



Adjudicating Decisions

While we wish that peer review always moved along quickly and seamlessly, we know that reality may be different. Sometimes, you as the Academic Editor (AE) may find yourself in challenging situations requiring you to carefully navigate a difficult decision-making process. Generally, most final decisions are reached within three rounds of review. We understand requesting more than two rounds of revision may be unavoidable and necessary at times, but this situation is less than ideal for everyone involved.

Here, we've put together a list of frequent issues you may come across and some advice we hope will be helpful for you in your editorial decision-making process.

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Theme	What's Happening	What We Recommend	What You the AE Might Say
<p>Outstanding concerns</p>	<p>A revised manuscript has just returned and you're unsure of whether to re-invite reviewers, or you aren't sure whether the authors have addressed the reviewers' concerns.</p>	<p>Apply your expertise and experience to evaluate the manuscript as best you can. If specific reviewer input or expertise is required, you may re-invite reviewers. You may accept the manuscript if you are confident that it is suitable for publication without re-review. If it is clear prior to re-review that revision is required or the manuscript is now unsuitable for publication, you may proceed with a revision or reject as is appropriate.</p>	<p>Revision: <i>"After carefully assessing the revised manuscript and your responses to my and the reviewers' concerns, I have determined that they have not been adequately addressed. I do not feel this manuscript is suitable for re-review at this time. I am therefore issuing another revision decision and requiring that you address the following: [list of requirements]. If these concerns remain unaddressed after revision, I may reject the manuscript."</i></p> <p>Reject: <i>"I have carefully assessed the revised manuscript and your responses to my and the reviewers' concerns. I find that they have not been sufficiently addressed and am not sending the manuscript back to reviewers. Unfortunately, I have determined that this manuscript does not meet the publication criteria for the following reasons: [Editor: please include details, e.g., the conclusions are no longer supported by the data]. In light of the above concerns, I must therefore reject the manuscript."</i></p>
<p>Outstanding concerns</p>	<p>Authors leave your or reviewers' concerns completely unaddressed</p>	<p>Clearly communicate to the authors which concerns must be addressed and state that if they aren't addressed, the manuscript may be rejected. In addition, identify any concerns that do not need to be addressed.</p>	<p>Last chance revision: <i>"Reviewer #2 had previously raised valid concerns regarding the statistical method used for analysis. They have also raised concerns about novelty, which you need not address given the publication criteria. However, the statistical issues must be resolved before I will consider accepting this manuscript for publication. As this is the second time that these concerns have been raised, if they are not fully addressed in the revision, I may reject the manuscript."</i></p>

<p>Outstanding concerns</p>	<p>Authors partially but not fully addressing reviewers' concerns</p>	<p>Clearly communicate to the authors, perhaps in an itemized list of broad points, which specific concerns must be addressed for the manuscript to be accepted for publication, and let them know that the manuscript may be rejected if these are not addressed. In addition, identify any concerns that do not need to be addressed.</p>	<p>Last chance revision: <i>"I have assessed the revision and note that Reviewer #2 previously raised valid concerns regarding the statistical method used for analysis. While you have revised the statistical analysis portion of the manuscript, it does not seem that you have fully addressed this concern. You must provide justification or clarification for the statistical method used before I will consider accepting this manuscript for publication. If they are not fully addressed in the revision, I may reject the manuscript."</i></p>
<p>Outstanding concerns</p>	<p>One previous reviewer continues to request revisions</p>	<p>Determine whether the authors addressing the reviewer comments is required for the manuscript to meet the publication criteria, or if the manuscript is suitable for publication at this point. If suitable, explain that you considered the reviewers' concerns but feel the manuscript should be accepted. Alternatively, if revision is required, clearly communicate to the authors which concerns must be addressed and state that if they aren't addressed, the manuscript may be rejected. If the reviewer's concerns are valid and the manuscript does not meet the publication criteria, you may unfortunately need to reject the manuscript.</p>	<p>Accept: <i>"One reviewer has continued to raise concerns about the study design, but after carefully considering your response and revision, as well as their most recent review, I have decided that this manuscript is now suitable for publication."</i></p> <p>Last chance revision: <i>"One reviewer has continued to raise concerns about the study design. After carefully considering your response and revision, as well as their most recent review, I believe these concerns are valid and require that you address these. If these are not addressed adequately in the revision, I may reject the manuscript."</i></p> <p>Reject: <i>"One reviewer has continued to raise concerns about the study design. After carefully considering your response and revision, as well as their most recent review, I believe these concerns are valid and that the conclusions are not supported by the data as is required by the publication criteria. Unfortunately, I have therefore decided to reject the manuscript."</i></p>

Theme	What's Happening	What We Recommend	What You the AE Might Say
Misunderstanding	Misunderstanding between authors and reviewers regarding concerns	Explain the misunderstanding to the authors if the issue is clear to you. If you are uncertain of either the author's or reviewer's viewpoint, or of how to resolve this issue, please contact the journal for assistance.	<i>"There may be a misunderstanding between you and Reviewer #1 regarding the statistical analyses. The reviewer has no issue with the method you chose but rather the assumptions and parameters utilized to obtain your results. In your Methods and Results sections, please clearly explain the rationale for choosing these assumptions and parameters, as well as any resulting limitations or impacts these choices have on the conclusions drawn."</i>

