourage you to issue a revise decision rather than reject so the authors have an opportunity to copyedit. If you are at all unsure about applying this or any of the other criteria, contact the journal office.
INFORMATION FOR THE ACADEMIC EDITOR

Be sure to read all email communications from PLOS. After you accept an invitation, an automated email is sent to you containing guidance on the next steps in the evaluation process and any notes left by a staff editor.

Before it reaches you, each manuscript undergoes a suite of technical and editorial checks. A staff editor may leave specific questions or guidance in the Information for the Academic Editor section of your invitation acceptance confirmation email. These notes can also be found at the top of the manuscript in the Information for Editor section of the Details page in Editorial Manager.

Often staff editors will leave their personal contact email in the Information for Editor notes. They are the best people to contact with editorial questions about the manuscript, in addition to your journal’s email.

PEER REVIEW OR REJECT?

If a manuscript clearly doesn’t meet the publication criteria, it’s ok to reject without inviting external reviewers. In your decision letter to the authors, please ensure you have provided enough information for the authors to understand the reason for the decision, clearly articulating your reasoning and citing the specific publication criteria that were not met.

If you decide to proceed with peer review, keep in mind that all manuscripts must be evaluated by at least one external reviewer (preferably two) before they are accepted for publication.

Generally, you should decide on your next action within four days of agreeing to handle the manuscript. Below are some recommendations on when to reject without review.
Reject without review when

- There are serious methodological or analytical flaws that cannot be addressed by peer review
- Conclusions are unsupported by the data (for example, insufficient sample sizes)
- Flawed, weak, or insufficiently detailed hypothesis, study rationale, methods, analyses, or results would prevent reviewers from properly evaluating the work
- Redundant work that doesn't clearly reference and discuss the existing literature (exceptions: purposeful replication studies or reanalyses that clearly discuss the existing literature. See publication criterion 2)
- Apparent revisions would take the authors more than a few months to complete. This could include additional experiments, extensive reframing or recontextualization of the work, or extensive reanalysis. An open reject (with invitation to resubmit) can be considered when extensive revisions are required that would exceed the usual 45-day major revision deadline.

In all other situations, please seek external peer review.

Proceed to Finding & Securing Reviewers OR Assessing Reviews & Making Decisions

Links to more Resources for Editors:

PLOS ONE | PLOS Climate | PLOS Global Public Health | PLOS Water

Need help? Contact:

plosone@plos.org | climate@plos.org | globalpubhealth@plos.org | water@plos.org

edboardsupport@plos.org