

Thursday, Feb 13, 2020  
FL2-1001, 9:30am-11:00am

*Join us for a second panel discussion on "Overcoming Obstacles in Publishing Papers" with three senior scientists at NCAR. Each panelist will provide insights and tips on navigating the publication process from an editor/reviewer perspective, followed by a group discussion.*

- *Scott Ellis, Project Scientist II, EOL*
- *Olga Wilhelmi, Project Scientist IV, RAL*
- *Glen Romine, Project Scientist III, MMM/CISL*

Opening comments and good/bad practices in publication:

Scott:

- Goals: to do good science; publication is not the end goal. If you do good science, you will get it published. Do not overemphasize the numbers. Peer review is serious, the pillar of science.
- For example, the original MJO paper is a serious publication, has high impact, and created a new field. Scientists should not aim for high LPU (least publishable unit), which could limit the impact. For editors, it's obvious when authors are trying to increase LPU.

Olga:

Currently the editor of AMS Weather, Climate, and Society

- Golden rule: treat others with respect, don't take things personally. Peer review is an important process.
- Authors: treat readers with respect, good organized papers are helpful, think about the audience, especially for interdisciplinary journals.
- Reviewers: think as authors, provide constructive feedback, explain how to improve the manuscript and help the authors. Good reviewers make the editors job so much easier.

Glen:

Currently the editor of Monthly Weather Review

- A major failure of a manuscript: results cannot not support the original ideas/hypothesis, but authors do not let go of the original ideas. They start the paper with one thing, but results suggest another. It creates problems for reviewers. The authors need to lead the readers down the path, structure the paper well, stay on target. Unsupported results confuse the reviewers, and lead to rejection.
- It's also important to know the expectation for the journal, and what reviewers are used to seeing.

## Q&A:

- 1. How are editors structured in journals?**
  - a. For AMS journals, there is usually one chief editor who's the primary person, does quick check with rough standards, and can reject the paper right away. Then they assign the editor.
  - b. Under each editor, a team of 2-3 associate editors is usually chosen a priori. For each paper, there will be at least one associate editor. All reviewers are rated, scored, to be used for future selections (yes/no, late).
  - c. The scoring depends on whether the reviewer accepts/rejects reviews, and whether they are late on their responses. If a reviewer with a high score rejects a paper, their decision will be heavily weighted.
- 2. Would you recommend becoming editor/associate editor (AE)?**
  - a. It is a valuable experience, and it's good to know how it works on the other side. You will learn to know good/bad papers/reviewers, and to become a better reviewer. Finding reviewers is challenging, given that all are voluntary works.
  - b. AEs are called for conflicting reviews, the editor relies on their expertise.
- 3. What to do when you get very different reviews? Such as a rejection and a minor, and the editor decides on a major?**
  - a. Editors usually give helpful comments to improve the paper, and clues to what they view as important.
- 4. How important is it for authors to suggest reviewers? How do the editors choose and avoid conflict of interests?**
  - a. The journals usually have a reviewers database, but it might not always work.
  - b. Suggested reviewers are helpful and taken into account, but not always chosen. It provides an idea of whom you know that are knowledgeable on the subject.
  - c. The editors think about who might provide valuable reviews. Look through citations.
  - d. Cross-pollination is important (picking both camps as reviewers).
- 5. At what point of career would you recommend people to become AE?**
  - a. When they have enough publications, express interests, and are able to spend time to make good reviews
- 6. How do early career scientists manage time for the peer-review process?**
  - a. It's worth the investment to serve as reviewers/AE, because it will improve paper writing. However, AE has a much larger volume to review.
  - b. Reviewer for proposals, you get to see how proposal selection works. Once you've submitted proposals, you're in the poll. You could email the program managers, but as ad hoc reviewers you won't see other reviews. It's good to be on the panel to understand the whole process.
  - c. When you publish, your name will be out there. Ask from senior colleagues to get reviews. NEVER delegate reviews.
- 7. If I have rejected review at an early stage of my career, how do I get back into the poll of reviewers to be asked again?**

- a. You can reach out to editors.
- b. The more you publish, the more requests you will get.
- c. Talk to senior colleagues.

