



EDITORIAL

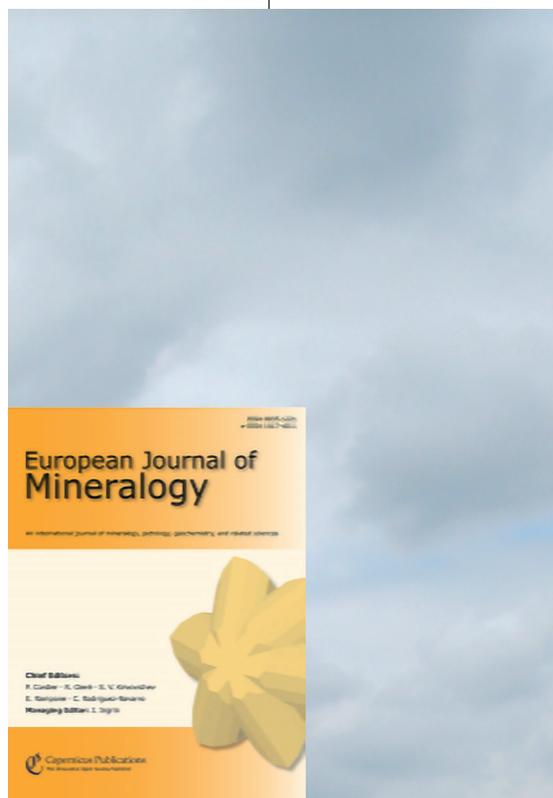
The Peer Review System is at Risk. We Need You to Defend It!

My previous editorial addressed the cost of publishing in open access and the different open access business models. In the present editorial, I will focus on the peer review system: its current challenges and risks.

Due to the large increase in the number of submitted manuscripts, it is more and more challenging to find dedicated reviewers for all these manuscripts. Imbalances between “supply and demand” creates conditions for aggressive competition and for new approaches to appear. There are discussions on the idea of paying reviewers for their work. Some journals have already started providing compensation to some reviewers in the form of free publications. These journals are competing with others that can only ever have a voluntary peer review process. Such a situation is extremely dangerous and could rapidly become uncontrollable. First, a contribution to reviewers removes the transparency of the financial model of scientific publications, which scientists are just now starting to attain through the open-access system. In addition, this practice will, ultimately and inevitably, result in an increase of publication costs ... because someone has to pay for this!

There are more fundamental reasons that justify isolating the review system from any commercial practice. Up to now, authors from each discipline review each other's work. In fact, I would even call it a “community review” rather than a “peer review”. If we begin to pay, or somehow financially reward, the reviewers, there is a risk that the community could progressively split into two: authors (with enough money and who publish a lot) and “professional reviewers” (who publish more rarely or even not at all). It is important to counteract this trend and to keep the review process in the hands of authors (i.e., those active in the scientific community), so maintaining a fully “community” review system.

Another risk that authors face when having to sign a reviewer's agreement or contract with a publisher in return for any form of reward is the loss of freedom attached to any contractual commitment. Publishers, who are usually the owners of the journals, may put high-demand on the rapidity and efficiency of the review process. To decline a request for a review, even if with a short deadline, may be difficult when an agreement has been signed and any future reward may be lost. Currently, some publishers are already setting less than two weeks as the deadline to reviewers. Contracted reviewers are expected to follow the publisher's policy or renounce the contract (and its inherent rewards).



As we know from many systems involving two groups with different financial models, those offering rewards or payment get advantages, including loyalty and a consequent stronger influence (in the market). Once a commercial review system is launched, there will be a race between publishers to attract and retain the best reviewers, which may create an inflation on the level of payments. In this scenario, it is unlikely that the most ethical or equitable journals – including journals of small, learned societies – will have a fair chance in this battle. The large commercial publishers, and publishers involved in mass-production, have all the chances to win the competition. It will be increasingly difficult for publishers that want to keep the free “community review” approach to find reviewers wanting to spend time to review articles for free. The two systems cannot survive together.

The *European Journal of Mineralogy*, along with most other journals owned by learned societies, provides no reward or payment to its editors or reviewers. We believe it is important to defend the free voluntary-based review system as the only one able to guarantee transparency, fairness, and quality in the evaluation.

But without the strong support of its community members, the learned societies alone will not be able to maintain this system for long.

It is a simple calculation. To function, the review system needs to ensure that there are at least two times more reviews than the number of submitted papers by any given (every) scientist. This means that authors must review at least as many papers as they publish, but preferably twice as many (to account for multi-author papers on one side and rejected papers on the other side). We can consider it a “scientific civic duty” for each author to contribute to the review system and its sustainability. Part of this duty is to accept review invitations independent of the manuscript's quality, assuming we feel scientifically competent. To meet the reviewing needs, it is also crucial to involve more junior scientists. Senior scientists have a major role to play by providing more reviewing opportunities to more junior colleagues (e.g., through nomination, support, etc.). As senior scientists, we have the responsibility of engaging the younger ones in understanding the importance of reviewing as a vital part of one's scientific community duty.

Only together and united can we aspire to keep the free “community review” alive. The publishing system does not exist without authors. We, the authors, have tremendous power! It is our responsibility *as authors* to decide which publishing system we want and then to act in agreement with our convictions!

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