ASSOCIATE EDITOR GUIDELINES

Welcome to the Frontiers community of editors
The following guidelines are meant to provide you with further practical information regarding your role as Associate Editor as well as the Frontiers peer-review process and platform. This is in conjunction with the Terms of your role (available as a separate document on your My Frontiers tab).

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the journal team directly using their field Editorial Office account. Please also do not hesitate to request an online demo of any of the features of the platform from your journal team.

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1. **HOW-TO’S FOR YOUR ROLE AS ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

As an Associate Editor, you play a key role in establishing and growing your specialty. Each specialty section has an average of 10-20 Associate Editors, including yourself. Your primary role will be to oversee and manage the peer-review process of manuscripts. Associate Editors also contribute to the strategic direction of the section by annually co-editing or nominating a high-profile Research Topic (article collection) around an influential scientific theme.

1.1. **COMPLETE YOUR PROFILE ON LOOP**

To join the editorial board, you created an account on our research network, Loop, which allows you to receive invitations and access your editorial assignment. We ask that you complete your profile within two weeks by adding a photo, a brief bio, and a list of your publications. Your publications will be important to ensure that you receive the most appropriate editing invitations. To add publications to your Loop profile, visit the relevant tab and insert your ORCID (2) or go through the suggested list and confirm/reject (3) records, as needed. Note that you may also update your author name(s) by selecting the corresponding option in the right-hand side menu (4).
1.2 BUILD A BOARD OF 10-15 REVIEW EDITORS

Invite 10-15 Review Editors *within the first month* of your appointment. Review Editors form an essential part of our editorial board and serve as a trusted network of experts who have agreed to regularly receive review invitations matched to their expertise, and to accept to review 5-10 manuscripts per year, depending on the journal and their availability.

These should be established researchers or experts in the field – e.g. readers, lecturers, principal investigators, assistant professors (not necessarily with tenure), or more senior. Outstanding senior postdocs can also be permitted in exceptional circumstances, such as by contributing a specific expertise to the board. When inviting potential Review Editors, aim for diversity in gender balance; geographical spread; foci of research, within the scope of the specialty.

Your fellow Associate Editors will also invite Review Editors, to jointly establish a large, representative board who are familiar with Frontiers’ interactive review process.

How to invite Review Editors?
Login to your Frontiers account
Enter ‘My Frontiers’ > ‘My Editor Role’ (1)
Click on ‘Invite Review Editors’ (2)
Enter the invitee’s name or email address.

An official invitation email (with links for the invitee to accept or decline) will be automatically generated, which you are welcome to contribute a personal message to. Invites who accept will be prompted to create a profile on Loop, after which they will immediately be listed on the editorial board. Please note, to ensure all necessary details are conveyed to those invited, the official invitation text itself cannot be edited. You can see the status of invitations in My Frontiers > My Editor Role.

You can also send the Editorial Office a list of peers whom you would like to invite as Review Editors, and we can contact them on your behalf.
1.3 NOMINATE AND CO-EDIT A RESEARCH TOPIC

Associate Editors contribute to the development of the section by nominating and co-editing a Research Topic - a collection of peer-reviewed articles around an influential research theme of their choice. Defined, managed, and led by leading researchers like yourself, such collections unite international experts around emerging topic areas, stimulating collaboration and accelerating research. By inviting top authors to submit to your topic(s) and overseeing the peer-review process of contributing manuscripts, you will build strong foundations for growth and set the high-quality standards expected for the section.

What makes Research Topics unique?

- Research Topic projects are led by you, the researchers: once a topical, appropriate theme is identified, the leading Editors determine the scope of their own article collection, and also identify key experts as potential contributing authors. This gives you a great opportunity to collaborate with esteemed colleagues from around the world, and/or grow your network, to create a stellar collection of research in your area of expertise.
- With a unique homepage for each project, the collections are fully available online and,
- once completed, also downloadable as a free open eBook (see here for an example), ensuring further dissemination and promotion of your project.
- Any article type can be submitted e.g. Original Research, Review etc.
- Frontiers Open Science Platform makes managing your collection easy, and increases discoverability, readership and citations.

