

Guidelines for *Crop Science* Associate and Technical Editors

This document provides *Crop Science* associate and technical editors with guidelines for processing manuscripts assigned to them.

Overview

Manuscript processing involves the following activities:

- **Admin** – Inspects the manuscript according to an established checklist and either returns it to the author for corrections or assigns it to the editor.
- **Editor** – Determines if the writing is suitable for peer review. Manuscripts written with poor English, to the extent that the author’s meaning is unclear, should be returned to the author by the editor. The message to the author will include a recommendation to obtain professional assistance to correct the manuscript. If the manuscript is acceptable, it is assigned to a technical editor (TE). The editor also screens manuscripts that fall outside the generally defined scope of *Crop Science*.
- **Technical Editor** – Quickly scans the manuscript for clearly stated objectives. The TE also checks the experimental methodology, including experimental design, and determines if the conclusions match the objectives of the study. The TE may also check the writing to confirm that it is suitable for peer review. If approved, the TE assigns the manuscript to an associate editor (AE).
- **Associate Editor** – This editorial board member is responsible for arranging reviews, managing the revision process, if warranted, and, ultimately, submitting to the TE a recommendation to release the manuscript to the author or accept it for publication.
- **Technical Editor** – As a final step, the TE makes the decision to release or accept the manuscript and is responsible for informing the author of that decision. At this point, the TE has the option to contact the author directly for additional revision.

Crop Science relies upon its editor, TEs, AEs, and reviewers to provide timely and useful reviews, and editorial decisions, as a professional courtesy to authors and readership. Please make every effort to process manuscripts in accordance with the timelines presented here.

TE ASSIGNS MANUSCRIPT TO AE

If the manuscript passes the first “read” or, more likely, scan, the next step is to assign it to an AE. Some TEs read the entire manuscript prior to making the assignment, whereas others quickly scan the document, looking for obvious shortcomings. It should be sufficient to read the abstract, look at the objectives, check the methodology (including experimental design), and determine if the conclusions fit the overall goal of the research. This entire process should require less than one hour. The manuscript should be assigned to an AE within *seven days* of being assigned to a TE, although, in most cases, it is expected that assignments to the TE and AE will occur on the same day. To execute the assignment, select the “Assign AE” tab and select among the names in the dropdown list. The number of manuscripts in parentheses adjacent to the name of the AE, when assigning the manuscript, is often inaccurate. It is more informative to click on the “View Details” button adjacent to the dropdown list to obtain more information pertaining to the workload of the AE. When a manuscript is assigned to an AE, the TE should attempt to select someone with expertise in the area represented by the paper. However, in many cases AEs will be assigned manuscripts outside their areas of expertise. Technical editors should make every effort to achieve an even workload distribution among the AEs.

AE INITIATES REVIEW PROCESS

Evaluate Manuscript – It is not unusual for the TE or AE to determine that the manuscript does not qualify for review based on scientific reasons. Scientific papers may not be published in any of the *Crop Science* Society of America journals, books or other scholarly publications unless two unbiased professional scientists agree the paper is acceptable. Similarly, reviews from a minimum of two unbiased professional scientists must be obtained to release a manuscript. The two scientists can be the editor and TE or the TE and AE. For the TE and AE to jointly release a manuscript, the TE must be added as a reviewer in Manuscript Central (MC). The TEs have the option of telling the authors that they were one of the reviewers. After the TE submits a review and the AE makes a release recommendation, the TE can make a not-ready-for-review

decision. Refer to Chapter 2 of the Editors' Handbook for checklists on scientific content, scientific presentation, and manuscript style. This chapter also provides a checklist for abstracts. These checklists contain criteria to be used in evaluating manuscripts that are being considered for publication in *Crop Science*. Chapter 2 provides instructions on managing the review process, including a list of errors that editors should handle with the author and those that can be corrected at headquarters. This is arguably the most important chapter of the handbook and should be read by all editorial board members.

Establish Reviewers – Commitments to review a manuscript should be obtained within **10 days** of the assignment to the AE. Assuming a few of the peers contacted will either decline the invitation or fail to respond, the AE is encouraged to send three or four invitations immediately upon being assigned to a manuscript. The goal should be to obtain at least two commitments to review the manuscript. In addition, the AE should serve as one of the reviewers, unless the subject matter is too far outside their area of expertise. The entire review of the original submission, from assigning a manuscript to the AE to receiving and processing the reviews, should require no more than **30–45 days**.

