

Optical Society of America

Guidelines for Editors

(Revised September 2009)

I. Introduction

One of the ways the Optical Society of America serves the optics profession is by publishing archival journals that present the results of scientific and engineering research. The Society, through its journal, topical, feature, and associate editors, establishes and maintains guidelines for reviewing and accepting papers submitted to the journals. It is important that the high quality of the journals be maintained, that both authors and reviewers be treated fairly and evenhandedly in the editorial process, and that manuscripts proceed through the process in a timely fashion. The guidelines and procedures discussed in this document suggest how editors can meet these goals. The guidelines are intended for all Optical Society journals; however, individual journal editors may implement some specific variations in policy and procedures.

II. Policies Concerning Editors

A. Appointment

Journal editors and journal division editors are nominated by the *Board of Editors*, endorsed by the *Publications Council*, and appointed by the *Board of Directors*. Topical, associate, and feature issue editors are nominated by journal editors and journal division editors and appointed by the *Board of Editors*.

B. Qualifications

Editors must be OSA members. They must be well known, recognized, and respected for achievements in their field. A record of publications in recognized journals is essential. Editors must have an excellent reviewing record, characterized by timeliness, fair mindedness, and efficiency. Editors must be willing to commit adequate time to their editorial responsibilities, must be accessible to authors, reviewers, and readers, and must have the full support of their institutions. No editor or topical editor of an OSA journal should undertake active editorial functions for other journals without approval of the Board of Editors.

III. Guidelines for Manuscript Assignment

A. Assignments

A journal editor or journal division editor will normally assign each manuscript submitted to a topical editor. Occasionally, the journal editor will reject a paper before it is assigned to a topical editor. The topical editor will select the reviewers and make the decision on publication of a manuscript based on the reviewer's responses and her or his own judgment of the manuscript. A journal or division editor may also act in the capacity of a topical editor. In addition to planning, promoting, and preparing introductory material for a feature issue, feature issue editors act as topical editors for articles submitted for the feature issue.

B. Editor's Availability

If a journal or division editor is unavailable for more than a few days, he or she should ask a topical editor to assign manuscripts and should inform the manuscript management office of this temporary action. Topical editors should inform the journal or division editor and the manuscript management office whenever they will be unavailable for more than 5 working days (3 in the case of Optics Letters). The editor may then assign other topical editors to manuscripts as appropriate.

C. Manuscripts Submitted by Editors

Journal editors and topical editors should not be responsible for manuscripts they or their close associates have submitted. The journal editor will assign another editor to handle such manuscripts and that editor will treat the manuscript as he would any other submission. Both the reviewing editor and the manuscript management office will maintain the confidentiality of reviewers' identities.

D. Communication of Sensitive Information

Submitted manuscripts should be distributed only to individuals who are involved in the editorial process for that manuscript. Further, no information about reviews or reviewers of a particular manuscript should be disclosed by topical editors to other OSA topical editors unless such disclosure is relevant to either the editorial processing of another manuscript or the transfer of the manuscript between topical editors of the same or another OSA journal.

IV. Guidelines for Initial Consideration of a Manuscript

A. Editorial Latitude in Declining to Consider a Manuscript

1. Inappropriate Manuscript

An editor may reject a manuscript without obtaining a review if the manuscript is inappropriate for the journal. In this case, the journal editor may suggest an alternative journal.

2. Prior Publication, Duplication of Publication, and Copyright Violation

A manuscript will be considered for publication in the Society's journals only if it contains new creative research work and/or important information not previously published. Manuscripts under consideration by other journals will not be considered for publication. Furthermore, a submitted manuscript must also be written in such a way that there is no infringement of copyright laws. Topical editors have discretion as to whether a paper submitted to the journal is sufficiently different from other published or submitted manuscripts as to warrant consideration. Authors have the obligation to reveal any previous or submitted publications that have content similar to that in the manuscript being submitted. Since the manuscript must contain significant new content not previously published or submitted elsewhere for simultaneous consideration, if related manuscripts are being submitted concurrently, the author should inform the editor of the relationship between the manuscripts.

