

Scientific Publishing for Authors and Referees

Ramona Vogt, Associate Editor, Physical Review C
Slides by Joe Kapusta, Chief Editor of Physical Review C

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People Associated with PRC Editorial

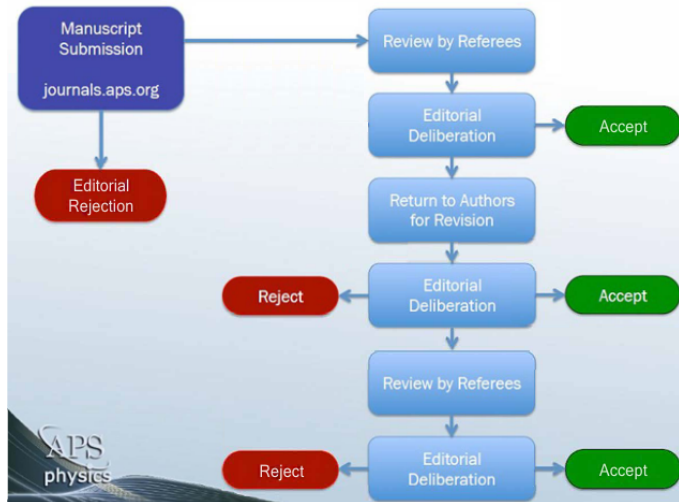
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Peer Review Process

The goal of the peer review process is to ensure that only high quality papers which advance our knowledge of nuclear physics are published in PRC. Usually this process actually improves the paper prior to publication. It is not the job of referees to continually suggest improvements to a substandard paper to meet the minimum standards of the journal.

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- Upon submission the manuscript is assigned by section/topic/experiment/theory to an appropriate handling editor.
- The handling editor may suggest it be rejected without review for various reasons. Most papers are sent to a referee, based on their knowledge and expertise, chosen from a huge database common to all APS journals.
- When a referee report is received, the handling editor may accept the paper or send it back to the authors to address the comments and criticisms. If a report is not received it is sent to another referee. This process continues.
- If the first referee does not recommend publication after 2 or 3 rounds the paper is usually sent to a second referee (unless a fatal flaw is identified in the paper). After 1 or 2 rounds with the second referee, the handling editor makes a final decision (publish or reject).
- A rejection may be appealed. An appeal goes to an editorial board member who makes a signed recommendation to the lead editor. If this appeal fails, it can be appealed to the Editor in Chief. The Editor in Chief makes a final decision, based not on physics but on whether due process was followed.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- 1: What Can I Do To Speed the Acceptance and Publication of My Paper?
- 2: How are Referees Chosen?
- 3: Can I Suggest Individuals to Referee My Paper?
- 4: Can I Exclude Individuals from Reviewing My Paper?
- 5: How Many People Review My Paper?
- 6: Can I Request a Second Referee?
- 7: Can a Referee Reject My Paper?
- 8: What Should I Do When I Get a Referee Report Criticizing My Paper?
- 9: Why Does the Referee Ask Me to Cite so Many Papers?
- 10: Why Does My Paper Sit in the Office so Long Without any Apparent Activity?

FAQ 1: What Can I Do To Speed the Acceptance and Publication of My Paper?

First, spend the time and effort to write a paper that is clear and grammatically correct. If your first language is not English you might want to consider asking someone else to proof read your paper before submission. This is a good idea in any case!

Second, if you receive a referee report requesting changes do your best to respond to ALL of the points raised and detail the changes made in your manuscript in your letter of resubmission. Take the comments and criticisms of the referee very seriously. The referee is most likely one of your most interested readers after all.

Third, statistics show that the longest delay is associated with the response time of the author(s). If you desire your paper to be published rapidly after you receive a referee report, respond to it quickly but accurately.

Finally, please be kind enough to send in your referee reports on another author(s)'s paper as quickly as you would wish them to review your own.

FAQ 2: How are Referees Chosen?

The lead and associate editors are active researchers. They have access to a database of referees containing thousands of people which is common to Physical Review A-E, Letters, and other Physical Review journals from which one or more may be chosen. There is no border in this database between different areas of physics. Referees are chosen based on many factors including their area of expertise and availability (a referee is not available if they are currently reviewing or have recently reviewed another manuscript).

FAQ 3: Can I Suggest Individuals to Referee My Paper?

You most certainly can! In fact it helps the editors for you to suggest knowledgeable individuals. However, people generally will not be selected if they are at the institution of one of the authors, if they have been a frequent co-author in the past, if they are currently reviewing another manuscript, or if they have been overworked in the past year as a referee. Therefore, it is useful to suggest many possible reviewers, not just one or two. Ten is not too many!

FAQ 4: Can I Exclude Individuals from Reviewing My Paper?

You may request that certain individuals not review your paper. You need not give an explanation for why. However, if your paper is criticizing another paper the handling editor may solicit a signed report from one of the authors of that paper. Depending on the report, the editor is likely to send it to an anonymous referee afterwards.

FAQ 5: How Many People Review My Paper?

Usually only one person is chosen to review a paper. However, if your paper negatively comments on another published paper an author of that paper may be asked to provide a signed Advisory Opinion (not anonymous). If the first referee is tardy a second referee may be chosen and, in some cases, two reports are then received. If an impasse is reached between you and a referee another one may be selected to bring the refereeing process to a conclusion.

FAQ 6: Can I Request a Second Referee?

Yes; see the FAQ above. Generally this request will be granted only if the handling editor feels that an impasse has been reached. Oftentimes it is better to continue to resolve the issues with the first referee.

FAQ 7: Can a Referee Reject My Paper?

No. Only the editor or an associate editor can reject your paper after an appropriate reviewing process has been completed.

FAQ 8: What Should I Do When I Get a Referee Report Criticizing My Paper?

Read the referee report carefully and dispassionately. Put yourself in the position of a reader. Is what you are presenting clear, unambiguous, logical, and well written? If you can respond positively to ALL the comments, suggestions, and criticisms of the referee then you should resubmit your paper with an explanation of all the changes made. If you cannot then you need to do more research or else drop the project and start another one. Oftentimes the author(s) misread the referee report. What may at first seem like a devastating blow is really a request for more information or a more detailed explanation. Other times the referee has indeed found a fatal flaw in the research. We all learn from our mistakes. Do not take it personally.

Even if you think the referee is mistaken, other readers might likewise be confused and this can signal that it would be useful to alter your explanations in the paper. One aim of the referee process is to improve papers. Answers from authors directed solely to the referee that are not reflected in changes to the paper are not useful to readers.

FAQ 9: Why Does the Referee Ask Me to Cite so Many Papers?

Not only is it ethically necessary to cite previous work on the topic of your research but it displays your knowledge of the subject and it helps the less knowledgeable reader to learn the history of the subject. It has been found that researchers in physics typically cite fewer paper than researchers in other areas of science. Not only does citing more papers properly assign credit where it is due but it also helps you to get more citations for your own papers!

FAQ 10: Why Does My Paper Sit in the Office so Long Without any Apparent Activity?

A majority of papers are assigned to external editors who are active faculty and/or researchers. This is befitting to a society journal. Sometimes it is caused by a backlog due to the statistics of small numbers, meaning that there are only a few staff who are full-time APS employees who can handle certain tasks. This is a known issue and improvements have been underway to decrease time spent in the office.