

Rejecting without Review: The Whys, the Hows

With every issue of *ACS Nano*, I revel in the diversity and quality of publications that represent the excitement of nanoscience; this is exactly where I want to be scientifically, at the crossroads of seemingly all research disciplines. Each issue always contains surprises, intrigue, and eye-opening vistas that are connected only by a length scale and a desire to build upon the properties of materials that are neither molecules, nor bulk. Behind every table of contents, of course, is a submission and editorial process that must screen hundreds of manuscripts each month, assist in constructively improving them, and ultimately publish those that shine through the review process. Owing to the very simple ratios of the number of submissions, the number of papers we can publish in any given (monthly) issue, and availability of reviewers, a large fraction of papers submitted to *ACS Nano* must be rejected without review. We receive far more submissions than we could ever publish, and thus it is a necessity. To be on the receiving end of a reject-without-review letter, however, is far less pleasant than the simple explanation about ratios and numbers would suggest. It seems like nasty business when it comes down to the heart of the matter because the basic premise of peer review—a fair and careful analysis of one's work—appears to be bypassed. I would argue, however, that the integrity and constructiveness of the peer review system is kept intact by this process, because prescreening ensures that only those manuscripts that we believe have potential to be published in our pages reach the referees; overloading an already busy audience of reviewers would lead to less time spent carefully and properly analyzing the papers they receive. This would lead to greater overall dissatisfaction, longer review times, highly annoyed authors and reviewers, and ultimately, lower quality publications. No one wants that. Rejecting without review also has positive aspects, including lessening of the chances for a manuscript to dwell unproductively in an unsuccessful cycle of peer review. It also has a negative feature of which we are fully cognizant: Many interesting papers will inevitably be overlooked, but I will attempt to address this problem, at least in part.

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At *ACS Nano* each paper is carefully read by *at least* two pairs of eyes, which is a combination of associate editors and our editor-in-chief. While in no way can I summarize the thought process for each person involved, I will try to give a sense of what makes a successful submission:

(i) The most important aspect, the (nano)science: We are looking for that almost indescribable “wow” factor—a subject or theme that sheds light on and gives insight into a perplexing problem or fundamental issue, for example, a new way of looking at a material (such as a new set of properties or mechanistic understanding) that may be the result of an interdisciplinary collaboration drawing expertise from a variety of areas, or an intriguing new application based on nanomaterials. The nanomaterials and their properties must be the star of the show. If the nanoscience is not front and center, then the article may not be of sufficiently broad interest to *ACS Nano* readers. If we believe that your manuscript is appropriate in scope for another ACS journal, we will make the recommendation. I do not make such a recommendation frivolously.

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IMAGE COURTESY OF JEFFREY MURPHY

Associate Editor Jillian Buriak carefully screening *ACS Nano* submissions.

clearly, concisely, and well and be in the correct format. Take the extra day before you press the submit button to (re)read your manuscript calmly; have a trusted colleague who has not seen it go through your paper with a fresh eye. If the writing is unclear or rife with grammatical errors, then we cannot send it out for review under any circumstances, as this makes no friends with referees for you or us. If your manuscript looks sloppy, then everyone will assume that your science is equally sloppy. We wish for you to be as proud of your publication as we are when it appears in the pages of *ACS Nano*.

If a manuscript that you feel should be considered for review is rejected, then by all means, write to the editor or associate editor who is handling your paper. We are all scientists ourselves, and we want to hear from you. We do try to provide reasons as to why your manuscript was rejected at this early stage in the decision letter, but perhaps there is insufficient clarity to respond satisfactorily to your concerns. Another avenue to pursue is to have your manuscript discussed by all of the editors during our frequent teleconferences, as *all* appeals are.

We are grateful to be in the position we are in, working for a journal that is being recognized over and over as up and coming.^{1–3} One aspect of this is that as the submission rate of top papers has continued to increase, we have had to raise the thresholds for both publication and review. It is because of our authors, readers, and reviewers that this is so, and we thank you for all of your hard work. Choosing a publication venue for one's research is akin to deciding which restaurant to visit that evening. Is it a special occasion, or just a quick bite on-the-go, or are you going to your favorite haunt that you frequent with regularity? We hope that *ACS Nano* will be your special favorite for your top work.⁴

Jillian M. Buriak
Associate Editor

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