

This document provides an outline of the editorial process involved in publishing a scientific paper (Article or Letter) at *Nature*, and describes how manuscripts are handled by editors between submission and publication. A multi-lingual guide to the editorial process is available at <http://npg.nature.com/npg/authors>.

1. Criteria for publication

The principal criteria for publication of scientific papers (Articles and Letters) in *Nature* are that they:

- report original scientific research (the main results and conclusions must not have been published or submitted elsewhere)
- are of outstanding scientific importance
- reach a conclusion of interest to an interdisciplinary readership.

2. Who decides what to publish?

Nature has space to publish only 10% or so of the 170 papers submitted each week, hence its selection criteria are rigorous. *Nature* does not employ an editorial board of senior scientists, nor is it affiliated to a scientific society or institution, thus its decisions are independent, unbiased by scientific or national prejudices of particular individuals. The judgement about which papers will interest a broad readership is made by *Nature's* editors, not its referees.

3. How to submit an Article or Letter

To reduce delays, authors should ensure that the level, length and format conforms with *Nature's* requirements, at submission and each revision stage – see www.nature.com/nature/authors. Submissions should be accompanied by a cover letter stating briefly why the conclusion is an important scientific advance and the author's case for the work being published in *Nature* rather than in a specialist journal. Authors are strongly encouraged to attempt two 100-word summaries, one to encapsulate the significance of the work for readers of *Nature* (mainly scientists or those in scientifically related professions); and the other to explain the conclusions at an understandable level for the general public. The cover letter should also specify the number of words in the text of the paper, the number of display items (figures and tables), the number of attachments (manuscript, figures, Supplementary Information if any, supporting manuscripts), and their formats.

4. What happens to a submitted Article or Letter?

The first stage for a newly submitted Article or Letter is that the editorial staff consider whether to send it for

peer-review. On submission, the manuscript is assigned to an editor covering the subject area, who seeks informal advice from scientific advisors and editorial colleagues, and who makes this initial decision. The initial judgement is not a reflection on the technical validity of the work described, or on its importance to people in the same field.

Once the decision has been made to peer-review the paper, the choice of referees is made by the editor who has been assigned the manuscript. Most papers are sent to two or three referees, but some are sent to more or, occasionally, just to one. Referees are chosen for the following reasons:

- independence from the authors and their institutions
- ability to evaluate the technical aspects of the paper fully and fairly
- currently or recently assessing related submissions
- availability to assess the manuscript within the requested time.

5. Referees' reports

The ideal referee's report indicates who will be interested in the new results and why, and lists any technical failings that need to be addressed before the authors' case is established.

6. Competitors

Some potential referees may be engaged in competing work that could influence their opinion. To avoid such conflicts of interest, *Nature* requires potential referees to disclose any professional and commercial competing interests before undertaking to review a paper, and requires referees not to copy papers or to circulate them to un-named colleagues. Although *Nature* editors go to every effort to ensure manuscripts are assessed fairly, *Nature* is not responsible for the conduct of its referees.

Nature welcomes authors' suggestions for suitable independent referees, but editors are free to decide themselves who to use as referees. *Nature* editors will normally honour requests that a paper not be sent to one or two (but no more) competing groups for review.

7. Speed

Nature makes decisions about submitted papers as rapidly as possible. Authors are usually informed within a week if the paper is not being considered and most referees honour their agreement with *Nature* to deliver a report within seven days or other agreed time

limit, and send their reports online. Decisions by editors are routinely made very rapidly after receipt of reports, and *Nature* offers an advance online publication service to an increasing number of manuscripts.

8. Decision letters and what they mean

All Articles and Letters published in *Nature* go through at least one round of review, usually two or three, sometimes more. At each stage, the editor will discuss the manuscript with editorial colleagues in the light of referees' reports, and send a letter to the author offering one of the following options:

- The paper is accepted for publication without any further changes required from the authors.
- The paper is accepted for publication in principle once the authors have made some revisions in response to the referees' reports.
- A final decision on publication is deferred, pending the authors' response to the referees' comments.
- The paper is rejected because the referees have raised considerable technical objections and/or the authors' claim has not been adequately established. Under these circumstances, the editor's letter will state explicitly whether or not a resubmitted version would be considered.
- The paper is rejected with no offer to reconsider a resubmitted version.

In replying to the referees' comments, authors are advised to use language that would not cause offence when their paper is shown again to the referees, and to bear in mind that if a point was not clear to the referees and/or editors, it is unlikely that it would be clear to the nonspecialist readers of *Nature*.

9. Appeals

If an author wishes to appeal against *Nature's* decision, the appeal must be made in writing, not by telephone, and should be confined to the scientific case for publication. *Nature's* editors are unable to assign high priority to consideration of appeals.

Authors often ask for a new referee to be consulted, particularly in cases where two referees have been used and one is negative, the other positive. *Nature* is reluctant to consult new referees unless there is a particular, relevant area of scientific expertise that was lacking in the referees already used. Authors should note that as *Nature* is an interdisciplinary journal, referees for a paper are chosen for different reasons, for example a technical expert and a person who has a general overview of a field might both referee the same paper. Editors' decisions are weighted according to the expertise of the referees, and not by a "voting" procedure.

If *Nature's* editors agree to reconsider a paper, the other original referee(s) will have the chance to see and comment on the report of the referee who is the subject of the complaint. New referees can often raise new sets of points, which complicates and lengthens the consideration process instead of simplifying it.

If an author remains unsatisfied, he or she can write to the Editor (nature@nature.com), citing the manuscript reference number. In all these cases, it is likely that some time will elapse before *Nature* can respond, and the paper must not be submitted for publication elsewhere during this time.

10. Formats and lengths of papers

Space in *Nature* is extremely limited, and so format requirements must be strictly observed, as advised by the editor handling the submission, and detailed in the guide to manuscript preparation and submission (www.nature.com/nature/authors).

11. Subediting of accepted papers

After a paper is accepted, it is subedited to ensure maximum clarity and reach. This process enhances the value of papers in various ways. *Nature's* subeditors are happy to advise authors about the format of their Articles and Letters after acceptance for publication. Their role is to

- edit the language for maximum clarity and precision for those in other disciplines.
- ensure that the paper is at the length specified by the manuscript editor (including figures).
- ensure that the terminology and notation conform to *Nature's* house style.
- ensure that the figures and tables are clear and will fit in the space available.

Subeditors might contact authors after acceptance for publication to discuss these points

12. Publication and the press

Original research papers are assigned to an issue two weeks before publication. A week later, *Nature* distributes a press release summarizing the content and highlighting papers of particular interest. Journalists are given the names and contact details of corresponding authors. They are also given online access to the full text of all papers due to appear in that issue. Authors should try and be available to answer any inquiries in the days leading up to publication. The content of the press release and papers is embargoed until 1800 London time / 1300 US Eastern Time on the day before publication and in all cases, authors are required to comply with *Nature's* pre-publicity and embargo policies (www.nature.com/nature/authors/policy).