

Instructions for Associate Editors—*Journal of Environmental Quality*

Thank you for agreeing to serve as an Associate Editor (AE) for the *Journal of Environmental Quality* (JEQ). This is an important task that helps ensure high standards are met for the quality of science appearing in JEQ. Manuscript Central (MC) is the official record for JEQ, so you must enter all information regarding a manuscript into MC. This includes assigning reviewers and your initial or final recommendation for a paper. You can log into MC at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jeq>. If you have submitted manuscripts to JEQ or reviewed papers for JEQ, you already have a password for MC. If you have not, you will receive your password via a separate email. Your user name is your email address. Note that there may be up to three tabs available to you when you log in (associate editor, reviewer, and author). Make sure you click on the associate editor tab. Follow the links for the AE and read the instructions for using MC. These instructions describe how MC works, and no attempt will be made to repeat the instructions in this document.

Duties of the JEQ Editorial Board

The JEQ Editorial Board is composed of three tiers: Editor, Technical Editors (TEs), and Associate Editors. The Editorial Board is responsible for the overall quality of the intellectual content of the journal through a comprehensive, thorough, fair, and timely review of manuscripts submitted for consideration in JEQ.

Duties of an Associate Editor

Prior to sending a paper out to reviewers, the AE should make a pre-evaluation of the paper. First, the AE should evaluate whether the paper is in condition for detailed review. Is the paper coherent and the English structure and grammar sufficient for the reviewers to clearly understand what is being presented? If the paper does not meet this minimum standard, then the paper can be *released without review because the manuscript is not ready for detailed review*. Second, if a manuscript does not conform in a general manner to JEQ style and format, the manuscript can also be *released without review because the manuscript is not ready for detailed review*. However, if style and format are the only reason for release, then the authors should be encouraged to revise the paper in accordance with JEQ style and format and resubmit. Style and format changes are easy to incorporate as part of the revision of a paper, so release only those papers that flagrantly deviate from JEQ style and format. Third, AEs need to establish whether the topic is appropriate for JEQ. If the topic is inappropriate, then the paper should be *released without review because the subject matter is not suitable for JEQ*. Another area that can be included in the pre-evaluation is the novelty of the paper. If the AE is confident that the novelty is low and the paper is not

worthy of publication for the lack of originality, then the manuscript can be *released*. However, a manuscript should not be released solely for the reason of lack of novelty unless a published paper or textbook can be cited showing this to be the case. *It is not sufficient to release a paper for lack of originality and merely state that the paper presents nothing new. You must provide a reference that shows the work has been done before or that the information presented does not add to the base of scientific knowledge.* In all of the above cases, an AE *must* provide a complete justification and detailed rationale stating the reason(s) for release.

It is important to keep in mind that it is the author's responsibility to make known to the reader the novelty of their work and to describe what knowledge gap is filled by their research and/or the implications of their research so that the significance of the research can be easily evaluated by reviewers, editors, and readers. A manuscript can be released for the failure to convey this information to the reader; however, usually this can be handled without releasing the manuscript by instructing the author that the significance of their research needs to be clearly conveyed in a revised manuscript. It is the AE's and reviewers' responsibility to evaluate whether the novelty of the paper as stated by the authors is truly novel.

An AE should obtain a sufficient number of reviews for each paper to allow them to make a recommendation of either *reject* or *return to author for revision* (*accept* is also an option, but it is rare that a paper that does not need to go back to the authors for some revision). Generally, an AE should obtain three reviews for each paper but may use more or less as needed. Two reviewers can be used, but only if they agree in their recommendation. As few as one reviewer can be used but only if a second detailed review is provided by the AE and the AE and outside reviewer agree in their recommendation. The AE should set the goal of finding and confirming reviewers within 7 days of being assigned a paper. It is usually most effective to first contact reviewers directly by phone or email (not just through MC) to ask if they can (i) complete a review and evaluate the manuscript and (ii) complete their review within 21 days. After 21 days from being assigned to a manuscript, reviewers will receive an automated email reminder to complete their review. If the AE does not receive a review within 28 days of the time the paper was assigned to a reviewer, then the AE should directly contact the reviewer by phone and/or email to establish when they will complete their review.