SPECIAL STATEMENT CONCERNING ARXIV

As you may know, many authors post their work in the arXiv webpage. This posting DOES NOT constitute prior publication. The current OSA posting policy allows a pre-print version of an article to be posted on arXiv but not the processed final version. We

ask authors to update the status of their paper in arXiv and link to the OSA journal website when their article is published.

B. Transfer to Other OSA Journals

If another OSA journal is clearly better suited to a particular manuscript, an editor may request permission from the author to transfer the manuscript to that journal. Manuscripts or manuscript files should not be transferred to other OSA journals unless the author gives permission. Transfers may be made either before or after review of the manuscript. If a submission form is not completed to indicate permission to transfer the manuscript, the staff should contact the author prior to making such a transfer. The original date of receipt of the manuscript will normally be maintained in the case of such a transfer, and the entire file will be transferred with the manuscript.

OSA editors should not transmit manuscripts or manuscript files to non-OSA journals.

C. Manuscripts Inadequate for Reviewer Evaluation

An editor may return a manuscript to an author for revision prior to the manuscript's being sent out for review if it is deemed that the manuscript is so poorly written that it would place an unnecessary burden on reviewers. Reasons for requesting revision prior to review may include confusing organization of the writing and poor figure preparation. Reviewers strongly urge editors to reject manuscripts if a student-level reader would find the author's English or grammar difficult to understand. The author should be advised to have a colleague who is fluent in English edit the paper before resubmission to OSA. An excessively wordy manuscript may also justifiably be returned to the author for shortening prior to review.

D. Waiving Page Charges

Any requests for the waiving of page or color production charges must be referred to the journal or division editor. There may be exceptional circumstances when these page charges need to be waived. Only the journal or division editor is authorized to waive page charges.

V. Guidelines for the Review Process

A. Number of Reviewers

Each manuscript, whether contributed, an invited review, or an invited tutorial, will receive anonymous peer review by reviewers who are scientists or engineers knowledgeable in the field covered by the manuscript. Suggested mechanisms for reviewer selection are listed in Appendix B. Reviewers are to be made aware of the appropriate standards for the category of the paper (contributed paper, comment, review, tutorial) they are asked to review. The standard number of reviewers will be two. Editors may review manuscripts in exceptional circumstances, such as long reviewer delays. In cases where one of the reviewers fails to submit a review in a reasonable time, an editor may make a decision based on one review.

B. Author's Requests Concerning Reviewers

If the author requests that a particular individual(s) not be a reviewer of the manuscript, the topical editor should normally not send the manuscript to that individual(s). If the author recommends reviewers, the topical editor may use one or more of them if he or she deems it appropriate, but is not required to do so. The topical editor may choose new reviewers for a resubmission if the author requests, but could also ask the old reviewers to re-review the revised manuscript and the author's reply.

C. Reviewer Delays

Reviewer delays represent the most serious problem in the expeditious editorial processing of manuscripts. The best reviewers tend to be busy individuals who have constraints on available time. In some fields, which may be very active, there may be only a narrow base of reviewers. The absence of other suitable reviewers may make it difficult to achieve the goal of prompt, high-quality reviews. It is important that editors carefully weigh reviewer promptness against other important characteristics that make for good reviews.

The initial responsibility for dealing with tardy reviewers falls to the OSA Manuscript Office. However, reviewers are typically more responsive to professional colleagues than to administrative personnel. Topical editors should communicate to a tardy reviewer, as directly as possible, their desire to see the review completed in a timely fashion. They can also discuss with the reviewer the desirability of the reviewer's transferring the manuscript to a qualified student or other professional colleague.

In addition to a nominal time for completion of reviews, there will be a maximum length of time for a reviewer to complete a review unless the editor responsible for the manuscript has been in communication with the reviewer and feels that further delay is warranted. The maximum expected review times allowed for various OSA journals are listed in Appendix A. Any reviews received after the maximum time can be used at the discretion of the editor.

D. Action on the Manuscript after Receipt of Reviews

1. Typically, the topical editor's choices are
 - Accept (manuscript not returned to author),
 - Accept, revision optional (manuscript and reviews returned to author for optional revision, revised manuscript not returned to topical editor),
 - Minor revision required (revised manuscript returned to the editor to verify the revision),
 - Major revision required (revised manuscript returned to topical editor and to reviewers if the topical editor so chooses),
 - Reject.

