



# REVIEWER SELECTION FAQs

Last updated June 2019; send suggestions for improvement to Steve Green at [Green@AnnEmergMed.org](mailto:Green@AnnEmergMed.org).

General principles on manuscript management and peer review decisions are found in the “Job Description for Decision Editors for *Annals of Emergency Medicine*” found at [www.acep.org/annalseditors](http://www.acep.org/annalseditors). This supplementary document addresses more specific issues regarding reviewer selection.

## **Which manuscripts should or should not be sent for full peer review?**

Your first job as decision editor is to screen which manuscripts are promising enough to warrant sending for full peer review. Most manuscripts that are substantially flawed or of poor interest to our readership should be rejected without such review. It is not appropriate for us to ask our reviewers to use their time and energies to evaluate unsuitable manuscripts (in particular our meth/stats reviewers), and instead as editor you should provide a brief paragraph summarizing the reason for rejection. If you have questions or concerns, get advice from a deputy editor.

## **How many reviewers should I use?**

If the manuscript is good enough to warrant review, you should select at least 2 content reviewers with appropriate expertise in the topic of the manuscript. The total number of reviewers depends upon your comfort with the specific topic. A minimum of 2 completed reviews should be obtained for each paper; a total of 3 or 4 reviewers is most common. Few manuscripts should ever need 5 or more reviews – perhaps only those on areas of extreme controversy (get advice from your deputy editor).

You will also request a methodology/statistical reviewer for the more promising original research and brief research reports, typically following the receipt of content reviews.

To avoid the unhappy scenario of ultimately finding yourself with too few reviews, it is best to routinely assign 2 to 4 extras as “Alternative Reviewers.” Alternative reviewers will then be automatically promoted and invited should individuals from your first selected group decline or ignore your invitation. Note also that you are provided the option to “link” alternative reviewers to specific individuals first invited. This way if a specific reviewer declines or ignores their invitation you can ensure who will be invited in their

place. When you have sufficient accepted reviewers for your manuscript, please remove any remaining Alternative Reviewers so that they can be available for other submissions.

### **Who should I invite?**

Try to invite reviewers who are likely to know the subject based upon their prior research and/or selected classifications in Editorial Manager. Don't use individuals from the same institution as the author, and avoid people likely to be good friends with the author. Scanning the manuscript's reference list will often provide excellent ideas for those who have done prior research in the area, as will doing a PubMed search.

Avoid using the same reviewers over and over, as we don't want to burn them out and it is worthwhile for each editor to receive a diversity of input over time. Avoid whenever possible inviting reviewers who have a current review already in progress or who completed a review in the past month (both items are visible on the reviewer selection screen). We strongly desire to increase the use of reviewers with diverse backgrounds, in terms of gender, race, geography, and culture. If one of your candidates fits one of those categories, we ask that you please invite them first.

If the author suggests reviewers, you are not obligated to use them. Similarly, if an author requests that you NOT use specific reviewers, you need not adhere to their request. When evaluating comments from reviewers in either group, try to take into account their potential biases, particularly with comments pertaining to perceived importance of the study or other subjective assessments.

Note also that there are several alternative templates available for reviewer invitations that you can select from a drop-down menu: Assign Guest Reviewer, Assign Reviewer to Revised Manuscript. Or, you can readily customize the letter to insert a special note to the reviewer.

### **How do I invite a specific person?**

If you have a specific individual in mind that you wish to invite, use the default setting of "Search for Reviewers" from "All Reviewers" and then search by their name.

### **What if a specific person is not registered in our system?**

If a specific person you wish to invite is not registered in our system, click "Request Unregistered Reviewer" near the bottom of the page and provide *Annals'* staff the necessary contact information to register and invite them. (All such information is typically available on PubMed if you locate the individual's latest article.) Or if you notice that a promising person is not a registered reviewer but don't need them for your specific paper at hand, forward their names to Steve Green ([Green@AnnEmergMed.org](mailto:Green@AnnEmergMed.org)) and he will look into formally inviting them to be a reviewer.

### **How do I invite suitable reviewers other than by name?**

Editorial Manager provides three functions for identifying reviewers: “Suggest Reviewers,” “Search by Classification Matches,” and “Search by Personal Classifications.” Note that with any of these functions you may search by “All Reviewers” or any single tier of reviewers; in general it is best to search by our best performing level of “Reviewers” first. (The tiered reviewer system is described in a separate section below.)

A good first strategy is to “Suggest Reviewers.” This will compare classifications selected by the author for their manuscript to those selected by the reviewers themselves, and display individuals with the most matches at the top. A related but more focused technique is “Search by Classification Matches.” This lets you pick which of the specific author-chosen classifications you wish to prioritize. The primary challenge to both of these techniques is that the authors often do not select the best classifications for their manuscript.

For editors familiar with *Annals*' classification system, the most efficient way to reliably identify qualified reviewers is doing a “Search by Personal Classifications.” This powerful function will permit you to display all reviewers who identify themselves as interested in “Gastrointestinal Disorders” for example, or “Geriatrics” or “Military Medicine.” This search technique does not depend upon author-selected classifications.

### **How do I find specialized methodology reviewers?**

*Annals* has reviewers in the following categories to assist with manuscripts of uncommon, focused methodologies.

- 20. Methodology (research designs per se)
  - 20.05 Peer review and scientific publication
  - 20.1 Qualitative research
  - 20.2 Social sciences research
  - 20.3 Librarian search strategies
  - 20.4 NHAMCS database
  - 20.5 HCUP database
  - 20.6 OSHPOD California database
  - 20.7 CMS data
  - 20.8 Survey Methodology

You can find them by doing a "Search by Personal Classifications" from “All Reviewers,” and then select the group in question.

