

# A re-review of peer review: Leading journal looks to end the 'review nightmare'

27 January 2009

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Every scientific researcher has asked themselves the question at some stage in their professional career: Why has the paper I submitted to be peer reviewed disappeared into the ether?

Scientists, like most people, desire immediate results. In the case of peer review, researchers want to learn whether their paper has been accepted or rejected as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the review process rarely seems to work in this manner, even with the enhancements that the Internet has bought.

The primary source of frustration for authors is peer reviewers who insist on time-consuming and sometimes iterative re-review that makes little difference to the eventual validity or quality of the final research paper. For that reason, *Journal of Biology* is today embarking on an experimental policy of allowing authors to opt out of re-review in an effort to dramatically speed up the publication process.

Led by Miranda Robertson, the newly appointed Editor of *Journal of Biology* and a former Biology Editor at Nature, the new policy will see all research papers submitted to *Journal of Biology* first screened by a member of the Editorial Board for suitability of inclusion into the journal. If any of the reviewers then has suggestions or demands revisions, including the addition of data, authors will be asked to respond to the referees and revise the manuscript.

However, under the new experimental policy, the authors will then be able to decide whether or not they wish the referees to look at their manuscripts again.

Where authors opt out of re-review their responses and the editors will carefully scrutinize revised manuscripts and if it is clear that substantive issues have not been addressed then the manuscript may be rejected. Otherwise it will be

published, with an accompanying minireview in which any flaws in the paper may be highlighted.

The decision to launch this experiment was taken after consultation with members of the Editorial Board, who were in general emphatically supportive of this new policy. 'Something surely needs to be done about the review nightmare that so many people face' said Editorial Board Member, Arthur Lander, University of California San Diego'...what is in the paper is fundamentally the responsibility of the authors, not of the reviewers' added Robert Horvitz, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Nobel Laureate.

Speaking of the launch of the policy, Miranda Robertson said 'Of course journals must do their best to ensure that the research they publish is valid, but the primary function of a journal editor is to promote the dissemination of research results, not to obstruct it. I hope this experiment will show that referees, authors and journals can work together to accelerate the publication of important research.'

Reference: What are journals for? *Journal of Biology* 2009, 8:1doi:10.1186/jbiol111  
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APA citation: A re-review of peer review: Leading journal looks to end the 'review nightmare' (2009, January 27) retrieved 20 September 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-01-re-review-peer-journal-nightmare.html>

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