The Manuscript Office maintains several form letters for each of these cases. The topical editor may write her or his own letter or add sentences or paragraphs to the form letters to cover special cases or conditions.

2. The topical editors should pay special attention to whether titles and abstracts are appropriate and informative and should suggest or require appropriate revisions.
3. When revision is required, the editor will request that the author(s) document all substantive changes made in the manuscript in response to the reviewers' recommendations.

E. Treatment of Reviews

Normally, all reviewer responses should be sent to the author. Exceptions may be material that is not substantive or that is inflammatory. Editors should recognize the divisiveness of personal attacks and take appropriate steps to shield authors from such attacks made by reviewers.

F. Time for Author's Response

If, for an archival journal, more than two months (one month in the case of *Optics Letters*, and two weeks in the case of *Optics Express*) elapse between the last communication from an

editor and the submission of a revised manuscript, then the manuscript is treated as a new submission, with the date of submission revised accordingly. At the discretion of the editor, the revised manuscript may or may not be required to undergo additional review.

G. Actions Based on Author's Response to Reviews

The topical editor may select any of the following options concerning the revised manuscript:

1. Choose to read an author's response, including revisions, and make a decision to accept based solely on the author's response.
2. Return the manuscript, the prior reviews, and the author's response to the original reviewer(s) for re-review. The topical editor may request, or in severe cases mandate, that authors remove inappropriate or derogatory comments from responses to reviews before the editor sends the comments to the original reviewers or to new reviewers.
3. Send this material to one or more additional reviewers.
4. Finally, if the author has been insufficiently responsive to the reviews or the editor is convinced that the paper is incorrect or otherwise inappropriate, the editor may reject the revised manuscript (using the appropriate letter) without further review. First round reviewers whose reports are cursory, inaccurate, and/or divisive should generally not be used in the subsequent rounds of reviewing.

H. Interaction with Other Editors

The topical editors are encouraged to consult other editors to discuss major discrepancies between two reviews, to discuss suitability for transfer to a different OSA journal, or to obtain quick "emergency" reviews of a manuscript that has been severely delayed because of the lack of response of the original reviewers.

I. Editing Prior to Publication

The copy editing staff will edit manuscripts accepted for publication to meet appropriate standards for clarity, style, and use of English. The objective of such editing is to assure readability of the journals by a readership that includes many to whom English is a second language. The English should easily lend itself to translation to other languages. Neologisms, colloquialisms, jargon, and acronyms are subject to particular scrutiny. Editors and copy editing staff may edit manuscript titles to improve comprehension and to facilitate proper indexing.

Authors must be informed of editorial changes in their manuscript prior to publication, and they have the option of withdrawing their paper if they do not agree with the editorial changes. However, the editor of the journal, in consultation with the managing editor, will have ultimate responsibility for decisions regarding such changes.

VI. Policies Concerning Reviewers

A. Anonymity of Reviewers

Editors will not disclose the names of reviewers to authors. The reviewer of a particular manuscript may disclose her or his name to an author but should inform the editor before doing so.

B. Frequency of Usage of Reviewers

The general policy is that reviewers should not be sent another manuscript to review from the same journal for at least 60 days, nor more than four manuscripts per year. However, exceptions can be made.

C. Use of Other Editors as Reviewers

Topical editors should avoid selecting other OSA journal editors and topical editors as normal reviewers.

D. Updating the Reviewer Database

Data on timeliness of reviews is automatically maintained in the peer review records. Editors are encouraged to add reviewers to the database on a regular basis.

E. Feedback to Reviewers

Editors are strongly encouraged to express their appreciation to reviewers who have written exceptionally constructive reviews, reviewers who are overburdened, reviewers who have completed a challenging review. Letters from authors commenting on the helpfulness of a review should also be conveyed to the reviewers. Editors are urged to comply with reviewers who request that they see the changes made by an author prior to acceptance. If an editor makes a decision contrary to the recommendations of the reviewer(s), the editor is encouraged to notify the reviewer and provide an explanation. Sample letters that address most of these scenarios are available for editors to use. Such feedback is necessary to maintain good faith and a positive relationship with the limited pool of reviewers for optics and photonics publications.