Preferred Reviewers and Reviewer Accounts – Authors have the option to suggest preferred reviewers. However, the AE is not obligated to ask these individuals to serve as reviewers. To invite a reviewer, this person will need an account in MC. Accounts are based on e-mail addresses, and, because many individuals have two or three e-mail addresses, it is important to search on a last name before creating an account. If one reviewer has two accounts, it may cause confusion. In those cases, the reviewer has had an account with MC and logged in using the old account. If the AE creates a new account for this user, the reviewer will not find the manuscript, as it will be located in the new account only. Again, accounts are based on e-mail addresses rather than names.

AE MANAGES REVIEWS

After obtaining the required number of reviews, the AE will either return the manuscript to the author for revision or make a release or accept recommendation to the TE.

Proofread Reviews – The AE is advised to read reviews, and edit them as needed, before sending them to authors. Reviews should not contain personal attacks, either directly or indirectly. We have received complaints when these reviews were inadvertently sent to authors. The AE may also wish to contact the reviewers and explain to them that the comments are inappropriate.

Summarize Reviews – It is helpful to provide the author with a paragraph or two that summarizes the comments offered by the reviewers. These paragraphs should

highlight the parts of the manuscript that are particularly deserving of attention during the revision process.

MS-Word Track Changes – Reviewers can and have been using the track changes feature of MS-Word to edit and review manuscripts. This creates a problem with reviewer anonymity. If the reviewer uploads an MS-Word file, MC will convert it to PDF format and strip out the reviewer information. If the reviewer uploads a PDF file, it will frequently contain information that identifies them. This is a complex problem and the AE may have to correspond with the reviewers to solve it.

Late Reviews – If, for example, three individuals agree to submit a review and two of the three reviews are received, the AE has enough reviews to make a recommendation to the TE. If a decision is made on the basis of the first two reviews received, the third reviewer will be unable to submit a review thereafter. This has the potential to create some conflict with reviewers, particularly slow ones. Prior to making a recommendation, the AE should contact reviewers who had not submitted a review, informing them that their review is still needed and must be received by a certain date. If they attempt to submit a review after the designated date, when the AE submits a recommendation in MC, the attempt will be unsuccessful.

AE REQUESTS REVISION

When the AE recommends revision, the manuscript goes back to the author, who is given two months to submit the revision. Extensions to this two month period are generally granted upon request. When the author uploads the revision, the manuscript goes into the queue 'Complete AE Checklist'.

The screenshot shows the 'AE Checklist' form in the Manuscript Central (MC) system. The form is titled 'AE Checklist' and contains the following text: 'Hi! Would you like to send this back to reviewers or make a decision immediately? Please make a selection below and click Checklist Complete.' There are two radio button options: 'Send the revision back to reviewers.' and 'Make an immediate decision.' At the bottom right of the form, there is a 'Checklist Complete' button (highlighted with a red box) and a 'Save' button. The top of the form displays the manuscript ID 'CROP-2017-09-0566-ORA.R2', the submission date 'Submitted: 10-Nov-2017', and the last update date 'Last Updated: 10-Nov-2017: 3 days, 7 hours in review'. It also lists the author 'Xiaoji (contact)', the title 'A Novel Gene GRAIN SHAPE2.1 Is Involved in Regulating Grain Size in Rice', and the reviewer 'AE: Seetharam, Endang'. The 'Editor Involvement' is listed as 'Decision'.

If the AE would like to get additional reviews on the revision, it can be done at this point. In communications with the authors, the AE should not convey the impression regarding the approval or release of the manuscript. The AE must remain as neutral as possible.

Repeated Reviews – Rather than allowing a manuscript to go back and forth several times between author-reviewer-associate-editor, it might be appropriate to recommend release for a borderline manuscript and encourage resubmission. Try to prevent cycling

manuscripts through the system numerous times with authors. As mentioned in the Editors' Handbook (Chapter 2), if a second revision is necessary, in most cases the associate editor should evaluate the revision without sending it to reviewers.

