

Who Are Corresponding Authors?

Motivated by recent discussions between two colleagues and many other conversations that I have had on this topic over the years, this month I discuss corresponding authorship. Part of the confusion over this designation stems from the two uses of the term. First, on submission, one single author must handle submission to and communications with the journal. We will address this task later. Second, and more importantly, after a paper is published, one or more authors are designated “corresponding authors”. These are the one or more authors with asterisks next to their names in published papers.

The corresponding authors of a paper (in this latter sense) are those to whom readers can address questions, requests for materials, or even suggestions for further work. In our increasingly complex and collaborative work, it has become ever more likely that a single author could not answer every detailed question about a publication and might not have access to all the materials used. For example, one author might be the expert in the materials synthesis, while another might be the expert in measurements and characterization, and a third might be primarily responsible for theory and simulations. Of course, even with this shared responsibility for leading different aspects of the project, every author of a paper remains responsible for the work presented in the paper, its interpretation, how it is written, and verifying that ethical requirements are met.

In contrast to the long-term obligations of the corresponding authors described above, during the submission and revision processes, the submitting author (perhaps this designation is more accurate) coordinates the manuscript, cover letter, editor and referee suggestions, and later, responses to editors and referees. The submitting author also ensures that all authors have read and approve the submitted form of the manuscript, both on initial submission and subsequently, should revisions be required, and finally, the galley proof corrections.

In order to be accessible to those requesting information or materials, the corresponding authors must be stable in their positions and locatable. Unless students or postdocs have long-term positions, it is typically not appropriate for these authors to be corresponding authors, even if they serve the function of submitting the manuscript. (There are occasional exceptions, such as where the senior author has passed away.)

I will take this opportunity to note here that it is usually best to contact the corresponding authors if you feel that they have missed citations in their papers. While we do have the *Letter to the Editor* format for commentary, the comments we publish must be of broad scientific interest to our community.

From the point of view of editors, when we search for appropriate referees of submitted manuscripts by looking at the authors of papers on related work, we are most likely to select only the corresponding authors, unless we personally know the authors involved. We select these potential referees carefully, and we depend on senior scientists' wisdom, perspective, and opinions in order to come to our editorial decisions.¹ For more information on what is expected of referees, please see the ACS Publishing 101 videos on the topic.²



Paul S. Weiss
Editor-in-Chief

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REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Weiss, P. S. The Best Referee Report. *ACS Nano* **2008**, *2*, 177.
2. Publishing 101 Episode 6 Part 1: The Review for Process for Reviewers; <http://pubs.acs.org/page/publish-research/episode-6.html>.

The corresponding authors of a paper are those to whom readers can address questions, requests for materials, or even suggestions for further work.

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