VII. Invited, Tutorial, and Feature Papers, and Comments

A. Invited and Tutorial Papers

The predominant method of publication in Optical Society journals is through contributed papers. In addition, with the exception of *Optics Letters*, invited review and tutorial papers may be published from time to time (typically as part of a feature issue). These papers, if so identified by the topical editor, are distinguished as invited review or tutorial papers in the journal.

B. Feature Issues

From time to time, Optical Society journals publish feature issues covering a particular area of research. (A journal or division editor, in coordination with appropriate topical editors from that journal, will choose the topic of a feature issue, along with the feature issue editors). These choices must be approved unanimously by the Board of Editors. Since feature editors act as topical editors for the feature, the editor may want to assign a topical editor to guide the feature editors in their work. (All papers should be reviewed by following the established peer review procedures).

Care should be taken to achieve broad coverage of work in the areas covered by the feature. Measures should include a balanced choice of feature editors, a selection of papers with a broad representation of research in the field, and awareness *not* to overemphasize the work of a particular group.

A schedule for each feature will be established through consultation with OSA staff and the journal editor. Feature editors are expected to comply with all of the specified

deadlines in their respective schedules; in the absence of compliance, the journal editor will resume responsibility for the feature issue decisions.

C. Comments on Previously Published Papers

Brief comments on previously published papers (three to four journal pages, one page for *Optics Letters*) and authors' responses to such comments appear from time to time in OSA journals. The author of a paper being commented on must be given the opportunity to review the comment and, if necessary, to publish a response to the comment. Both comments and author responses should be reviewed; publication of the comment does not guarantee publication of the response. Both comments and replies need to contain an abstract.

Comments should address the technical substance of the article and should not be concerned with pointing out prior works, apparent plagiarism, or important missing references. Authors may address issues such as prior work and missing references in an erratum to the original article. Personal attacks should not appear in comments any more than in regular manuscripts. Occasionally, it may be necessary for the editor to exercise particularly strong control over the wording of a comment.

The following procedures are used for handling Comments:

- The manuscript is sent to the journal editor who will decide if it is appropriate to consider it for publication. Note: If the Comment is about a paper in Early Posting that has not yet been published in final form, the journal editor will determine how to proceed based on the content of the comment and the current status of the original manuscript.
- If appropriate, the manuscript is sent to the Topical Editor who handled the paper that is being commented on. If he/she or she is no longer serving, the paper should be sent to the Topical Editor who is currently handling the same topic.
- The manuscript, along with a copy of the paper being commented on, is sent to a reviewer selected by the editor
- If the Editor decides that the paper is acceptable for publication (possibly after the manuscript is satisfactorily revised), the author of the paper being commented on is sent the manuscript of the comment and invited to submit a Reply.
- If the Comment and Reply are both acceptable, then they are sent to the Editorial Office to appear in the same issue.

VIII. Guidelines for Handling Controversy and Possible Ethical Violations

A. Procedures

Decisions on the technical suitability of a manuscript for journal publication are made by the topical editors based on the manuscript, the reviews, and the response of the author(s) to the reviews. Questions are sometimes raised concerning the correctness of these decisions. In unusual circumstances authors, reviewers, or readers may request that final editorial decisions be reviewed either by the person making the decision or by someone with a higher level of responsibility. Requests made solely on the basis of the technical merit of the decision should be declined by the topical editor unless new information is forthcoming. Topical editors have the option of introducing a new reviewer ("super-reviewer") to the process by allowing the new reviewer to study all correspondence and either agree or disagree with the editor's previous decision. If the individual persists in this request, the topical editor should consider the desirability of having the journal editor or division editor make further response.