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New concerns	Reassignment from another editor where previous reviews were insufficient to reach a decision, so new review(s) were secured that raised new concerns.	Communicate to the authors the reasons for choosing to secure new reviews, as well as your assessment and agreement with the newly raised concerns. Describe which concerns must be addressed for the manuscript to be accepted for publication. Indicate whether you intend to invite reviewers to re-review.	<i>"The Academic Editor who originally assigned themselves to this manuscript became unavailable, and I am now the Academic Editor. After assessing the previously returned reviews in detail, I felt that further external review(s) were required before I could reach a decision. The review(s) raised new concerns that I agree need to be addressed. I do apologize on behalf of the journal office for the delay this has caused. While Reviewers #1 and 2 provided generally positive comments and find the manuscript suitable for publication, I require that you respond to the careful critique provided by Reviewer #3 and revise the manuscript accordingly. After I assess the revision, I may re-invite reviewers to re-review the manuscript."</i>

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Disagreement	Authors rebutting or refusing your or reviewers' requests to perform	Review authors' rebuttal and judge whether the additional work is	Open reject: <i>"After careful consideration of your response and revision, unfortunately I have determined that</i>

	essential additional experiments or analyses	required for the conclusions to be supported by data. If you would like to consult another editor on this, please email the journal. If work is required, decide whether to open reject and invite resubmission or provide one more opportunity for concerns to be addressed through a revision. An open reject can be considered when extensive revisions are required that would exceed our usual 45 day major revision deadline.	<p><i>without this additional work, this manuscript does not meet the publication criteria and I must reject it. If you are able to fully address these concerns, you may revise the manuscript accordingly and submit a new manuscript. If you choose to submit an appropriately revised version of this work, please include the original manuscript number in your cover letter and provide a summary of the revisions undertaken since the original submission. I will agree to handle the new submission if I am available.</i></p> <p>Last chance revision: <i>“After careful consideration of your response and revision, I have determined that this additional work is required for the conclusions to be adequately supported by the data. I would like to offer one more opportunity for you to fully address these concerns. If the revised manuscript does not fulfill these requirements, I may reject it.”</i></p>
Disagreement	Authors do not agree with comments raised by a new reviewer added after the first round of review	Assess whether the reviewer’s concerns are valid, major, and must be addressed to meet the publication criteria. Clearly communicate to the authors the reason that you invited a reviewer at this stage, and that these concerns must be addressed for the manuscript to meet the publication criteria and be accepted.	<p>Last chance revision: <i>“After Reviewer #2 raised concerns regarding the methodology used, I secured a review from a methodological expert, who has provided a careful critique of your work. I apologize for extending the review process but felt this additional review was required to determine the methodological validity. I have reviewed your response and their comments, and determined that these concerns must be addressed before I will accept the manuscript for publication. If these concerns are not resolved in the revised manuscript, I may reject it.”</i></p>
Disagreement	Author and reviewer disagree on concerns or scientific	Assess both sides of the disagreement and apply your own	<p>Option 1: Equally valid <i>“You and the reviewer both make valuable points, and I can appreciate both perspectives. I</i></p>

	content/perspective	expertise and experience. If possible, come to a decision on how this disagreement can be resolved in the manuscript. If you are unsure or would like a second opinion, or if the discussion becomes argumentative or inflammatory, please email the journal.	<p><i>request that you present the reviewer's perspective in addition to yours in the Discussion section, acknowledging the limitations this may present for your interpretation of the results."</i></p> <p>Option 2: Author valid <i>"You and the reviewer both make valuable points, and I can appreciate both perspectives. In this case, much of the recent literature supports the perspective provided in your rebuttal. However, I would ask that you also mention the alternative perspective raised by the reviewer."</i></p> <p>Option 3: Reviewer valid <i>"You and the reviewer both make valuable points, and I can appreciate both perspectives. In this case, I believe the reviewer's interpretation is perhaps more valid given their expertise and recent literature on the topic. I request that you present their perspective in addition to yours in the Discussion section, including an outline of the disagreement and a discussion of the evidence that supports each perspective."</i></p>
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Language	Authors did not adequately revise the manuscript for language or grammar	Suggest that the authors copy edit or make use of a copy editing service. Review the manuscript yourself and determine whether the language is passable for publication. We do not advise proofing or copy editing the manuscript yourself.	<p><i>"I have assessed your submission, and I have concerns about the [if applicable, insert additional comments] and overall readability of the manuscript. I therefore request that you revise the text to fix the grammatical errors and improve the overall readability of the text.</i></p> <p><i>PLOS suggests that you thoroughly copyedit your manuscript for language usage, spelling, and grammar. If you do not know anyone who can do this, you may wish to consider employing a professional scientific editing service. Whilst you may use any professional scientific editing service of your choice, PLOS has partnered with both American Journal Experts (AJE) and Editage to provide discounted services to PLOS</i></p>



			<p>authors. Both organizations have experience helping authors meet PLOS guidelines and can provide language editing, translation, manuscript formatting, and figure formatting to ensure your manuscript meets our submission guidelines. To take advantage of the partnership with AJE, visit the AJE website (https://www.aje.com/services/editing/) for a 15% discount off AJE services. To take advantage of the partnership with Editage, visit the Editage website (www.editage.com) and enter referral code PLOSEDIT for a 15% discount off Editage services.</p> <p>Upon re-submission, please provide the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* The name of the colleague or the details of the professional service that edited your manuscript* A copy of your manuscript showing your changes by either highlighting them or using track changes (uploaded as a *supporting information* file)* A clean copy of the edited manuscript (uploaded as the new *manuscript* file) <p>Please note that PLOS does not copy edit accepted manuscripts and that one of the criteria for publication is that articles must be presented in an intelligible fashion and written in clear, correct, and unambiguous English. If the language is not sufficiently improved, I may have no choice but to reject the manuscript."</p>
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