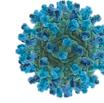


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Nature: the truth

Myths always circulate about Nature's editorial processes and policies. Here is an attempt to dispel them.

Myth 1: Perhaps the longest-lived myth is that publishing a preprint of a paper submitted to this journal will pre-empt its consideration. Not true, as has been said in these columns before. For more than 20 years, we have had a policy of treating preprints as equivalent to conference talks: intra-researcher communication that encourages informal feedback and leads to better papers.

Myth 2: Nature journals do not want senior researchers to involve junior colleagues in the confidential process of peer review. Untrue. We positively encourage such involvement, to help graduate students and postdocs gain experience with due oversight. We ask that they be identified, give them credit and may well go to them directly for advice on subsequent papers.

Myth 3: Referees can veto papers. Only on technical grounds. It has always been the editors who select which papers *Nature* publishes, even though referees' assessments of significance are influential. We always heed technical comments, but reserve the right to disagree with a referee's recommendation as to whether publication is warranted.

Myth 4: The authorship of a paper — including country and institution — influences *Nature's* decision on whether to referee or publish it. Untrue. We frequently publish papers from first-time authors, and frequently reject papers by highly reputable researchers on purely editorial grounds of the paper's significance. We offer the option of double-blind peer review for those authors who want it. We recognize the possibility of unconscious bias.

Myth 5: *Nature* editors choose papers for anticipated media coverage or citations. Not true. Assessment of significance is what counts. In many areas of research, citations do indeed reflect significance, and

we value such achievements. But many papers that we publish neither achieve nor are expected to achieve high numbers of citations. We value them, nevertheless, because we judge them to have intrinsic interest, or because of their potentially substantive impact on society.

Myth 6: *Nature* editors sometimes reject papers without reading them fully. Untrue.

Myth 7: Authors must prepare submitted manuscripts in the form consistent with our highly *Nature*-specific format guidelines. Not true. For submission purposes, we care only that the paper conforms roughly to our length stipulations, and that editors and referees can understand the claims and their bases. Figures and their legends do not have to be placed at the end of the text at submission stage. Only moving towards publication does the formatting matter.

Myth 8: Within the *Nature* journals system, in which authors may be offered a transfer of a rejected paper to another journal, the transferred paper may be underestimated by the receiving editors. Untrue. Editors assess papers on their own terms. Because such transfers are informed by our knowledge of our journals' criteria, one would expect a substantially lower rate of prompt editorial rejections and a higher rate of refereeing for such transfers than for direct submissions — which is indeed borne out by our statistics. For example, manuscripts transferred within the *Nature* family were sent to external reviewers in February 2018 twice as frequently as those submitted directly.

Myth 9: *Nature* editors never consider appeals. Not true.

Our Guide to Authors may not be sufficiently clear on some of these policies, and we are working to improve it. Above all, we hope that this Editorial will help researchers, and correct sometimes widespread misconceptions about *Nature's* processes and policies. ■

Cries for help

An outpouring on Twitter highlights the acute pressures on young scientists.

Poor mental health is an issue for many of our readers, as underscored by the response to a tweet sent by @NatureNews last week, which highlighted rates of depression and anxiety reported by postgraduate students (see go.nature.com/2gtjxq). The reaction blew us away: more than 1,900 retweets and around 230 replies.

"This is not one dimensional problem. Financial burden, hostile academia, red tape, tough job market, no proper career guidance. Take your pick," read one. "I'd love to see some of the comments under this thread published," wrote one responder. "There needs to be real conversation about this, not just observation." We

agree — which is why we are publishing some of the responses.

There is a problem with the culture in science, and it is one that loads an increasing burden on the shoulders of younger generations. The evidence suggests that they are feeling the effects. (Among the tweets, one proposed solution to improving the PhD: "treat it like professional training instead of indentured servitude with no hope of a career at the end?") It will take a while to change that culture — and, unfortunately, it will probably take almost as long for some in the community to realize the need for it to change. But change it must.

We intend to revisit this topic, starting in May, with a Careers Feature on depression. We want to hear more from readers on mental-health issues and the stresses that contribute. You can share your stories in confidence here: go.nature.com/stress-stories.

We thank those who have already told theirs. "I hold down three jobs to fund my PhD, living in hopes of funding, it's a constant strain," wrote one. "So many others out there like me, and sometimes I wonder if it's even worth it. The research community will lose so many great minds to issues like this. It needs to be changed." ■