

WSSA GUIDELINES FOR ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Role and Responsibilities

Associate Editors (AEs) play a key role in peer-reviewed publishing, supporting the journal Editor as subject experts on various topics. AEs oversee assigned manuscripts, moving these papers through review and revision. AEs are responsible for assessing manuscript quality, obtaining peer reviews, requesting revisions where appropriate, and making recommendations to the journal Editor about acceptance or rejection of a manuscript.

As an Associate Editor for a WSSA journal you have three main responsibilities:

1. You manage the review process, working with the Managing Editor to ensure that manuscripts move through review and revision as efficiently as possible. You liaise with the journal Editor and the Managing Editor to identify suitable reviewers, obtain reviews, and you make a recommendation to the Editor based on the reviews received **and your own assessment of the manuscript**. Evaluating the manuscript yourself is a key responsibility as AE - you are not merely a portal for transmitting the opinions of the reviewers.
2. You communicate with the corresponding author about manuscript revisions, and you review the revised manuscript before making a final recommendation to the Editor.
3. You serve on your journal's Editorial Board to uphold scholastic standards and provide input on journal policy, scope, and direction.

Workflow

WSSA journals use the Editorial Manager (EM) software platform for manuscript processing. You will receive an EM e-mail alert when a new manuscript is assigned to you, together with a list of suggested reviewers selected by the Editor. Here are the steps to follow when you receive this alert:

1. Access the manuscript on EM and read it. Before assignment to an AE, all submitted manuscripts are reviewed by the Editor for quality and suitability for the journal. Desk rejections by the Editor (i.e. the paper is returned to the author without review) screen out the majority of poor-quality manuscripts and those unsuitable for the scope of the journal. However, an AE with more specific expertise serves as an additional filter, and you should discuss an assigned manuscript with the Editor if you do not think the quality or subject of the manuscript justifies further review.

Manuscripts submitted to WSSA journals are automatically screened for plagiarized content using iThenticate. Reports generated by iThenticate can be accessed by the Editor and Associate Editors, but not by reviewers. To see iThenticate screening results, access the manuscript in EM by clicking on the hyperlink in the e-mail message that notified you of the assignment. Then click on Action Links at the top of the left-hand column, select Similarity Check/iThenticate Results from the drop-down menu, and when the next window opens, go to Report Status and click on Completed. Manuscripts frequently contain commonly used short phrases that will be highlighted by iThenticate, but any larger block of flagged text that matches previously published material in the iThenticate database should be investigated. Manuscripts with high iThenticate scores (> 20%) will have already been examined on submission, but a second pair of eyes is valuable. Contact the Editor if you have concerns about possible plagiarism, including self-plagiarism (i.e. authors duplicating all or part of their own previously published work). WSSA does not currently use software to detect image duplication or manipulation in submitted manuscripts, but if you have concerns about this in any paper you should contact the Editor.

Notify the Editor immediately if you have a potential conflict of interest (e.g. if one of the authors is a close current collaborator or employed at the same institution) or if the topic is so far outside your area that you feel unqualified to handle the submission. The Editor tries to assign every manuscript to an AE with appropriate expertise. However, given the diversity of submitted papers and the limited number of AEs, you may sometimes be asked to handle a paper that is not in your immediate specialty.

2. Check the list of suggested reviewers. You have 24 hours to add or remove reviewers on this list, or to change the order in which reviewers will be contacted. If you are satisfied with the reviewer list, you can immediately e-mail the Managing Editor (wssa@cambridge.org) to initiate reviewer invitations. Contact the Managing Editor if you wish to make changes to the reviewer list. You most likely know qualified individuals in your area of expertise who would be good additions to the WSSA reviewer database, and AE suggestions for new reviewers are always welcome. However, as a professional courtesy, confirm with colleagues that they are willing to review before adding them as new reviewers.

After 24 hours, reviewer invitations will be sent to the first two listed individuals, and will continue down the list until two positive responses are received. The Managing Editor will contact the Editor if the list is exhausted without finding two reviewers. You will then work with the Editor and Managing Editor to identify additional reviewers to be contacted. Reviewers are asked to submit reviews within 21 days, and EM sends automatic reminders to reviewers when their reviews are due. EM will notify you when reviews are received.

3. When you receive the reviews. First, reread the manuscript. It is a good idea to do this before you read the reviews so you can form your own unbiased assessment.

Then read the reviews and decide if they are fair and adequate. See the WSSA Guidelines for Reviewers for details on what a good review should address. Remember that reviews will be read by the authors, and the reviews together with the AE comments represent the response of the journal to a submitted manuscript. We want scientific rigor, but lazy, shallow, or unnecessarily harsh reviews do not reflect well on the journal's editorial board and reviewers, and will deter authors from submitting to the journal in future. You can request additional reviews from other reviewers if you feel that the reviews you have received are insufficient for you to make a recommendation on the manuscript. You can do this, for example, if two reviewers offer very different opinions, although as AE you also have the option of functioning as a third reviewer when necessary. To obtain additional reviews, contact the Managing Editor (wssa@cambridge.org) with the names and e-mail addresses of the reviewers you wish to invite.

