

RTI Press uses **Scholastica**,* a web-based system used by numerous peer-reviewed journals, to handle and administer the manuscript submission and peer-review process.

If you need assistance with Scholastica, contact Annie Gering, Publishing Editor, at agering@rti.org.

Summary of Associate Editor (AE) Responsibilities

- Conduct a pre-review check of assigned manuscript
- Identify and invite peer reviewers
- Summarize own and peer reviews
- Communicate decision to the corresponding author and the Executive Editor

NOTE: At any stage, don't let more than a week pass before following up with the author or reviewers or checking into Scholastica.

Conduct a Pre-review Check of Assigned Manuscript

1. Read the manuscript to determine whether it is suitable for peer review on scientific and substantive grounds. Consider whether the manuscript is reasonably well constructed and well written.
2. Based on your own review of the manuscript, decide whether to send it out for peer review.
 - **If YES:** Move to peer review.
 - **If NO:** Either reject the manuscript or ask for resubmission, if that seems appropriate and likely to produce an improved manuscript. See guidance on "Communicate Decision to the Corresponding Author" on page 2.

The table below summarizes the decision process.

Point of departure: AE reviews manuscript

Prior to Peer Review	After Each Round of Peer Review
If pre-review check meets standards: Proceed to peer review.	If reviewer recommends acceptance and you agree that no revisions are needed: Accept.
If standards are unmet but can be easily addressed: Revise.	If reviewers and /or you judge the manuscript to be potentially publishable, but see need for revisions: Revise.
If standards are unmet and are unlikely to be addressed: Reject.	If revisions are unlikely to address unmet criteria: Reject.

Identify and Invite Peer Reviewers

At least two completed reviews are required for all types of manuscripts except research or policy briefs, which require only one reviewer. For all manuscripts, invite more than the minimum required reviewers to increase the chances that we receive the required reviews in a timely manner.

NOTE: Recruit non-RTI reviewers whenever possible. Internal RTI reviewers may be invited if you encounter challenges recruiting external reviewers. For all reviewers, proceed with due diligence to ensure no conflicts of interest. For most publication types, a minimum of one external reviewer is required. For briefs, a minimum of one review is required, preferably from a non-RTI reviewer.

Identify potential reviewers:

- Did the author(s) of the manuscript suggest any peer reviewers?
- Identify reviewers as you might for a peer-reviewed journal: people you know; authors of articles or books on similar topics; internet searches. At RTI, search CRIS.
- Search researchers at our partner institutions: University of North Carolina, North Carolina State University, Duke University, and North Carolina Central University.
- Ask colleagues with related expertise for suggestions of possible reviewers, especially external reviewers.
- Check the references, particularly for names that are repeated. If authors have published previously with RTI Press, also check the references of previous submissions.
- **AVOID CONFLICT OF INTEREST.** Presume conflict of interest for close colleagues or collaborators. If unsure, ask potential reviewers if they have an actual or perceived conflict of interest.

Invite peer reviewers

- Invite possible reviewers in Scholastica. You may also send an email notifying them of registration, explaining what RTI Press is, and providing a brief description of the manuscript.
- For potential reviewers who are new to RTI Press, you may wish to send a regular email reiterating what is in the Scholastica email and advising them to look in their spam folder if they have not received anything from Scholastica.

* Please note that Scholastica does not support Internet Explorer.

Track progress of peer reviews

- When someone agrees to be a reviewer, be sure to remind them to respond to the Scholastica invitation.
- If a peer reviewer declines an invitation, go back to Scholastica and invite somebody else.
- If reviewers remain delinquent, follow up outside of Scholastica.
- If a reviewer is unresponsive, revoke their invitation via a default email message in Scholastica. This removes them from the system.

Summarize Own and Peer Reviews

Once you have received comments from all reviewers, you will need to read through the reviewers' reports as well as generate your own thoughtful review of the work. When you are ready to make a decision, draw up an overall summary of the reviews for the authors, highlighting the strengths of their piece and the areas that need more work.

In general:

- Start with the positive.
- Be specific in your feedback to authors.
- Always be collegial, especially with rejections.

Communicate Decision to the Corresponding Author and the Executive Editor

Once you have summarized the reviews, you must make a decision about the manuscript and communicate that decision to the author. There are several possible options for your decision.

Initial decision

Revise. This is by far the most commonly selected option. Explain what is important to revise, pointing out any particular issues brought up by reviewers and any suggestions of your own. If reviewers provided comments in the manuscript, include anonymized files for the authors. Remind authors that, with their resubmission, they must provide a complete, understandable explanation of what they revised (or did not change) in response to reviews, preferably in a table.

Accept. If you decide to accept the manuscript, communicate this decision to the author and the relevant Executive Editor. If the manuscript is substantively acceptable but still needs some changes, use the "revise" option instead of "accept."

Reject (after review). In this case, there are issues beyond what might be fixed in a revision. As with any rejection, provide the author with clear explanations of your concerns.

After an author has submitted a revised manuscript

If "revise" was your original decision, determine whether the authors have adequately responded to reviewers' comments in their revised manuscript. If so, accept the manuscript. If not ...

- Send the manuscript back to the author for further revisions.
- If substantial revisions were made in response to reviewer comments, consider sending the revised manuscript back to the original reviewer(s) and ask them if they are satisfied with the revisions.