When the AE has received sufficient reviews to make a decision, the reviewers' comments and recommendations are used in the evaluation. The AE is expected to have read each assigned manuscript to be able to make a fair and knowledgeable evaluation and recommendation regarding the paper. The AE should not make a recommendation based solely on the reviewers' comments unless the topic of the paper is outside the AE's area of expertise and general knowledge.

If after review the recommendation is to *release* the paper, then the paper goes back to the TE, who will make the final decision. In this case, the identity of the AE is kept confidential. The AE needs to prepare a short paragraph explaining why they are recommending release and providing suggestions of what can be done to bring the manuscript up to JEQ standards for publication. This will go back to the authors via MC. A full disclosure of the reason(s) for releasing a manuscript by an AE is essential and is especially important for a revised and resubmitted manuscript since the authors have taken the time to revise according to reviewers' comments and should be made fully aware of the issues and concerns that remain with the manuscript preventing its acceptance. As noted above, it is not sufficient for AEs to indicate that a manuscript has been released for the reasons mentioned by the reviewers. The AE must clearly convey to the author in the Associate Editor Comments box of MC why the manuscript was released and what needs to be done to bring the manuscript up to JEQ standards.

If the recommendation is to *return to author for revision*, then the AE must prepare a letter indicating what changes need to be made and that the authors have 30 days to return their revised paper (papers are released after three months if they have not been returned). You may wish to emphasize certain points made by the reviewers or suggest additional changes above and beyond those suggested by the reviewers. When you click on *return to author for revision*, you will be given the opportunity to enter your letter, and the letter and reviewer comments will be sent to the author as an email. Note that each reviewer must enter a recommendation in MC. If they do not, the reviewer comments will not be transmitted to the author.

When an author submits a revised paper in MC, you will receive notification via email. Evaluate the paper and determine if adequate improvements have been made. At that point, you have the same three options available to you as before and you must indicate your recommendation in MC.

You should not indicate in your comments to an author that their paper has been accepted or released. *The Technical Editor makes the final decision.* Also note that it is the policy of JEQ to release papers that require extensive revision and that would likely need a second review. This is to prevent papers from remaining “active” for extended periods of time (sometimes more than a year). We would rather release them from consideration and leave it up to the authors to revise and resubmit as a new paper.

Locating and Maintaining Contact with Reviewers

Locating reviewers has become more difficult due to the increased competition for good reviewers stemming from the increased number of papers submitted to journals and the increased number of environmental journals. There are currently more than 200 environmental journals with which JEQ competes for reviewers. In the past, MC in combination with the reviewer database (called ‘Reviewer

Locator' in MC) provided AEs with an easy means of obtaining reviewers since MC provides a means of entering reviewers' names and the reviewers are automatically contacted. This means of securing reviewers worked very well, but the increased competition for reviewers and the increased security of firewall that block automated emails has caused this approach to be problematic. Three potential problems can occur: (i) the automated email does not reach the potential reviewer because it is blocked by a firewall, (ii) the automated email from MC is ignored by the reviewer, or (iii) the potential reviewer is out of office for an extended period. In each case, the AE will not know if the invitation to review ever reached the reviewer. If the AE merely enters the reviewer's name into MC without following up, then there may be a false assumption that the reviewer has accepted the invitation, which may or may not be the case.

Manuscript Central is a useful system, but it is not intended to relieve the AE of all responsibility for following up on (i) getting a formal acceptance by the reviewer to review the paper and (ii) getting the reviewer to complete the review in a timely manner. Consequently, the following procedure is strongly encouraged: Contact the reviewers (by phone or using your email, including a copy of the abstract in your email) to determine if they will review the manuscript. Inform those reviewers that have accepted that they will receive an automated email from MC providing them with the link to access the manuscript. Enter the confirmed reviewers into MC so they receive the link. After you have entered the reviewers into MC, check with each reviewer to verify that they have received the automated email with the link. If a reviewer has not received the automated email, then their firewall is blocking automated emails; if this happens, contact the submissions manager, Lauren Van Driel (lvandriel@sciencesocieties.org), and have her email the link directly to the reviewer.

Using Manuscript Central

The review process will probably never be completely paperless even with all manuscripts being submitted electronically. Reviewers may print out copies of papers and mark them up as part of their review. If you receive marked manuscripts from a reviewer, simply forward them to the authors if you are returning the paper for revision or to the TE if you recommend that the paper be released. The TE will return all printed material to the authors for papers that are rejected. However, if you can scan these printed materials as a pdf file, please do so and email it to the authors or TE, whichever is appropriate.