Even if the reviews are positive, do not automatically recommend acceptance if you believe that a manuscript is not of sufficient quality or it has not been thoroughly reviewed. If this happens, obtain at least one more review, and write your own detailed comments. However, do not recommend rejection for trivial reasons. Reserve rejection for manuscripts with serious issues that cannot be improved by revision, such as an incorrect hypothesis, poor experimental design, or failure of the research to add anything meaningful or useful to our understanding of the topic.

EM will ask you to rate the reviews you received, based on quality and timeliness. Please do this thoughtfully. Good reviewers are hard to find, and - despite its importance - reviewing is too often an unacknowledged and unrewarded activity. If a reviewer provides an exceptionally thorough or detailed review, consider e-mailing a personal note of thanks. The gesture may help retain him or her as a willing reviewer for the future.

4. Write your comments on the manuscript. These should include a summary of the main points raised by the reviewers as well as your own observations. If you are requesting revisions, your AE comments should provide clear and specific guidance for the authors on how to proceed. You should direct the authors on which points made by the reviewers should be addressed and why; which points are relatively unimportant; and (if necessary) where you as AE do not share a reviewer's opinion. If you do disagree with a reviewer, keep your comments neutral, professional, and focused on helping the author revise the manuscript. *Weed Science* and *Weed Technology* AEs can remove or edit reviewer comments included in the letter sent to the corresponding author (see #5 below). However, reserve this option for serious cases of harsh, disparaging, or inadequate reviews that will not help improve the manuscript. All reviews, AE comments, and correspondence with the authors will be archived in Editorial Manager with the manuscript.

5. Decide on your initial recommendation, and select the appropriate category in EM. Final acceptance or rejection of a manuscript is the responsibility of the Editor, not the AE. If your recommendation is Accept, Reject/Revise and Resubmit,

or Reject/Discourage Resubmit, EM automatically forwards that recommendation to the Editor who then sends a decision letter to the corresponding author. If you are an AE for *Weed Science* or *Weed Technology*, and your initial recommendation is Accept with Minor Changes, Minor Revision Requested, or Major Revision Requested, EM generates and displays a standardized letter from you to the corresponding author that will be sent with reviews attached. You can edit and review this letter before sending it (click on Preview Letter in the bottom menu bar to see how the letter will appear when sent to the corresponding author), but if you do make any edits be careful not to delete the resubmission instructions. For *Invasive Plant Science and Management*, the AEs forward their recommendations to the Editor, who sends all decision letters, including those requesting revisions, to the authors. IPSM AEs do not handle this correspondence.

The Editor selects an article from each issue describing innovative research of potential public interest. The selected article is featured in a press release and made freely available for a limited time when the issue is published. Each WSSA journal also selects one article each year for an Outstanding Paper award. If a high-quality manuscript describes especially interesting or innovative research, you can add it to the shortlist of papers to be considered for this award. Manuscripts are flagged as potential candidates for either a press release or the Outstanding Paper Award by checking the appropriate box in EM when you submit your initial recommendation. This action is not communicated to the authors.

6. Revised and resubmitted manuscripts. EM will alert you when a manuscript is resubmitted after revision. The new manuscript file will have the same number as the original submission, with "R1" appended to distinguish the revised version. You can use the hyperlink in the EM e-mail alert to access the original manuscript and all the revised versions in EM, together with reviewer comments and author responses.

In most cases, review by the AE alone is sufficient to reach a final recommendation, but you can request additional reviews of a revised manuscript if you feel they are needed. If you received detailed and thoughtful reviews of the original submission, consider inviting one or more of the original reviewers to re-review the revised manuscript to determine if problems previously identified have now been resolved. You can ask the author to submit a second revised manuscript if the first set of revisions fails to address all the points raised during review. However, it improves efficiency and reduces author frustration if an AE provides sufficient direction to allow a final recommendation on the manuscript after a single round of revisions. If you do ask for further revisions, be specific about what is required and avoid requesting changes beyond those initially proposed by reviewers and in your AE comments. A manuscript resubmitted after a second round of revisions will have "R2" appended to the original identifying number.

A good AE not only assesses the scientific quality of the manuscript, but also helps authors present their research in ways that maximize transparency and impact. Major formatting problems are addressed by the Managing Editor during initial

screening as part of the manuscript submission process, and all accepted manuscripts are copyedited by Cambridge University Press for minor text errors before publication. However, as AE you can suggest improvements to figures in a revised manuscript, and you should encourage the use of color for graphics and images. Color images enhance visual appeal, and are published in WSSA journals at no additional cost for authors. Where appropriate, you can also encourage authors to upload supplementary files containing material such as code, data, or additional analyses. This supporting material will not be formatted, but will be made available with the final published article and permanently archived online.

Ethical Issues

In addition to plagiarism, AEs should be aware that manipulation of the peer review system can occur. Abuses reported in other journals include unjustified demands that authors cite the reviewer's own work, thus boosting the reviewer's citation scores; reviewing and citation cartels in which researchers agree to provide favorable reviews and multiple citations of each other's papers; and fake reviews where an author provides false contact information redirecting a reviewer invitation to the author or to an accomplice. While such abuses have not so far been detected in WSSA journals, vigilance is necessary to ensure that our peer review system remains fair and honest. The Editors confirm the identity, institutional or employer affiliation, and e-mail address of any suggested reviewer unknown to them, and AEs inviting additional reviewers should do the same.

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