



EDITORS' INFORMATION GUIDE

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Introduction to Springer Nature

At Springer Nature our mission is to advance discovery by publishing robust and insightful research, supporting the development of new areas of knowledge, and making ideas and knowledge accessible around the world. As a research publisher, Springer Nature is home to trusted brands including [Nature Research](#), [Springer](#), [BMC](#), [Palgrave Macmillan](#) and [Scientific American](#). We are the world's largest academic book publisher, a pioneer in the field of open research, and our company has almost 13,000 staff in 50 countries.

There are many different editorial roles at Springer Nature. We employ hundreds of professional editors working on our journals in-house (such as on the *Nature* titles), and we also work with thousands of Editors-in-Chief, Editorial Board Members, Section Editors and Handling Editors based at academic institutions. This guide is intended for those external editors.

Our external editors play a key part in helping us to advance discovery, from working with us to build a network of authors and peer reviewers, helping authors improve their papers, advocating for our journals, and sometimes dealing with legal or research integrity issues. Ultimately they help safeguard the scientific accuracy of the published record and ensure that our authors work commands the highest level of trust.

We value the hard work and dedication our expert editors put into this important and rewarding role, and we are committed to working together and providing as much support and guidance as we can, based on Springer Nature's 170 years of experience in academic publishing.

Editors' Information Guide is part of the support we provide and offers a short reference guide to the role and responsibilities of an Editor-in-Chief. We hope it will also be of use to editors serving on journal editorial boards, handling editors, and anyone who wants to understand the day-to-day work of a journal editor.

Overview of the Editor-in-Chief role

The role of an Editor-in-Chief is varied, but their core purpose is to be a champion for their discipline and a custodian of the scientific record in order to ensure the success of the journal for their community.

An Editor-in-Chief ensures that:

- Their journal meets the needs of their research community
- Their journal provides a route for scientific discussion and debate as well as the dissemination of sound primary research
- All of the content in the journal is scientifically valid and fits the aims and scope of their journal
- The peer review system is managed and overseen efficiently and with integrity (either single-handedly or working with a team of handling editors or Editorial Board Members)
- Their journal adheres overall to the high standards expected from a journal published by Springer Nature

One way in which Editors-in-Chief do this is to assess manuscripts for their suitability for peer review, select suitable peer reviewers and make editorial decisions based on peer review reports. Sometimes this is done single-handedly, other times with a team of handling editors or Editorial Board Members.

However, there is much, much more. The Editor-in-Chief role requires a unique set of skills and expertise in its own right, and a day in the life of an Editor-in-Chief might include activities as varied as:

- Selecting Editorial Board Members for their journal,
- Keeping their Editorial Board engaged with their journal,
- Deciding whether to publish a manuscript in the face of conflicting peer review reports,
- Making decisions about manuscripts on controversial topics,
- Investigating cases of suspected research misconduct,
- A promotion plan for the journal, once it is accepting submissions

Journal, holding teleconferences with relevant Editorial Board members to discuss specific issues and/or by holding in-person Editorial Board meetings at conferences in the subject area of the journal.

The Editorial Board

The Editorial Board of a journal consists of a group of experts in the field who support the Editor-in-Chief in the running and development of the journal. For this reason, it is essential that the Editor-in-Chief has a strong Editorial Board in place.

Setting up an Editorial Board

A good Editorial Board will consist of:

- A broad mix of members who contribute in different ways to the success of the journal
- Members with expertise that covers the breath of the journal scope and includes key leaders in the field
- Members whose expertise aligns with research output in the field
- Members with appropriate statistical expertise for the field

It is the Editor-in-Chief's role to suggest and help to recruit suitable candidates for their Editorial Board. For new journals this is done in collaboration with the Publisher.

Role of the Editorial Board

The Editorial Board can be called upon to

- Help determine the journal's field specific editorial policies
- Help with routine peer review of manuscripts
- Provide expert advice on manuscripts during research integrity investigations
- Represent and promote the journal, for example at meetings and conferences
- Provide content by writing occasional editorials and other short articles
- Assist with ideas for commissioning reviews and commentaries and serve as Guest Editor for special or themed issues for the journal

A key role for the Editor-in-Chief is to keep their Editorial Board engaged and contributing to the journal, and regular communication with its members is an ideal way to maintain this interest. This might be achieved by sending regular updates on important developments in the journal, holding teleconferences with relevant Editorial Board members to discuss specific issues and/or by holding in-person Editorial Board meetings at conferences in the subject area of the journal.

