

AMA Manual of Style

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Editorial Responsibilities, Roles, Procedures, and Policies

Annette Flanagin

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I believe the editor is the primary source for ethical responsibility among professional publications. George D. Lundberg, MD Coupled with the autonomy and authority that come with editorial freedom are responsibility and accountability (see also , Editorial Freedom and Integrity). Editors are responsible for determining the journal's content, ensuring the quality of the journal, directing editorial staff and board members, developing and maintaining procedures, and creating and enforcing policies that allow the publication to meet its mission and goals effectively, efficiently, and ethically and in a fiscally responsible manner. This section focuses primarily on decision-making editors (ie, editors in chief and

Acknowledging Manuscript Receipt

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Journals should send a notice to authors to acknowledge receipt of their manuscripts and provide names and contact information of relevant editorial staff. For journals with Web-based manuscript submission systems, acknowledgment letters may be sent automatically, usually after an author has viewed the submission and confirmed that it is complete.

The Editor's Responsibilities

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An editor's primary responsibilities are to inform and educate readers and to maintain the quality and integrity of the journal., Thus, editors are obliged to make rational and consistent editorial decisions, select papers for publication that are appropriate for their readers, ensure that the content of their journal is of high quality, and maintain standards

to ensure the journal's integrity,, (see also , Editorial Freedom and Integrity). The editor's duty to readers often outweighs obligations to others with vested interest in the publication and may require actions that may not appear fair or suitable to authors, reviewers, owners, publishers, advertisers,

Editorial Responsibility for Manuscript Assessment

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The editor should establish and maintain procedures and policies for appropriate editorial assessment and decisions to accept, request revision of, and reject manuscripts (see also , Editorial Assessment and Processing). The editor also establishes whether such decisions will be made unilaterally or by other editors (eg, deputy, associate, assistant, contributing, section, or guest editor) or in collaboration. Factors used to determine decisions should be made available to authors and reviewers. For example, JAMA editors use the following general criteria to evaluate manuscripts: material is original, writing is clear, study methods are appropriate, data are valid, conclusions are reasonable and supported

Editorial Responsibility for Rejection

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Rejecting manuscripts may be one of the most important responsibilities of an editor. By rejecting papers appropriately, an editor sets standards and defines the editorial content for the journal. Decisions to reject a manuscript may be based on a wide range of factors, such as lack of originality, lack of importance or relevance to the journal's readers, poor writing, flawed methods, scientific weakness, invalid data, biased interpretations and/or conclusions, timeliness, or the specific publishing priorities of the journal. A rejection letter must be carefully worded to avoid offending the author and should express regret for the outcome, but also must

Editorial Responsibility for Peer Review

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Decisions about manuscripts are made by editors, not peer reviewers. Reviewers offer valuable advice, serve as consultants to the editor, and may make recommendations about a paper's suitability for publication, but all editorial decisions should be made by the editors.

Editors are obliged to be courteous to peer reviewers, provide them with guidance and explicit instructions, assign only those papers that are appropriate to specific reviewers (in terms of reviewer expertise and interest), maintain confidentiality if using blind or anonymous review, provide reviewers with sufficient time to conduct their review, and avoid overworking them., Editors should ask reviewers in advance

Editorial Responsibility for Revision

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The editor's impartial focus on improving a manuscript facilitates the process of revision. According to Morgan, "in letters requesting revision the editor should use an impersonal tone in criticizing." All such communication is best if the tone is objective and constructive. Editors should clearly communicate to authors what is expected in a revision; it may be helpful for editors to request that authors submit revised manuscripts with changes, additions, and deletions indicated and a cover letter itemizing the changes made in response to the editor's and reviewers' comments and suggestions. Editors are obligated to use sound editorial reasoning in requesting

Editorial Responsibility for Acceptance

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Editors should follow consistent procedures to evaluate papers and make decisions regarding acceptance (see , Editorial Responsibility for Manuscript Assessment). Editors should inform authors of acceptance of their manuscripts in a letter that describes the subsequent process of publication, including substantive editing and any remaining queries; editing of the manuscript, tables, and figures for accuracy, consistency, clarity, style, grammar, and formatting; and what material the author will be expected to review and approve before publication. Editors may also provide an approximate timetable for the publication process. If authors are given an expected date of publication, they should be informed of

Correspondence (Letters to the Editor)

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A biomedical journal should provide a forum for readers and authors to participate in postpublication peer review and scientific dialogue and to exchange important information, especially with regard to articles published in the journal., A common forum for such exchange is the correspondence, or letters to the editor, column (see also , Types of Articles, Correspondence). Such letters become part of the published record and, like articles, are indexed by bibliographic databases. In the correspondence column, journal readers have the opportunity to offer relevant comments, query authors, and provide objective and scholarly criticism of published articles. Authors of articles to

Role of the Editorial Board

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Editorial boards comprise leaders and experts in the subject area(s) represented by a journal. Editorial board members provide various functions, including representation of the journal and outreach to the community of readers and authors served by the journal; advising the editor on policies, editorial content, and editorial direction of the journal; serving as peer reviewers; writing and recruiting manuscripts; and/or assisting the editor on editorial decisions (ie, handling manuscripts with which the editor has a conflict, serving as guest editor, or serving as section editor or editor for specific types of manuscripts). Some journals use editorial board members as decision-making