Requests for review of the editorial process based on claims of bias or unethical conduct may be initially presented to anyone in the OSA publications governance hierarchy (topical editor, journal division editor, journal editor, chair of the Board of Editors, chair of the Publications Council, President). Claims concerning authors or reviewers should be evaluated by both the appropriate topical editor and journal (or journal division) editor. If the allegation concerns bias or unethical conduct within the publications governance hierarchy, this evaluation should be carried out at the next higher governance level. Claims should be made in writing and a written response should be made by an appropriate individual in the OSA governance hierarchy. Investigations should be fair and impartial, particularly in cases where possible remonstrative action is under consideration. When the evaluation is carried out by topical editors and journal editors, copies of written communications should be sent to the Chair of the Board of Editors if appropriate. In those cases when the Chair of the Board of Editors, the Chair of Publications Council, or the President must be involved, these officers should seek the advice and consent of the Board of Editors, the Publications Council, and the Board of Directors, respectively. In the evaluation of possible unethical practice, reference should be made to the *Guidelines of the Optical Society of America Concerning Ethical Practices in the Publication of Research*.

B. Action in the Case of Apparent Bias

When a reviewer appears to be biased, the topical editor should choose a replacement reviewer. When a topical editor appears biased toward a particular author or subject area, the journal or division editor should select another topical editor appropriate for the manuscript.

C. Actions on Apparent Ethical Violations

1. On the part of Editors and Topical Editors

If it is concluded that an ethical violation may have occurred, appropriate action should be taken by the OSA governance hierarchy. Recommendation and approval of any action should be carried out in the same way as the initial appointment process, except that the accused individual should be given full and fair opportunity to respond.

2. On the part of Authors

If a topical editor and the appropriate journal editor conclude that an author may have engaged in unethical conduct regarding a manuscript, the case should be immediately referred to the OSA Ethics Review Board. The author will then be informed in writing of the alleged misconduct and be given an opportunity to respond to the allegation. If the Ethics Review Board conclude that no further action is necessary based on the authors' response, they will notify the author and Editor. Alternatively, if, after evaluating the authors' response, the Board concludes that the allegation is probably correct, they should write the author of any corrective steps that they expect the author to take.

Some examples of unethical behavior are:

- Failure to secure consent from all co-authors before submitting manuscript
- Failure to include appropriate people as co-authors on manuscript
- Submitting versions of manuscript to multiple journals concurrently

- Submitting manuscript to OSA journal that has already been published in whole or in part in another journal (self-plagiarism)

3. On the part of Reviewers

If a topical editor and the appropriate journal editor conclude that a reviewer may have engaged in unethical conduct while acting as a reviewer, the matter should be immediately referred to the OSA Ethics Review Board. The individual will be informed in writing of the alleged misconduct and be given the opportunity to respond to the allegation. If the Ethics Review Board concludes that no further action is necessary based on the reviewer's response, they will notify the reviewer and Editor. Alternatively, if, after evaluating the reviewer's response, the Board concludes that the allegation is probably correct, they will inform the reviewer that he will no longer be used as an OSA reviewer.

Some examples of unethical behavior are:

- Recommending rejection of a manuscript for competitive or personal reasons
- Delaying the completion of peer review process for personal benefit
- Plagiarizing or in other ways unethically using research in manuscript for own work

Appendix A

Standard Procedures and Timeline for the Reviewing Process

The timelines and procedures listed at each step are the maximum delay that should elapse before action is taken for manuscripts submitted to *JOSA A*, *JOSA B*, and *Applied Optics*. Please note that the timelines and procedures for *Optics Letters*, *Optics Express*, and *Journal of Optical Networking*, where rapid publication is especially important, will differ considerably.