Launching a new journal

The idea for a new journal might come as a proposal from the scientific community itself as a result of researchers struggling to find a suitable home in which to publish their research. Sometimes the Publisher may identify a new or expanding field which is in need of a dedicated journal.

Before a journal can launch there is much work is done, and the Editor-in-Chief would work in collaboration with the Publisher to prepare and shape the new journal.

The Publisher may require advice and input from the Editor-in-Chief on:

- What the title of the new journal should be
- What the ethos, aims and scope of the journal should be
- Potential candidates for the Editorial Board and handling editors
- Setting up the peer review policies and procedures
- Putting a commissioning plan in place to ensure a pipeline of articles

Journal development

An Editor-in-Chief will naturally be invested in the success of the journal and is the journal's chief champion in the community. A key aspect of their role is therefore to work with the Publisher to manage journal development by encouraging submissions and increasing the visibility of the journal in the relevant field.

Development Strategy

The aims of a journal development strategy might include:

- Growing market share in publications
- Achieving inclusion in select Abstracting & Indexing services
- Engaging with the research community
- Driving content usage and improving metrics, such as mean number of days from submission of the manuscript to first decision; Impact Factor; social media shares; or total number of downloads for articles, to name just a few

Commissioning

Commissioning – whether reviews, opinion pieces and/or original research – can be instrumental in increasing the readership and overall impact of a journal.

Commissioning is an important aspect of journal development because:

- Articles from leaders in the field can increase the journal's credibility
- Commissioning articles in a topical or emerging area indicates that the journal is open for submissions in that area of the field
- Commissioning content on a particular aspect of the journal's scope also helps to indicate that the journal is interested in publishing in this area

An Editor-in-Chief can commission content for their journal in the following ways:

- Utilizing contacts to encourage submissions
- Actively soliciting submissions from key researchers and colleagues in the field, and presenters of relevant work at conferences
- Actively soliciting submissions in a topical or emerging area within the scope of the journal
- Publishing high quality themed or special issues
- Working with the Publisher to ensure that your journal is promoted at relevant conferences

The most effective ways in which to develop a journal and commission content will vary between journals. The Editor-in-Chief and Publisher work closely to maintain an effective development strategy via regular strategic commissioning meetings.

Using the Editorial Board

As well as working with the Publisher, the journal Editorial Board is a rich source of support for commissioning and journal development activities and Editors-in-Chief will engage with their Editorial Board and foster enthusiasm in these activities, to ensure the success of the journal.

Manuscript handling and peer review

The Editor-in-Chief aims to ensure that all articles their journal publishes meet agreed editorial, ethical and best practice standards and are scientifically valid. These are fundamental criteria every manuscript is assessed for. In addition, the Editor-in-Chief must decide whether a manuscript is right for their journal in terms of scope and interest level.

Before peer review

Before peer review, the Editor-in-Chief should ask themselves:

Is the manuscript within the journal's scope and of sufficient interest? If it is not, but appears to be otherwise scientifically valid, the Editor-in-Chief can offer the authors a transfer to another more suitable journal via the Springer Nature transfer service.

For more information please speak to your Publisher contact or see our [website](#).

Does the manuscript adhere to the journal's editorial policies? Our key brands, Nature Research, Springer, BMC and Palgrave Macmillan have their editorial policies on their websites and Editors-in-Chief should be familiar with these and any additional editorial policies specific to their journal. This aspect of the initial assessment of a manuscript can sometimes be the most challenging, and most interesting, part of the whole manuscript handling process.

Are there any language concerns? If a manuscript requires English copyediting to improve the quality or clarity of the language used, the Editor-in-Chief can recommend a professional editing service such as those provided by our affiliates [Nature Research editing service](#) or [American Journal Experts](#).

If a manuscript fails to pass these initial questions or is deemed to be obviously flawed, or below the interest level of the journal, the Editor-in-Chief should reject the manuscript or investigate any research integrity concerns at this stage without sending it for peer review.

After peer review

Is the manuscript sufficiently scientifically valid? This question is addressed by peer review, a major part of the manuscript handling process. The Editor-in-Chief may be directly involved in selecting and inviting peer reviewers and making final accept or reject decisions, or, for large journals, may oversee a team of editors who directly handle the peer review process. Regardless of whether or not they are directly involved in handling peer review, the Editor-in-Chief has oversight of the peer review process and is ultimately responsible for the content of the journal.

