

What Is Peer Review?

Handout for World Forestry and Forest Products

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Peer Reviewed defined:

Peer-review is the process through which submitted journal article is reviewed by an expert panel prior to its approval for publication. This helps to ensure the validity of the article for use in research.

Why is Peer Reviewing important?

Peer review (known as refereeing in some academic fields) is a scholarly process used in the publication of manuscripts and in the awarding of funding for research. Publishers and funding agencies use peer review to select and to screen submissions. The process also assists authors in meeting the standards of their discipline. Publications and awards that have not undergone peer review are liable to be regarded with suspicion by scholars and professionals in many fields.

Another rationale for peer review is that it is rare for an individual author or research team to spot every mistake or flaw in a complicated piece of work ...It is because in a new intellectual product, an opportunity for improvement may stand out only to someone with special expertise or experience. Therefore showing work to others increases the probability that weaknesses will be identified, and with advice and encouragement, fixed. The anonymity and independence of reviewers is intended to foster unvarnished criticism and discourage cronyism in funding and publication decisions.

How it works:

Peer review subjects an author's work or ideas to the scrutiny of one or more others who are experts in the field. These referees each return an evaluation of the work, including suggestions for improvement; to an editor or other intermediary (typically, most of the referees' comments are eventually seen by the author as well). Evaluations usually include an explicit recommendation of what to do with the manuscript or proposal, often chosen from a menu provided by the journal or funding agency. Most recommendations are along the lines of the following:

- to unconditionally accept the manuscript or proposal,
- to accept it in the event that its authors improve it in certain ways,
- to reject it, but encourage revision and invite resubmission, and
- to reject it outright.

During this process, the **role of the referees is advisory**, and the editor is under no formal obligation to accept the opinions of the referees.

Furthermore, in scientific publication, the **referees do not act as a group, do not communicate with each other, and typically are not aware of each other's identities**. There is usually no requirement that the referees achieve consensus. Thus the group dynamics is substantially different from that of a jury. In situations where the referees disagree about the quality of a work, there are a number of strategies for reaching a decision.

Traditionally reviewers would remain anonymous to the authors, but this is slowly changing. In some academic fields most journals now offer the reviewer the option of remaining anonymous or

not; papers sometimes contain, in the acknowledgments section, thanks to (named) referees who helped improve the paper.

At a journal or book publisher, **the task of picking reviewers typically falls to an editor.**

Typically referees are not selected from among the authors' close colleagues, relatives, or friends. Referees are supposed to inform the editor of any conflict of interests that might arise. Journals or individual editors often invite a manuscript's authors to name people whom they consider qualified to referee their work. Authors are sometimes also invited to name natural candidates who should be *disqualified*, in which case they may be asked to provide justification (typically expressed in terms of conflict of interest).

Editors solicit author input in selecting referees because academic writing typically is very specialized. Editors often oversee many specialties, and may not be experts in any of them, since editors may be full time professionals with no time for scholarship. But after an editor selects referees from the pool of candidates, the editor typically is obliged not to disclose the referees' identities to the authors, and in scientific journals, to each other. Policies on such matters differ between academic disciplines.

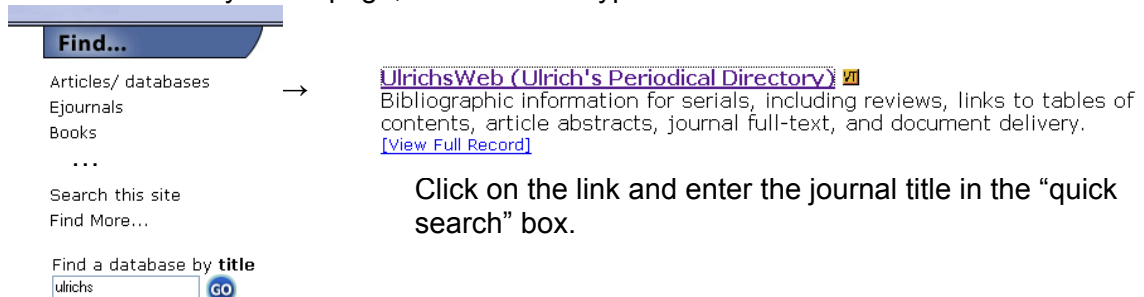
Scientific journals observe this convention universally. The two or three chosen referees report their evaluation of the article and suggestions for improvement to the editor. The editor then relays the bulk of these comments to the author (some comments may be designated as confidential to the editor), meanwhile basing on them his or her decision whether to publish the manuscript. When an editor receives very positive and very negative reviews for the same manuscript, the editor often will solicit one or more additional reviews as a tie-breaker."

Excerpted from: Answers.com (trade mark), <http://www.answers.com/peer%20review>, accessed on August 17, 2005. Last accessed on August 30, 2007.

How can you tell if a journal is Peer Reviewed?