**8. When do you know that you have enough to publish one high impact/quality article?**

- a. Standards vary, you should develop your own sense of what story you want to tell, and focus on the science at hand.
- b. Journal dependence, word counts; e.g. if it's a comprehensive study with a novel method, the method could be published in a method-focused journal, and analysis/results in a different journal;
- c. Do not have a dense article, it can detract from the main story; in that case it's worth breaking up the research into multiple papers.
- d. Reviewers do not like multi-part papers, because they will have to commit much more time. It is often not necessary to have multi-part papers. Ask for help on how to partition the study. Separate the study into key stories and peripheral stories (there might be sacrifices). Only show the interesting stories, and let the rest go.
- e. Minimum results: there is no standard, it will depend on how good you're at crafting the story.

**9. Any advice for checking how dense the paper becomes? How to make sure the whole story is there?**

- a. Put on the reviewer's hat when writing the paper. E.g. avoid huge blocks of text that are not friendly to readers. No one except for reviewers will read every sentence of the text.
- b. Use Supporting Information and Appendix to make the story flow, but only the necessary materials.
- c. Use simple language, fancy words invite problems.
- d. If you're not good at writing, ask for help.

**10. As a reviewer, should you take care of grammar and writing?**

- a. If the correction is lightweight, will put in the comments. If it's too much work, one can make a major comment on grammar.
- b. Can give examples of the types of errors to let the authors know the clues.
- c. If it's not fixed after the revision, the reviewer can reject it.
- d. AMS does proofreading, but not all journals. Reviewers will help to improve the quality of the paper.

**11. Do editors read through the whole paper before sending it to the reviewers?**

- a. Almost never: they scan through to check the content
- b. Editors might talk to each other to decide which journal is appropriate
- c. Editors check to see if the paper meets the general guidelines. If they think it's bad, they might reject it right away.

**12. How to deal with comments that relate to writing styles?**

- a. You can decline comments, if the reviewers complain again the editor gets to decide.

- b. Some editors will try to keep the reviewers happy; some will make their judgement.

**13. How to navigate reviewers's disagreement in the analysis/conclusion?**

- a. Remember not to take it personally, put away reviews and get back to soften the language.
- b. Think: do the reviews have a point? If not, justify in a respectful way.
- c. Call for help from AE or another reviewer.
- d. You can appeal and provide evidence, chief editor weighs in.
- e. Before resubmission to a different journal, address the previous comments. You might get the same reviewer and comments.

**14. How to deal with negative feedback from journals and figure out what to do?**

- a. Co-authors.
- b. Stand your ground and defend yourself (at least in the first round), it's your science. If comments won't make your science better, you don't have to do it (and justify it).
- c. If you're not able to do additional work, strengthen your conclusion, rethink the presentation of results.
- d. Do not make conclusions too grandiose.

**15. Where to put the trivial results that reviewers suggest you to do?**

- a. In response to reviewers.
- b. Take a pause, back up, and spend more time improving the paper.

**16. How to deal with papers that are similar but have small results/applications?**

- a. Papers that build-on and correct previous techniques are valuable.
- b. How much increment is enough? It is a personal call.

**17. What are the factors in accepting/rejecting reviews?**

- a. Am I qualified to review? Can I provide useful information?
- b. Time constraint?
- c. Conflict of interests?
- d. Provide comments at your strength, and tell the editor how much you can/cannot contribute

**18. To what extent are neutral/negative results encouraged to be published?**

- a. Reviewers will reject selling things that are not supported by the results
- b. Authors can argue ways the results could be important and impactful.
- c. Be open, honest, and straightforward
- d. Journal dependent
- e. If your science advances your field, it's publishable
- f. Suspense won't work for technical writing
- g. Be honest about limitation and challenges, people will find out the shortcomings later anyways

**19. How to deal with conflict of interests when deciding to review an article?**

- a. If you cannot provide impartial review, don't do it.

**20. Blind reviews? Or completely open reviews?**

- a. Can of worms...

- b. Some reviewers never give minor revisions, because they want to see the response from the authors.
- c. Be hesitant to reject papers, unless it is fundamentally flawed.
- d. Soft rejection: when the authors need more than 2 months to improve the paper; it can be more kind and save people's time with rejection.