Only Authors May Revise Manuscripts – In MC, all revisions must be approved by the authors. If the AE makes minor changes/suggestions to a manuscript, the revised manuscript must be sent back to the author for approval. Only the author can upload revisions to the manuscript. This keeps the entire editorial process inside MC and also ensures that *Crop Science* obtains the proper files for publication.

Response to Reviewers' Comments – For each comment offered by a reviewer, the author should indicate if it was accepted or rejected in the revision. If the latter, the author is expected to justify that decision. This detailed response from the authors is very helpful in evaluating the revision.

TE REQUESTS REVISION

The TE can make a self-assignment as AE if the revision from the author is to be returned to the TE directly, instead of to the previous AE. The AE will be copied on the TE's e-mail to the author when a revision is requested. When the revision is submitted by the author, the AE should automatically recommend acceptance, as it is the job of the TE to evaluate the revision at this stage.

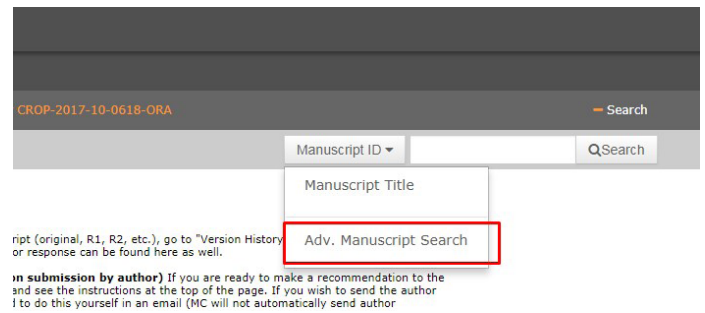
AE RECOMMENDS RELEASE OF A MANUSCRIPT

Please accompany a recommendation of acceptable for publication or release to the author with a brief justification for this recommendation. This is particularly helpful when recommending release. In MC, space is provided to enter one or two paragraphs justifying a recommendation.

Features Of Manuscript Central

Advanced vs. Quick Search – On the AE dashboard there is a search box on the right-hand side of the page. The default is a quick search. An easy way to find a single manuscript is to use wildcards (*) with parts of the manuscript ID number. For example, *0123* will find manuscripts CROP-201X-02-0123-ORA and its revisions. Otherwise, open any version and go to the "Manuscript Information" tab, then scroll down to the "Version History" box. To access the details for a particular version, click on the magnifying glass of the desired version under "Switch Details."

To set up an advanced search, change the 'Manuscript ID' field to 'Adv. Manuscript Search' in the quick search bar.



To see all the manuscripts that have been assigned to the AE, the AE's last name can be entered in the appropriate box. Then select the search button at the bottom of the page. Results can be saved by selecting "Export to CSV."

Supplemental Material – Supplemental material needs to be reviewed along with the manuscript. Files containing supplemental material can be accessed via the 'Supplemental Files' icon, which is located next to the 'Original File' icon in MC. If the supplemental files are not intended for publication, the author may state that in the cover letter.

Audit Trail – Remember to access the audit trail, which is one of the left-hand tabs on the manuscript view. It shows the editor everything that has taken place regarding this manuscript.

Reviewer Scores – Fill out the reviewer scores when the reviews are received. This can be done when the reviews are read. They may prove to be very helpful.

Back Button – Never use the browser back button on the MC site. Please use the buttons available on the page to navigate the site.

Resources

Challenges with MC – If problems are being experienced with MC, there are two options for assistance: (i) use the online help, available in the upper right hand corner of the screen or (ii) contact the Admin or Managing Editor at headquarters (ADM is listed after the AE, TE, and Editor for each manuscript). For questions pertaining to scientific content or other editorial processes, contact either the Editor or the TE.

Unavailable to Handle Manuscripts – Associate editors can indicate dates during which they will be unavailable by clicking on their username at the top of the screen and navigating to 'Username and Password'. During that period, 'n/a' will appear next to the name in dropdown lists and in reviewer selections.

Record Retention – If there are manuscript-related records outside of those contained in MC, and if the manuscript has been published, they can be discarded about three months after publication. Records of released manuscripts should be retained for two years after the release date. See Chapter 1 of the Editors' Handbook for more information.