1.4 SUBMITTING YOUR OWN ARTICLES

Submitting your own work to the journal is welcomed and encouraged. Your contributions will serve as an important foundation for the journal, showing support and setting a quality standard therein. If you have any questions regarding your own submissions please do not hesitate to contact your journal team. Please note that your submissions will undergo the regular peer review process of the journal.
2. THE FRONTIERS PEER-REVIEW PROCESS

The Frontiers peer-review process has been designed to optimize the quality of published articles by fostering objectivity, rigor and collaboration. The Associate Editor and reviewers who endorse a manuscript are all acknowledged publicly on all published articles, and your final decision on a manuscript should consider all the reviewers’ feedback. It is important that you are familiar with Frontiers policies and practices covered in this section.

As the Associate Editor handling the peer-review process for a submitted manuscript, you are responsible for:

- The initial evaluation of the manuscript, to decide whether it is eligible for review;
- Inviting reviewers and ensuring the thoroughness of the reviews;
- Giving authors access to the interactive review forum;
- Mediating the discussion to ensure a timely and fair review;
- Making a final decision for acceptance or recommendation for rejection

2.1 INITIAL VALIDATION

To support you in ensuring the quality of the manuscripts, all submissions undergo standard initial checks by the Research Integrity team. All submissions are pre-screened for:

- Textual overlap with and similarity to published material;
- Potential image or data manipulation;
- Language quality;
- Adherence to editorial policies;
- Adherence to ethical standards;
- Potential conflicts of interest.

Following completion of these initial checks, the manuscripts are sent to a relevant Associate Editor on the board.

If issues are identified in manuscripts you are handling, the Research Integrity team will notify you and the authors as part of our standard procedure. No action is required from you unless specifically requested.

2.2 EDITORIAL ASSIGNMENT

When submitting a manuscript, authors may select an Associate Editor from the board whom they believe to be well-suited to edit their manuscript. This “preferred editor” will be invited to handle the peer-review process. Should the Associate Editor decline the assignment or not reply after a few days, invitations will be sent to other Associate Editors based on relevant expertise, as indicated by the publications listed on their Loop profile.

When you receive an invitation to edit, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have the right expertise?
- Can I be objective in my evaluation of the manuscript? (Please consider potential conflicts of interest, see below.)
• Do I have the time to handle the manuscript?

If you are unable to answer yes to all the questions, please click on the Decline link immediately to avoid receiving reminders and delaying the process for the authors. If your answer is yes to all the above, then you can consider accepting the invitation.

After clicking on the Accept link you will be prompted to answer a list of questions regarding potential conflicts of interest (COI) and will be unable to accept the assignment if one or more COIs apply. Ensure that you do not have a COI with either the authors or the submitted research. You may always refer to the Conflict of Interest section of the Review Guidelines for a list of potential COIs.

If you think that you are qualified to edit the manuscript but cannot answer yes to all the questions, then contact the Editorial Office. Some minor COIs are permissible but require a public statement on the published manuscript.

2.3 YOUR INITIAL ASSESSMENT

The next step is to download the manuscript (1) and any supplementary materials (1), if applicable. Please read through the manuscript and determine whether it should be sent for review (2) or recommended for rejection to the Specialty Chief Editor (3). Whilst doing so, please consider the following:

Does it contain fundamental objective errors that cannot be rectified?
Does the research adhere to ethical standards and research quality in the field?

Initial Assessment

- **Start inviting reviewers**
  - If the manuscript presents quality research, valid methodology and is within scope
- **Contact the Editorial Office**
  - If you believe a manuscript is out of scope of the section, the authors have chosen an incorrect article type or if you have any other concerns
- **Recommend it for rejection**
  - See section for more details
  - If the manuscript fails any of these initial checks
2.4 INVITING REVIEWERS

How to invite reviewers?

If no issues are identified in the initial assessment of the manuscript, you will be asked to invite reviewers within 7 days of accepting to handle the manuscript. Frontiers requires a minimum of 2 reviewers for most article types and, as such, we recommend that you invite at least 4 potential reviewers.

