Editorial

Why Editorial Rejection?

The truth is that no one likes to have their manuscript rejected at the editorial level. It can seem like an arbitrary judgment and give an impression that editors have been dismissive, but we do not take these editorial decisions lightly at *The Journal of Neuroscience*. Although it is possible for a journal to function without editorial rejection, this process facilitates review in a number of ways. In particular, the editorial rejection process benefits authors by delivering rapid decisions for manuscripts that are not likely to succeed in peer review. Editorial rejections are also meant to relieve the burden on volunteer reviewers, transferring some of the reviewing load onto editors. We have an outstanding group of reviewers who accept the demands of in-depth and rapid review for *JNeurosci*, but this is a service that they give to colleagues and is a finite resource. As a result, our editors step in and make sure that the manuscripts that go to the reviewers have already been evaluated for potential technical soundness and interest to the broad readership of *JNeurosci*.

Every editorial rejection involves in-depth consultation between at least two reviewing editors who have knowledge of the scientific area of the study and one senior editor. These online discussions are often very detailed. The editors are expected to provide well articulated arguments about whether the statistical analyses are appropriate and the data are relevant to the stated hypotheses. We also make a judgment call on whether the manuscript fits within the scope of the journal, will fare well in review, and will interest readers given experience with similar studies. The decision letter for manuscripts that are editorially rejected includes a summary of the online discussion among editors so that authors can use the concerns raised by experienced peers.

It is also instructive to ask how editorial rejection affects final decision outcomes at *JNeurosci*. The overall rate of editorial rejection has remained relatively steady at ~20% for the last 2 years (Fig. 1A). Despite an increase in editorial rejection from ~10% in 2015 to 20–25% in 2017, the overall acceptance rate did not scale with this change (Fig. 1B). This indicates that, whereas the editorial rejection process has accelerated the decision process for these rejected manuscripts, it has not led to a significantly higher rate of rejection. Consistent with our commitment to peer review, *JNeurosci* still sends the large majority of manuscripts to external reviewers.

JNeurosci welcomes manuscripts that use a wide variety of techniques at many levels of organization. *JNeurosci* receives the most submissions in the Cognitive/Behavioral section (~35%) and the least in the Development/Neural Repair section (~12%). The editorial rejection rate for manuscripts in both sections is ~20%. The proportion of manuscripts that are rejected parallels the proportion of manuscripts submitted and has for at least the last 3 years (Fig. 2). This can give an impression that manuscripts from one section or another are disproportionately receiving editorial reject decisions. In absolute numbers, Behavioral/Cognitive studies are receiving more decisions overall, so they also represent a larger number of authors who are editorially rejected despite a similar editorial rejection rate to manuscripts in other

Figure 1. Acceptance and rejection rates. *A*, Editorial rejection rate by section. *B*, Overall acceptance and editorial rejection rates.

Figure 2. Total number of submissions by section in the last 6 months (area graph) with the percentage of all submissions (blue line) and the percentage of all editorial rejections (red line) by section.

sections. In response to concerns that we single out particular areas of neuroscience research for editorial rejection, we have reviewed our processes as an editorial board and have also reviewed our “Information for Authors” to clarify that we are interested in manuscripts from all areas of the field. That said, *JNeurosci* reviewers and editors will make decisions based on whether studies are methodologically sound, provide novel empirical or conceptual insights, and are likely to be of broad interest.

Submitted studies that provide novel insights into, or make specific predictions about, neural mechanisms or neural representations are most likely to be successful in the review process. These insights can come directly from measurements of neural function or indirectly by showing how the study addresses a current problem in neuroscience. Authors should use the significance statement to address how the data in their manuscript are of interest to neuroscientists outside of their immediate field and

what broader questions are informed by the submitted study. We are currently developing materials to help authors understand what information is most useful to include in the significance statement, how it should differ from the abstract, and how it can be useful to editors and readers in identifying the novel insights in the work.

The field of neuroscience is growing and evolving rapidly. Judgments on which manuscripts are of wider interest changes based on which questions have been studied most intensely and where new insights are being made. As a society, the Society for Neuroscience is committed to serving the membership by providing multiple places to publish their work. *JNeurosci* works in partnership with *eNeuro* to provide options for scientifically rigorous publications that span all areas of work being done by the membership. The underlying principles of *JNeurosci* remain a commitment to publishing strong science after rigorous peer re-

view. One key aspect of that process at *JNeurosci* is that the reviews are guided by working scientists who serve as editors. For an in-depth look at the editorial process, we encourage members of the community to watch this [video](#) that we made to show what happens after a manuscript is submitted to *JNeurosci*. We will continue to work to bring as much transparency as possible to all aspects of the process by providing data to our authors, reviewers, and readers and by listening to and changing policies in response to feedback from the community.

We invite you to contribute to the discussion by e-mailing me at JN_EIC@SfN.org or tweeting me [@marinap63](#) on Twitter.

Marina Picciotto

EiC *JNeurosci*

DOI: 10.1523/JNEUROSCI.3465–17.2017