

FAQ: TRANSPARENT PEER REVIEW AT *NATURE COMMUNICATIONS*

What is transparent peer review?

For all papers published in *Nature Communications* that are submitted from January 2016 authors can agree to the publication of a peer review file containing the reviewer comments to the authors and author rebuttal letters. Our authors are given the opportunity to opt out of this scheme at the point of acceptance.

Why has *Nature Communications* implemented this scheme?

In our 2014 Author Insights Survey, 67% of authors said that they would like publishers to experiment with alternative peer review models. We hope to make the peer review process more transparent, and it may also facilitate a deeper understanding of the research that we publish. Transparent peer review also creates a useful resource for students and early career researchers looking for information on how the peer review system operates. For our peer reviewers, it has the benefit that if they wish to refer to, or share, one of their reviews, they can do so easily.

Are you the first to do this?

No, this system is already used successfully by a number of other publishers across several research areas.

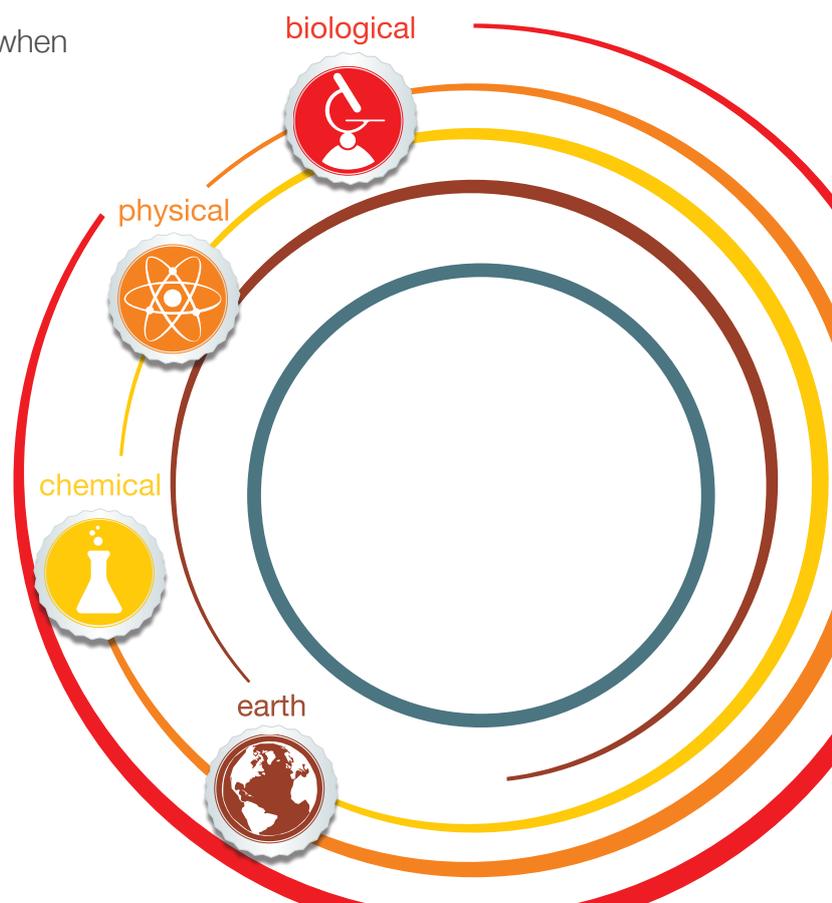
Can authors opt out?

Yes, we will ask our authors if they would like to opt out at the point of acceptance.

Can peer reviewers opt out?

Peer reviewers are informed of this new initiative when invited to review and can decline to review the manuscript if they are not comfortable with their review being published. Acceptance to review is regarded as permission to release the reports. However, given that their review will be anonymous if they choose not to sign their report we hope that they will not choose to opt out.

Reviewers also have the option to make confidential comments on the manuscript to the editor if they would like, although we would prefer that, in the interest of transparency, this is avoided. Any comments that the authors need to address in revision should be made in the 'comments to the authors' section.



Are reviewer names published?

No. Unless reviewers sign the comments to the authors with their name, we will respect and maintain their full anonymity under all circumstances. However, if they would like, reviewers can request that their name be added to their comments at any point, up to and including receipt of a notification that the manuscript has been accepted in principle.

Does this apply to manuscripts that have been peer reviewed elsewhere?

Authors sometimes transfer manuscripts between our journals. If a manuscript has been transferred to *Nature Communications* after peer review at another *Nature* journal, then we will receive those reviewer reports. However, these reports and the author responses to them will not be included in our peer review files, as those reports were submitted to the other journal without consent to potential publication.

If the same reviewers subsequently agree to review for us, only their reviewer reports for *Nature Communications* will be included in the published peer review file. Instances of transferred manuscripts that were previously peer reviewed will be marked up in the peer review file, without naming the other journal.

What if an author wants the peer review file to be edited pre-publication?

The peer review files will contain the full reviewer reports to authors and the author rebuttal letters. The only exception is the disclosure of confidential data provided to editors or reviewers, which authors will be able to suggest for redaction. Redactions will be noted in the peer review files.

What are the limitations of transparent peer review?

The reviewer reports are taken into consideration when the editorial team decides whether to accept, reject or ask for changes to a manuscript, but just reading the peer review reports will not necessarily give a reader the full picture of the decision-making process.

Correspondence between authors and editors, reviewer comments made confidentially to editors, and internal discussions between editors will remain confidential. A paper might be published against the advice of a reviewer, if for example we receive confidential feedback from other reviewers that overall favours publication. These discussions might not always be fully captured in peer review files, although we may add editorial explanations to some of the files.

Will you publish your editorial decision letters?

In this first step towards more transparency we are focussing on the scientific discussions arising during peer review. We hope to evaluate whether to open up the process further at a later stage, for example by also publishing our editorial decision letters.

How many authors opt in?

We monitor parameters such as author opt-in rates and feedback from authors, reviewers and readers, and have reported these to the community in an editorial (<http://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms13626>).