- 1) Look at the title page or table of contents of a journal to see if there is a notation about articles submitted for publication (e.g. "All papers undergo a blind peer review process")
- 2) Look at the table of contents to see if there are designations between Reviewed articles, Featured articles, etc
- 3) Use Ulrich's Periodical's Directory (online database)

From the library home page, under "FIND" type in "Ulrich":

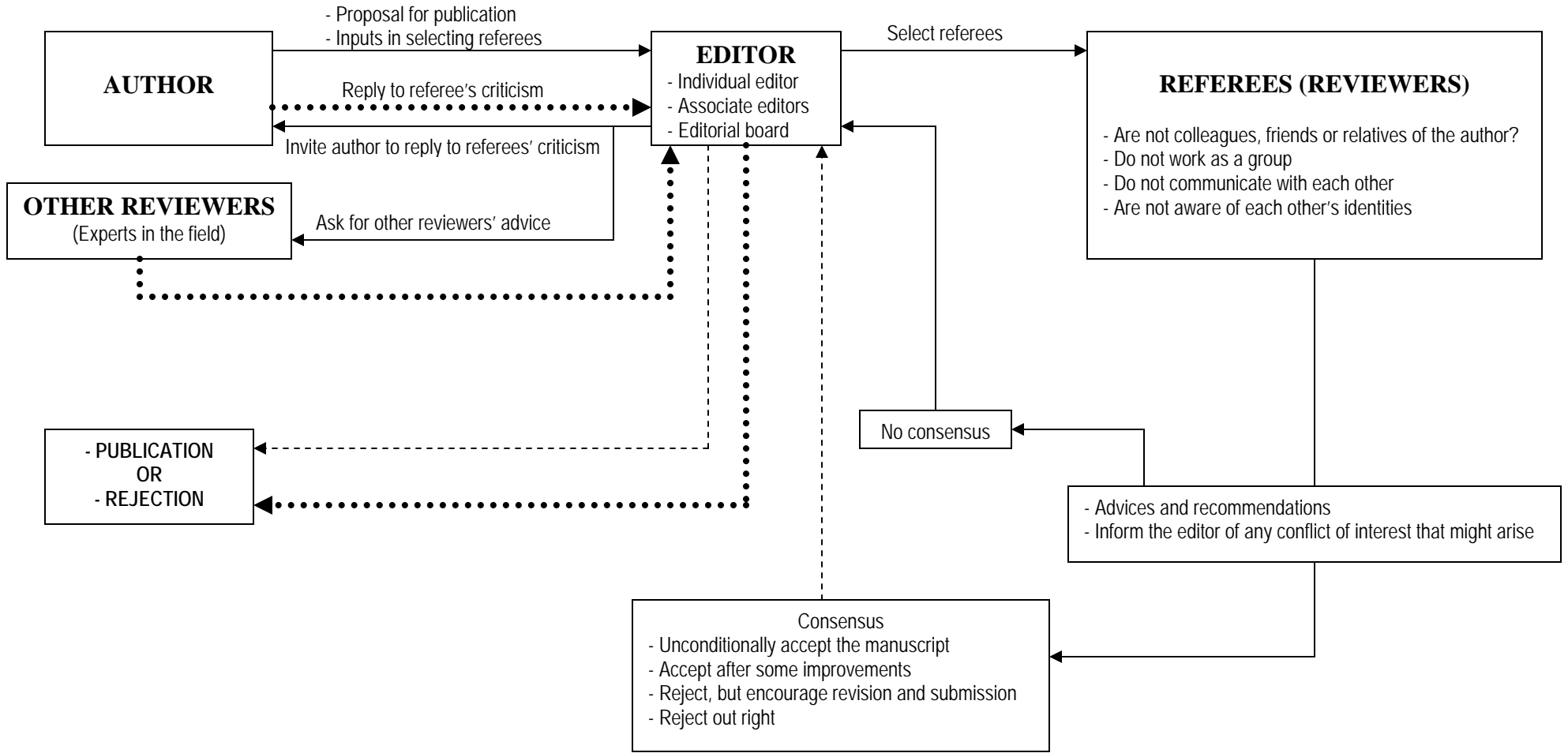


The screenshot shows a search interface with a 'Find...' search bar. Below the search bar, there are several options: 'Articles/ databases', 'Ejournals', 'Books', and '...'. To the right of these options is an arrow pointing to a search result for 'Ulrich'sWeb (Ulrich's Periodical Directory)'. The search result includes a brief description: 'Bibliographic information for serials, including reviews, links to tables of contents, article abstracts, journal full-text, and document delivery.' Below the description is a link labeled '[View Full Record]'. Below the search bar, there is a text input field with 'ulrichs' entered and a 'GO' button. To the right of the search result, there is a text box that says 'Click on the link and enter the journal title in the "quick search" box.'

- 4) If you are still not able to tell, contact the publisher (check their website, email, or call) and ask what is the criteria to publish an article in their journal.

For more information please contact
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