### **How does *Annals* stratify their peer reviewers?**

As might be expected, our approximately 1,500-member reviewer pool exhibits a broad spectrum of quality and reliability. To permit editors to target the bulk of their review invitations to our better reviewers, *Annals* uses a tiered reviewer stratification system, using

the following three categories ordered from best to worst: Reviewer, Consultant, Specialist (mnemonics RauCouS or ReCesS).

“Reviewers” (top tier) are our premier reviewer cadre, ie, those individuals most likely to deliver timely, quality reviews. We should use them for the bulk of our reviews. This group comprises approximately one fourth of our total reviewer pool.

“Consultants” (borderline tier) would be former Reviewers who have exhibited some issues with review quality and/or dependability. We should use Consultants when either we have difficulty locating suitable Reviewers or when the specific Consultant seems particularly well suited for the given paper.

“Specialist” reviewers (underperforming tier) should only be selected in those circumstances in which we know that the individual has expertise appropriate to the paper in question. This category includes former Reviewers and Consultants who have exhibited particularly suboptimal performance, and individuals of unique background (eg, pharmacists, physicians with training other than emergency medicine) who would not typically be suitable for general selection in the peer review process.

*Annals* evaluates reviewer performance on an ongoing basis and promotes/demotes individuals within this dynamic classification. Note that this system is invisible to the reviewers themselves.

### **What do I do if reviews are late?**

*Annals* asks its reviewers to complete their task within 2 weeks, a faster turn-around time than many other journals. Under *Annals*' tiered reviewer system, individuals whose reviews are frequently late are demoted and thus less likely to be reinvited. That being said, valuable reviewers still regularly miss our deadline.

*Annals*' staff routinely send reminder notes to overdue reviewers, and it is usually worth being patient for a couple more days to permit the late review to arrive. Personal contact from an editor can often be very influential, with language such as the following: “We appreciate your agreeing to review *Annals* manuscript XXXX-XXXX, but note that your review is now past due and is the last one pending on this manuscript. When can we expect it? If you have not yet started on your review, let us know and we will remove this from your work queue altogether and proceed with a decision on the manuscript. Further, if we have not heard back from you by tomorrow afternoon we will remove this task from your work queue.”

### **What if I want to remove a reviewer?**

A reviewer can withdraw from their accepted task at any time, although this is unusual. If an editor wishes to remove a reviewer from their accepted task, they can either be uninvited or terminated. Neither such action should be undertaken lightly or generally with-

out warning to the reviewer, as the individual may have already devoted substantial time to the task.

Editors can “un-invite” reviewers through the link on the reviewer invitation page. Un-invitations are appropriate when you invited the wrong person by accident, or quickly realized that you don’t need the person after all. If the un-invitation is not shortly after the invitation, be aware that the reviewer may have already begun work and may be offended by the action. It is preferable to either contact them first, or specify in the un-invitation that at their request they can be re-invited if they wish. If you have already received enough other reviews to shape your decision and don’t need a remaining pending review, you should either wait for them to finish, or contact them by e-mail to see if they have yet begun the task. Note that for *Annals*’ reviewer performance statistics, an un-invitation is not regarded as any fault of the reviewer and is not counted against them in any way.

If an editor proceeds to make a decision on a manuscript while a review remains outstanding, Editorial Manager will “terminate” that reviewer and send them an email notifying them that the task has been removed. Such terminations should be reserved for situations in which the review is more than slightly late and the reviewer has been warned as discussed in the prior section. For the standpoint of *Annals*’ evaluation of reviewers, termination is a serious offense that typically results in demotion. It is assumed to only occur when reviews are well past due and still not received despite suitable warning, so please do not terminate reviewers in any other circumstance.

### **How do I rate reviewers?**

There is no need to rate meth/stats reviews, but don’t forget to rate each other review afterwards in accordance with the following guidelines and scale.

*Annals* uses the following scoring elements for review quality:

- The reviewer identified and commented upon major strengths and weaknesses of study design and methodology.
- The reviewer commented accurately and productively upon the quality of the author's interpretation of the data, including acknowledgment of its limitations.
- The reviewer commented upon major strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript as a written communication, independent of the design, methodology, results, and interpretation of the study.
- The reviewer provided the author with useful suggestions for improvement of the manuscript.
- The reviewer's comments to the author were constructive and professional.
- The review provided the editor the proper context and perspective to make a decision on acceptance (and/or revision) of the manuscript.

Editors use these criteria to rate each review from 1 to 5 with the following definitions:

1. Unacceptable effort and content (comments not sent to author, trigger editor review)

2. Unacceptable effort OR content (comments not sent to author, trigger editor review)
3. Acceptable
4. Commendable; of use to both editor and author
5. Exceptional; hard to improve (expected to describe less than 10-20% of reviews)

### **Editing reviewer comments**

Before you send reviewer comments to an author, be sure to edit them first. Some reviewers are unduly harsh in their choice of language and their wording can be readily softened to be more constructive and less judgmental. Also edit out comments with which you disagree or those that are inconsistent with your revision requests.

### **Brief Commentaries and Editorials**

If a particular review is of unusually high quality and/or critically discusses an interesting issue relating to the study, consider the idea of inviting this reviewer to take their review and further develop it into a Brief Commentary or even an Editorial suitable for publication in the journal alongside the article. Feel free to discuss promising reviews that might be suitable for this with your deputy editor.

### **What else?**

Other questions? Contact Martha at [mvillagomez@acep.org](mailto:mvillagomez@acep.org).