If a reviewer returns a review as an email attachment or by some other electronic means, you can cut and paste the review into MC for that paper. This information is transmitted to the authors either when you return the paper for revisions or when the paper is rejected by the TE.

Timeliness

The *Journal of Environmental Quality* strives to provide a response to the authors of submitted papers within three months. This means that the authors should either know that their paper has been rejected or that they need to provide a revised manuscript. Experience has shown that three things cause delays the most often: (i) papers that are not sent out for review immediately after receipt by the AE, (ii) reviewers who do not return their reviews in a timely fashion, and (iii) AEs who do not act on a paper after reviews or revisions are completed. To prevent these delays, please send papers out for review as soon as you receive them. Preferably, have all reviewers located and confirmed within 7 days. Send reminders to reviewers when reviews are late. Make your recommendations as soon as possible after a sufficient number of reviews have been obtained or after receiving a revised paper. Overall, quality comes before speed. Sometimes you may need to wait for a quality review. Please keep in mind that it is our objective to provide a fair, thorough, and comprehensive review in a timely manner.

If an AE has personal, professional, or health problems that will interfere with their duties, they should notify their TE (and the Editor) immediately so that a brief temporary leave of absence can be arranged and the AE's active manuscripts can be assigned to other AEs. It is the AE's responsibility to notify the Editor and their TE before these problems affect the timeliness of the evaluation of a manuscript.

We need to keep the papers moving for several reasons. Authors base their journal decisions in part on how long it takes to get the paper reviewed. We also want the information that appears in JEQ to be as timely as possible. Papers printed more than one year after they have been submitted may not represent the latest work in a given area. Please be respectful of the authors and treat their papers as you would like your own papers to be handled.

Editing

The question often arises as to how much effort reviewers and AEs should expend on editing papers. This could include rewording sentences, asking for improved clarity in places, correcting grammar and spelling, improving the appearance of tables and figures, monitoring the use of SI units, and conforming to JEQ style and format requirements. The primary and most important objective is for the AE to establish the scientific and technical soundness of a paper, but clarity, conciseness, and meeting JEQ style and format requirements are also important and should not be left solely for the copyeditor. Associate Editors should read papers carefully with these issues in mind. Do not assume that these issues will be taken care of by

the TE, Editor, or Managing Editor. Pay particular attention to the use of SI units and insist that all authors use SI units. Ultimately, it is the authors' responsibility to conform to JEQ style and format requirements, but it is the AE's responsibility to point out to the authors where they have not met these requirements. If the paper requires extensive editing, this is grounds for rejection regardless of the quality of the science. You are not expected to rewrite papers, but aside from the scientific and technical soundness of a paper, you are responsible for the overall condition and quality of those papers that you accept and pass to your TE.

To assist AEs in improving the clarity and quality of papers, a checklist has been provided at the end of these instructions, which consists of style and format requirements that authors commonly overlook.

Page Length of Manuscripts and Electronic Supplemental Information

The word limit for technical reports and short communications submitted to JEQ is 7000 words, including abstract, headings, tables, and figures, where each table or figure (including table titles and figure captions) is equivalent to 300 words (600 for large tables and figures that take up an entire page). References are excluded. The 7000 word limit does not apply to Reviews and Analyses, Environmental Issues papers, or introductory papers to special sections. By the time a paper gets to you, the editor has already checked that it meets the word limit guidelines. Please keep the word limit in mind when asking authors to revise their work. In addition, AEs and TEs should make an effort to point out when authors are too verbose or are including information and discussions that are not of value to the paper. Less essential information, such as figures of site location maps or previously published tables of data, should generally be included as electronic supplemental information.

Manuscripts Concerned with Environmental Modeling

The editorial policy for the consideration of environmental modeling papers is explicit. Modeling papers are only considered if they provide measured data to validate the model. However, there are exceptions to this rule. If measured validation data are an "undue burden" for the authors to obtain, then an uncertainty analysis using Monte Carlo simulations or first-order uncertainty analysis must be provided in place of the measured data. An "undue burden" is defined as an onerous financial or health burden that is unrealistic. For example, providing measured data to validate a regional-scale non-point source pollutant model would pose an onerous financial burden because of the tremendous number of samples required. An example of an onerous health burden would be the collection of data for a contaminant that poses an extreme danger, such as plutonium or dioxin. Ideally, a modeling paper should provide measured data for validation and should also provide an uncertainty analysis to establish the reliability of the measurements, except in those

cases where measured data poses an undue burden, in which case an uncertainty analysis is sufficient.