There are two options for sending invitations to reviewers: (i) Review Editors from the board; (ii) external reviewers.

To invite Review Editors from the board:

- Select the “Manage Reviewers” tab (1);
- Select “Search for Reviewers in Frontiers” (2);
- Use the search bar to search for the name of the Review Editors you would like to invite (3). You can also search for Review Editors by keyword (4).

To invite external reviewers:

- Select the “Manage Reviewers” tab (1);
- Select “Invite an external reviewer” (5);
- Fill out the relevant information.
Once this has been completed, click on the “Invite” icon (6) and choose to compose a personal message or simply send the templated invitation. You may also select multiple Review Editors to invite in a single batch.

**Who to invite?**

When inviting reviewers please take the following into consideration:

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Smart reviewer invitations} & \text{Diverse in age, gender and geographic location.} & \text{Their affiliation should be recognized.} \\
\hline
\text{They should hold a PhD with post-doctoral experience OR have several years of relevant professional or academic experience.} & & \text{Reviewers should not share the same affiliation with you or each other to promote diversity of thought and safeguard review objectivity and fairness.} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

**Smart reviewer invitations**

If the required number of reviewers is not reached after 7 days, invitations will be sent by the Editorial Office to appropriate Review Editors on board who are matched based on their expertise by our semantic algorithm. This serves to avoid undue delays and to ensure the authors can receive prompt feedback on their submission.

If you have sent out at least 3 invitations within the previous 3 days before the deadline, smart invitations will be temporarily postponed for a further 3 days.

You are strongly encouraged to invite reviewers yourself and can also revoke any reviewers invited by smart invitations.

Should you require any additional time to invite reviewers personally, please let the Editorial Office know as soon as possible within the 7 days (as above) and we can accommodate this.

**Revoking a reviewer**

Please consider revoking invited or appointed reviewers if:

- You consider them no longer suitable to review the manuscript;
- They become severely delayed or unresponsive;
- They are not constructively contributing to the review.

You may remove them from the assignment by clicking on the “Revoke” icon and writing a personal note explaining why this action had to be taken. If the minimum number of active reviewers is not met, you will be required to secure a replacement reviewer.
2.5 INDEPENDENT REVIEW

Once reviewers are assigned, they are expected to fill out a review questionnaire within 15 days. The review questionnaires vary depending on the article type and have been designed to facilitate the work of the reviewers as well as to focus on objective issues and the validity of the manuscript.

At this stage, reviewers conduct their review independently and do not have access to any comments made by the other parties. The status of each review report is shown in the “Manage Reviewers” tab, where it is also possible to send reminders to delayed reviewers (1). A reviewer’s submitted report is stored in their dedicated tab (2).

If a reviewer contacts you to request additional time to submit their report and you approve, please update us, so that we may grant the extension via the review forum. Please note that reviewers can grant themselves a 5-day extension in the system.

Assessing the review reports

You will be automatically notified once an independent review report has been submitted. Reviewers are expected to provide rigorous and in-depth reports. Your next step is to assess their quality and carry out an appropriate action:

Is the reviewers’ feedback objective, constructive, appropriate and sufficient?

- Reviewers’ feedback objective and constructive?
  - Activate the review forum.

- Reviewer’s feedback inappropriate, not sufficiently rigorous, or too brief? *
  - Select the level of revisions Minor, Moderate, or Substantial.
  - Invite additional reviewers.
  - Request the reviewer to provide additional feedback.
  - Consider revoking the reviewer.

- Reviewer’s feedback is out of scope?
  - Consider revoking the reviewer if this is not possible/they do not respond.
  - Inform the Editorial Office.

- Reviewer identifies fundamental flaws that cannot be addressed via revisions?
  - Leave your recommendation notes in the Editor tab.
  - Recommend the manuscript for rejection by activating the review forum with major concerns.

Add a personal message and click ‘Activate’.

Inform the Editorial Office.

