

## Editorial

# Introducing Open Peer Review at *JNeurosci*

Scientific publishing has dramatically changed in recent years, and, as a result, there have been a number of exciting and very useful improvements to the peer review process. This process focuses on the evaluation of scientific work as a method of scholarly quality assurance in terms of scientific rigor and originality of the research, appropriate scholarship, and effective scientific communication. We are happy to announce that *JNeurosci* has begun to move away from the “traditional” peer review process that it has pursued since its inception, to a progressive “open” peer review model, effective October 31, 2023. We hope that our open peer review model described in this editorial will promote a transparent and productive publication process that is centered on our authors.

The idea that quality standards in scientific fields can be ensured through peer review has a long tradition dating back to publishing models of early professional societies and their publication outlets in the 1800s (e.g., the Royal Society and their *Proceedings*). However, the traditional peer review model, as we know it, was developed as a standard just ~50 years ago and quickly adopted by numerous scientific journals, including *JNeurosci*. In the traditional model, the evaluation of a manuscript is based on two or more written review reports by experts in the field, who are selected by the editors. Their reports guide editorial decisions and are shared in anonymous form with the authors to help them improve their work. If the authors are given an opportunity to revise their manuscript, another important product of the peer review process yields the authors’ response letter (or “rebuttal”) that explains how the critiques were addressed and the manuscript was changed accordingly. In the traditional model, the two pivotal products of the peer review process—the reviews and rebuttals—are kept confidential and are shared only among editors, authors, and reviewers.

Early in the history of peer review, it was thought that these products were potentially as important as the reported science itself. We think that it is indeed a lost opportunity to keep the important products of peer review “behind the scenes.” In our open peer review model, we will publish the editorial decision letters, reviews (in anonymized form), and the authors’ responses to the critiques along with the article. That is, we will disclose the entire process that led to the publication of an article, including the contributions of editors, reviewers, and authors. Please note that we will honor and maintain the confidential nature of the process by keeping the anonymity of our reviewers (if they do not indicate otherwise by signing their reviews).

We understand that not everyone in our community may embrace our open peer review model from the get-go. In our

version of the model, we will give both authors and reviewers the ability to opt out. Authors will be asked whether their rebuttal can be published only at the initial manuscript submission stage; reviewers can opt out of sharing their anonymous review when submitting initial comments about a paper. That way, we hope to minimize biases that may result from possible outcomes of the peer review process. Tracking the opt out choice will also be a valuable measure of how our community is reacting to the new open peer review at *JNeurosci*.

Another important component of open peer review is collaborative or interactive peer review. Here, editors and reviewers discuss their opinions on a manuscript through consultation with the goal to send a unified and clear message to the authors. We use collaborative peer review at *JNeurosci* in cases where we need to resolve opposing reviewer opinions or contradictory arguments, so that we can guide our authors in further developing their work. However, we do not use consultation as a default with each submission to reduce burden on the reviewers. In our experience, there is good agreement between reviewers in most of the submitted manuscripts that we evaluate as editors. If there are questions or concerns regarding the reviews or the process, our authors should always feel free to contact us for guidance and assistance. We view scientific publishing as a collaborative process among editors, authors, and reviewers to help scientists in our community to publish their best work at the best possible quality.

Peer review has often been criticized for its obvious imperfections, such as inconsistencies within and across journals or potential biases. We think that enhancing transparency in scientific publishing is an important way to improve an imperfect system. By disclosing the process that led to the publication of an article (including reviews, rebuttals, and editorial decision letters), editors, reviewers, and authors alike are accountable. Further, reviews and rebuttals have an important educational value and provide insight for scientists of all career stages into how scientific projects and manuscripts can be developed to a publishable standard. We do hope that our community will embrace our new peer review model, and we look forward to reporting back regularly on how it will be received. If you have thoughts, questions, or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me by email ([kastner\\_eic@sfn.org](mailto:kastner_eic@sfn.org)).

In science,  
Sabine

Sabine Kastner,  
Editor-in-Chief, *JNeurosci*

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