

# How We Handle Appeals and Why

As our submissions have grown, we have also received increasing numbers of appeals.<sup>1</sup> Just as when a manuscript is submitted, only our scientist/editors comment and make decisions on appeals. As a guide to our authors and others, I want to share how these appeals are handled.

A package of each appealed manuscript is assembled that includes the submissions, the communications with the authors, and referee reports, if any. As editor-in-chief, I assign all relevant editors in terms of expertise, who are free of conflicts of interest with the authors and work, the appeal package to read and to discuss. These comments are made on a shared file and allow us to discuss not only the manuscript under current consideration but also the status of the field, our expectations for papers in this area that we would publish and that others might, and the range of submissions that we receive in the area. These comments are made informally and help normalize us between our more than 20 editors in terms of our expectations and how we handle (subsequent) related submissions. Appeals effectively give us a series of live case studies of how we understand the state of nanoscience and nanotechnology, as well as a way to move *ACS Nano* forward.

**Only our scientist/editors comment and make decisions on appeals.**

Any editor can champion a manuscript for further consideration. We feel that this gives authors and their work every chance to see the light of day. If an appeal is accepted, the authors are given a chance to revise the manuscript before it is sent to referees for further review. We will often offer guidance on how the manuscript can be revised to make it more likely to pass through the referee and editorial processes. Roughly between 10 and 20% of appeals are accepted for further consideration; a smaller number are ultimately published.

Effective arguments for review include highlighting the novelty and broad interest of the work and addressing referee comments. As in the submission of revisions, we expect referee comments to be addressed, individually and explicitly.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, listing similar manuscripts that we and others have published indicates a lack of novelty and is effectively an argument *against* publication. Appeals made on this basis are rarely successful. It is not useful to try to identify referees; such attempts are almost always incorrect in any case. Commonly, the referees whose comments are the most negative are those suggested by the authors as independent experts.

Note that we hand pick each referee to which a manuscript is sent, based on the topic of the paper, the methods used, the potential referees' expertise and independence, and their familiarity with *ACS Nano*. Insulting a referee in an appeal (or elsewhere) is unprofessional and is certainly unproductive. Indeed, sometimes a referee or an editor *does* miss a point. Appeals (and revisions) give authors the opportunity to make that point more clear. We suggest doing so in the manuscript text, figures, tables, and references, not only in the appeal or revision letter.<sup>2</sup> As scientists and authors, it is up to us to make ourselves understood in our writing and otherwise.

If a multiplicity of referees have found critical flaws in a manuscript, it is an indication to us that the authors have not made the case for their work. Such appeals are unlikely to be successful.

As our submissions continue to rise, we are only able to send smaller fractions of manuscripts we receive out for external review. As always, at least two scientist/editors make this decision and any of these editors can champion a manuscript and send it out. I assign manuscripts to these editors by looking at each manuscript within a few hours of submission. The editors are selected based on their expertise and the scope of the

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manuscripts they handle. Specifically, a subset of editors handle all the manuscripts in a particular area so that they have an overview of that subfield—what work is at the forefront and of the greatest impact. These editors often discuss specific manuscripts so as to share wisdom and to stay current. Sometimes, we overlook a key aspect of submitted work; we have found that appeals help us identify these papers, and several have ultimately been published.

**Editors are selected based on their expertise and the scope of the manuscripts they handle.**

Our editors continue to speak regularly during our monthly teleconferences, meetings in person twice a year, annual meetings with our advisory board, get-togethers at scientific meetings we attend around the world, and frequent daily interactions. All these discussions, along with our handling of appeals, keep us up to date on the field and where it is going. Finally, in addition to the editorials that we have published as guides to authors and referees, let me refer you to a recent editorial on how manuscripts are handled by the editors of our sister journal, the *Journal of Physical Chemistry Letters*.<sup>3</sup> While our processes are not identical, their editors have quite a few key insights that I think you will find valuable.

*Disclosure:* Views expressed in this editorial are those of the author and not necessarily the views of the ACS.



Paul S. Weiss  
Editor-in-Chief

#### REFERENCES AND NOTES

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