* In cases where a brief review report is submitted, you will be notified and asked to assess the submitted report. It may be the case that the report is positive.
Your communication tools

There are two channels that you can use to communicate with participants of the review process:

- During the independent review: please send a message to either the authors or a reviewer via the review forum with the Editorial Office in copy;
- At the point of making the review reports available – you can leave comments for the authors in the Editor tab. The reviewers will also be able to see these comments;
- accordingly, please refrain from posting any identifying or sensitive information in this tab.

At any point during the peer-review process, should you or any of the reviewers have an annotated PDF, with comments relevant to the authors, please contact the Editorial Office to ensure an anonymized version is delivered. The Frontiers peer-review process takes place on the online discussion forum; therefore, we recommend that all comments are posted directly on there.

Recommending rejection specifically during the independent review

If you would like to recommend rejection during the independent review, take the following action:

- If you have not already done so, provide feedback to the authors in the Editor tab regarding your decision to recommend rejection;
- Click on “Recommend to reject manuscript” in the review forum in the right-hand pane;
- The authors will be informed of the recommendation and any active reviewers will be made inactive on the assignment.

The authors will then have 7 days to submit a rebuttal and/or upload a revised manuscript. If the authors respond, please take one of the following actions:

- Re-invite the previous reviewers or new reviewers if you believe the review should continue.
- Confirm your recommendation for rejection by clicking on “Recommend to reject manuscript”.

If, after 7 days, the authors do not respond, the recommendation for rejection will be sent directly to the Specialty Chief Editor and no action is required from you.
Activating the review forum

If you are satisfied that at least two review reports are complete and adhere to the criteria above, grant authors access to the review reports by clicking “activate the interactive review”. Please select the appropriate level of revisions (minor, moderate or substantial) and enter a personal message, that will accompany the automatically generated message detailing the necessary action.

2.6 MEDIATING THE DISCUSSION

Timely peer-review process: how does the interactive review work?

You, the authors and the reviewers can now see all comments in each reviewer’s and Editor’s tabs. Authors are asked to respond to reviewers’ comments in the review forum and to upload a revised version of their manuscript. If the authors encounter a delay with their resubmission, they may grant themselves a single 14-day extension via the review forum; more significant extensions must be approved by you, and the Editorial Office will update the review forum accordingly.

Our system automatically notifies participants when a new comment or revised manuscript is uploaded and allows 7 days for participants to respond.

Adding your own comments

Please note that you can access and post comments in the interactive review forum at any time. To do so, you can either:

- Click on the “Add Comment” icon (1) below the relevant comment that has been posted;
- Enter comments in the Editor tab (2);

Once you have entered your comments, please ensure that you click “Submit all Comments” (3) – this will make your comments visible to all other participants, who will be notified by email.
During the interactive review stage, we ask you to ensure that the dialogue between the reviewers and the authors is constructive, professional and timely.

Please pay attention to the following:

Are the reviewers providing an expert opinion and critical evaluation?
Have there been multiple rounds of revisions, beyond what is necessary or feasible?

Should a dispute arise at this stage, you will act as a mediator or invite new reviewers for additional opinions.

**Reviewers’ recommendation**

During the interactive review stage reviewers can either:

- **Endorse** – if they are satisfied with the changes made and have no further requests and you will be notified of this via email;
- **Reject** – if they disagree with the manuscript’s contents or consider that it cannot be further improved;
- **Withdraw** – if they are no longer available, the manuscript develops beyond their expertise or personal circumstances prevent them from continuing with the review.

If a reviewer withdraws or recommends rejection, they become inactive and you will be notified.

- The reasons for a reviewer’s recommendation or withdrawal are accessible in the review forum in their tab and will be visible at the top of the report in red font. These reasons are only visible to you and the Chief Editors – the authors or reviewers will not have access to these. This is also the case if a reviewer withdraws or recommends rejection without submitting a report. If appropriate, you may forward these comments to the authors, with due care for preserving the anonymity of the reviewer.
- Their report is saved but it is not possible for anyone to engage with this tab further. These reviewers will remain anonymous regardless of the final decision for the manuscript.