1. Manuscript Office (4–5 working days)
Manuscripts will be submitted by the authors to the OSA All-Digital System (ADS). Manuscript Office Staff will check the submitted files and will push the papers that were submitted correctly to the Assign Editor step. If not, the author will be asked to resubmit properly. Any manuscript submitted directly to a journal editor or topical editor must be submitted to the ADS prior to proceeding with the review process.
2. Journal Editor or Divisional Editor (2–3 working days)
The editor will select a topical editor to handle each manuscript. (The editor may also serve as a topical editor for particular manuscripts if he or she chooses).
3. Topical Editor (6 working days)
The topical editor will select several possible reviewers for the manuscript and contact them by email. The topical editor should not request reviews from more than two reviewers at any one time.
4. Manuscript Office during Review Process
 - a) 1-2 weeks after sending to reviewers
An automatic reminder is sent to inquire about any review that has not been returned.
 - b) 2–3 weeks after sending to reviewers
The automatic reminder system will contact the reviewer a week after the first reminder is sent and will continue to contact the reviewer once every additional week that a review is tardy until a response is heard from the reviewer or until it is no longer feasible to wait for the review.
 - c) 8 weeks after sending to reviewers (4-5 weeks for *Optics Letters*)
No waiting for reviews past this point. The topical editor can obtain emergency reviews (which could include providing a review of his or her own) and proceed, or decide to make a decision based on one review.
5. Topical Editor (5 working days after receipt of last review)
The topical editor will “close” peer review when both reviews of a paper have been received. The Editor will then be required to make a decision based on those reviews. A standard decision letter (though it can be edited by the editor) will be sent to the author along with a pre-production review, if appropriate.
6. Revisions (2 months after sending decision to the author)
If revisions are requested the authors are allowed two months to respond (one month in the case of *Optics Letters* and two weeks in the case of *Optics Express*). If revisions are not received by the end of two months, the revised manuscript will be treated as a new submission when it arrives. Please be sure to remember that OSA has a “one-bounce”

policy that states that **the author is permitted only one opportunity to revise his/her paper. The revised paper must be accepted/rejected by the topical editor.** If necessary, you may send the revised paper back to the reviewers for re-review, but please be prepared to accept/reject the paper based on the reviewers' further comments. In rare instances (if the reviewers bring up new criticisms during re-review that weren't in his/her initial review, if the revisions requested during re-review are minor enough to warrant allowing the author to revise his/her paper further, or if the author was unaware of certain reviewer comments due to technical issues with the peer review system) the editor can make exceptions to this policy, but we ask that they do so sparingly.

7. Press Releases

Occasionally, papers are submitted to OSA journals that are of particular newsworthiness and importance. OSA has a Public Relations office that can publicize these papers in the wider science community through press releases, articles on web pages, etc. If you come across a paper that you believe would be of interest, please notify the Manuscript Office at the accept stage. We will take all necessary steps to get wider publicity for the article.

Appendix B

Suggestions to Topical Editors on Choosing Reviewers

1. The OSA reviewer database.

The OSA Manuscript Office maintains a database of past reviewers and authors and others who have been identified as potential reviewers, which editors access via the Web.

2. Reviewers not in the database.

It is desirable to expand the reviewer database to cover a wider range of potential reviewers, and topical editors are encouraged to choose reviewers who are not listed in the OSA database. For these reviewers, the topical editor should provide the Manuscript Office with the name, **e-mail address**, address as completely as known, telephone and FAX numbers. Preliminary information of expertise is also desirable, but staff will follow-up with the individual to solicit those details.

3. Use of prominent reviewers.

Topical editors should avoid the overuse of prominent researchers as reviewers, since these people get many requests for reviews. Less well-known researchers, post-docs, and senior graduate students frequently write more careful reviews than better-known scientists who are too busy to take the time. The best use of prominent researchers is to ask them to suggest junior associates in their departments or groups who would be suitable reviewers.

4. Suggested sources for reviewers.

- a) Authors of papers referenced in the manuscript
- b) Authors of papers on similar subjects published in OSA journals found by using OSA's Optics InfoBase
- c) Authors of papers on similar subjects from the programs of recent major conferences (CLEO/QELS, OFC, IQEC, OSA, APS, SPIE, or IEEE meetings)
- d) Referrals by well-known researchers (see paragraph 3 above)
- e) Authors of papers on similar subjects listed in abstract services and journals (INSPEC, Science Abstracts, Chemical Abstracts, Journal of Current Laser Abstracts, Science Citation Index)

5. Sources for address and e-mail information for reviewers.

- a) OSA membership Directory
- b) APS Membership Directory and Directory of Physics and Astronomy Staff (published in alternate years as the December issue of Bulletin of the APS)
- c) Other professional society directories (ARVO, MRS, IEEE / LEOS)
- d) Directories of corporations, universities and research institutes (several available, most technical libraries will have at least one); these will give a mailing address and an entry point such as a general information or department office telephone number
- e) The Web.