Peer reviewers should be selected on the basis of their expertise in the topic and methodology covered by the manuscript. Peer reviewers with expertise in statistical aspects of the manuscript may also be needed. Peer reviewers need to have demonstrable expertise and recent activity in the field as well as be free of any potential bias, although a declared competing interest does not necessarily preclude an individual from peer reviewing a manuscript.

What is my decision? Once the peer reviewers have returned their peer review reports, the Editor-in-Chief, if directly involved in handling peer review, needs to make a decision on whether to accept the manuscript for publication, reject it, or ask the authors for further revisions. The Editor in Chief should weigh up the comments and concerns raised by the reviewers, consider how far they preclude publication, whether the concerns raised can be addressed, and what is best for their journal and the scientific field in general. It may be that the Editor-in-Chief's assessment results in a decision that goes against the recommendation of a reviewer.

Alternatively, it may be that the Editor-in-Chief is faced with strongly opposing views amongst the reviewers or between the peer reviewers and authors of the manuscript. The Editor-in-Chief can call upon their Editorial Board to arbitrate in such situations.

A manuscript represents the end result of months or even years of work on the part of the authors. It is important that when an Editor-in-Chief communicates that a manuscript has been rejected, which can be either before or after peer review, the authors are given an explanation for why their manuscript is not suitable for their journal. It is particularly important to distinguish between rejection because a manuscript is fundamentally unsound, and because it is below the interest threshold for the journal. In the latter case, a transfer to another Springer Nature journal may be offered to the authors. For more information on transfers, please speak to your Publisher contact or see our [website](#).

Publication ethics

Mistakes by authors or issues relating to research and publication ethics can arise and be identified at any point along the manuscript handling process, as well as after publication. With increasing awareness and better detection methods, it is inevitable that an Editor-in-Chief will need to handle more and more publication ethics issues, so they should be aware of such issues, how to handle simple cases and where to go for help for more complicated issues.

All Springer Nature journals are members of the [Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\)](#) which provides advice and resources to help editors deal with research and publication problems. As well as a set of [flowcharts](#) to guide editors through commonly encountered problems, COPE also holds quarterly discussion forums for difficult cases and conferences for its members.

With any publication ethics issue, there is likely to be a number of stakeholders involved, (e.g. authors, institutions, funders, reviewers, whistle-blowers). Editors-in-Chief can seek help and support from their Publisher contact in the first instance. In complex cases, a Research Integrity Advisor from the Springer Nature Research Integrity Group, a team dedicated to promoting best publication practice and resolving publication ethics issues, will get involved to help resolve the case.

It is important to remember that details of all on-going publication ethics investigations are kept confidential until a final editorial decision is made. The outcome of an investigation may be: no further action, the publication of a Correction, the publication of a Retraction, or the publication of an Expression of Concern.

[In addition, all Editors-in-Chief at Springer Nature agree to follow the Editors Code of Conduct.](#)

- The Editors Code of Conduct sets out the minimum expected standards in relation to peer review, manuscript handling, editorial policy, conflicts of interest, legal issues and representing the journal
- Editors-in-Chief particularly need to be aware of their own potential competing interests which may relate to their role as Editor-in-Chief as a whole or in relation to a particular manuscript submitted to their journal. It is important to note that a competing interest in relation to the role of Editor-in-Chief as a whole does not necessarily preclude them from acting as Editor-in-Chief
- When an Editor-in-Chief has a competing interest in relation to a particular manuscript (for example, they may have collaborated or competed with the authors or they may have financial or non-financial connection with some aspect of the manuscript content or with the funders of the research or the institution where the research was carried out), the Editor-in-Chief should not handle the manuscript themselves, but should assign a member of their Editorial Board or team of handling editors to manage peer review of the manuscript and make the final editorial decision

Appendix

Journal complaints procedure

Editors-in-Chief should establish a complaints procedure for their journal. Some choose to have their own process which may involve a group of independent experts to assess a case. The Publisher also has a complaints procedure which the Editor-in-Chief can adopt. In any case individuals wishing to make a complaint or comment about a Springer Nature journal should contact the Editor-in-Chief or editorial office for that journal in the first instance.

Springer Nature as a responsible business

At Springer Nature, we aim to have a positive impact in every area of our work. We know that we can only be a truly sustainable business by ensuring we are responsible in our use of resources and by creating a culture based on trust and respect. For more information on our responsible business policies, please visit [our website](#).