Policy for Monitoring/Observation Papers

Monitoring studies are only considered if they test a hypothesis that will advance our knowledge and understanding of environmental concepts. An environmental monitoring study is only acceptable for consideration if the data are put into context to allow a better understanding of concepts that provide a significant scientific impact or the data provide unique observations with broad application and interest.

Resources:

Instructions to Authors and other information for JEQ can be found at

<https://dl.sciencesocieties.org/publications/jeq/author-instructions>. The *Publications Handbook and Style Manual* can be found at <https://dl.sciencesocieties.org/publications/style>.

Quick Checklist of JEQ Style and Format Requirements:

- Provide page and line numbers.
- Provide a cover page with the manuscript title, and authors' names and contact information. Indicate the corresponding author's name and provide the corresponding author's e-mail address.
- A title of 12 words or less (not counting conjunctions or prepositions) is recommended. Titles should be limited to those words that give significant information about the manuscript's content and facilitates retrieval in indexes developed by secondary literature services. A good title briefly identifies the subject, indicates the purpose of the study, and introduces key terms or concepts.
- It is important to carefully review/edit abstracts to ensure that they contain all the necessary elements. The abstract should be a single paragraph of 250 words or less, with 1 to 2 sentences each for a justification/rationale, objective or hypothesis, methods, results, and conclusion. The abstract must provide a rationale for the study and a hypothesis or an objective, significant quantitative results, a brief discussion of the results, and a conclusion. Only the most significant results should be presented. The soil taxonomic classifications of soils involved in field studies should also be presented. How you implement the oversight of this is up to you: you can work with your reviewers to suggest revisions to the author, or you can do this directly with the authors yourself.
- Conclusions: Authors can either include a separate Conclusion, which will appear as a subheading under the Discussion section or provide the conclusion with no heading at the end of the Discussion section. In either case, the conclusion will be no longer than 200 words. Within the 200 words the conclusions and implications of the work should be provided. In some instances, no conclusions may have been drawn

from the study. In this case, the implications of study should be provided. In other words, if the authors forego the inclusion of a Conclusion subheading within the Discussion section, then the final paragraph of the Discussion section should provide the conclusions (if any) and the implications of the study. This paragraph should be 200 words or less. Conclusions must not simply repeat what has already been presented in the manuscript but present some sound inferences from the study findings.

- Abbreviations list: Please provide an alphabetized list of only the most commonly used (i.e., 3 times or more) abbreviations. Conform to the following example format: Abbreviations: CAFO, concentrated animal feeding operation; NMP, nutrient management plan, etc. Throughout the manuscript, define all acronyms used when they first appear.
- Use an “en-dash” rather than a hyphen between ranges of numbers, including ranges of page numbers in the References section. The use of an en-dash applies only to ranges of numbers.
- Any awkward, confusing, or grammatically incorrect sentences should be noted, with instructions for the author to correct these sentences.
- Do not begin a sentence with an acronym, symbol, or formula.
- Throughout the manuscript, provide SI units. If you are uncertain, refer to the Publications Handbook and Style Manual, which is available at <https://dl.sciencesocieties.org/publications/style> under Units and Measurements. Providing SI units is the responsibility of the authors and can lead to a delay in publication if not provided.
- Tables and figures must be able to stand alone; consequently, all acronyms appearing in tables and figures must be defined even though they may have already been defined within the main text. Place the definitions of acronyms at the bottom of the table and in the figure caption.
- Figures may be reduced from 40 to 75%; consequently, it is important that the text size is sufficiently large so that when the figure is reduced the text is legible. Illegible figures due to unreadable text once reduced can delay the publication of the manuscript until figures are corrected by the author. Legible figures, even when reduced, are the responsibility of the author. Poor quality figures are not acceptable and will delay publication until the author can provide publication quality figures.
- For identification purposes, please provide the author’s name (e.g., Jones et al.) and the manuscript ID (e.g., JEQ-2016-00-0000) and/or manuscript title at the bottom or top of each figure.

Refer to the JEQ Instructions to Authors (<https://dl.sciencesocieties.org/publications/jeq/author-instructions>) for additional style and format requirements.