Consider one of the following actions:

- Invite additional reviewers if you either do not agree with the recommendation or require further input;
- Recommend rejection based on the reviewer’s comments.
2.7 MAKING THE FINAL DECISION

Once all reviewers have completed the review process, either by endorsing, recommending rejection, or withdrawing their participation, you should proceed to take a final decision on the manuscript. When deciding, you should read the final version of the manuscript, and consider all reviewer comments and author responses, whilst applying your own judgement and expertise. Please note, you will not be able to endorse the manuscript for publication, if an appointed reviewer is due to act.

When making your final decision, please consider the following points:

• Are the reviews appropriate and of high quality?
• Has the final manuscript been submitted?
• Does the manuscript propose a suitable research question and hypothesis, supported by relevant theory?
• Do the authors apply a correct and transparent methodology?
• Are the study, design and materials clearly laid out?
• Is the language and presentation clear and adequate?
• Are figures and tables in line with scientific norms and standards?
• Do the authors follow Frontiers’ Author Guidelines on editorial and ethical policies?
• Is the manuscript grounded in existing literature through sufficient referencing and does it offer an appropriate coverage of the relevant literature?

Where a decision is unclear, you should consider inviting further reviewers, or get in touch with the Editorial Office for advice on how to proceed.

If there are pending comments in the manuscript that were not addressed, you can request the final changes in the Editor tab before accepting the final version of the manuscript.

Please note that if you accept the manuscript your name will appear on the article as the handling editor. You thereby publicly certify the paper as a valid scholarly contribution. Do not accept a manuscript if there are concerns raised that have not been addressed – you are responsible for safeguarding the publication record in your role as Editor.

Recommending rejection

Should you decide to recommend a manuscript for rejection based on reviewers’ recommendations, click “Recommend to reject manuscript” (1) on the right-hand side menu and provide clear justifications for your decision.

Your recommendation will be sent directly to the Specialty Chief Editor, who verifies that the review was conducted in accordance with Frontiers’ policies and takes the final decision.

Note that, at this point, the authors are not aware of your recommendation. Only after the Specialty Chief Editor confirms a rejection are you, the authors, and the reviewers notified of this final decision. Furthermore, while the Specialty Chief Editor may decide to forward your feedback to the authors, this will not be done automatically.
High quality research supported by valid methodologies

Remember that, at Frontiers, it is the validity and quality of the research that should be evaluated, not its potential impact. Rejection is only justified if the manuscript contains technical or ethical issues, or is below the standards of the field and cannot be sufficiently improved.

Furthermore, you are not bound to reviewers’ reports. The final decision remains yours and even if there are the required number of endorsements from reviewers, you do not have to accept a manuscript if you believe that it is not of sufficient quality or that it has not been reviewed thoroughly enough.

Accepting a manuscript

If all reviewers endorse publication, you will be asked to take the final decision on the manuscript.

Should a reviewer endorse publication prematurely and you believe there are outstanding issues, you may reactivate their review by clicking on the “Re-activate review” (1) icon.

Similarly, if reviewers finalized prematurely before the authors resubmit their revised manuscript, you should ask the reviewer to evaluate the latest submission.
The final validation stage includes a final technical check by the Editorial Office, to ensure that the manuscript is ready to enter production and starts immediately upon selection of the “Accept manuscript” option. The Editorial Office will contact you in the following days to confirm that production has been initiated, or if there are any outstanding concerns that have not been addressed during the review.

2.8 ACCESSING MANUSCRIPTS

Correspondence from the Editorial Office regarding a specific manuscript will always include a direct link to the review forum. Alternatively, your assignments may be accessed by selecting ‘Frontiers’ > ‘My Editorial Assignments’ (1), which will display the list of completed and ongoing assignments you may have.

Once you access the list, click on the “Go to Review Forum” button (2). You can filter the list by title, manuscript ID number, current status, or article type.

2.9 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

The Editors of each specialty have editorial independence over content-related decisions and will be supported in the accomplishment of their tasks by the Editorial Office. Frontiers, however, maintains discretion over the policies that are core to its mission, to ensure only high-quality articles enter the scholarly record. This includes issues such as: plagiarism, conflicts of interest, copyright and compliance with our Author Guidelines.

For further information regarding the peer-review process, please refer to our Review Guidelines.