

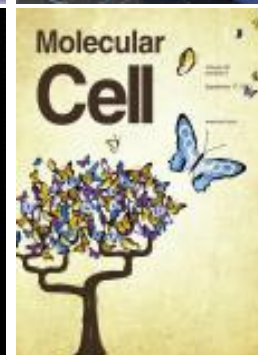
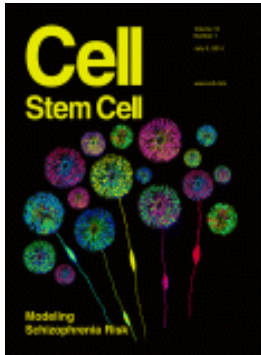
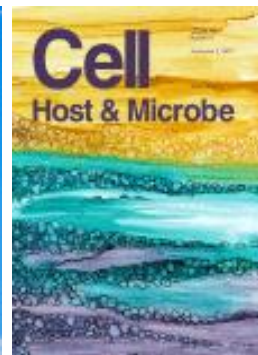
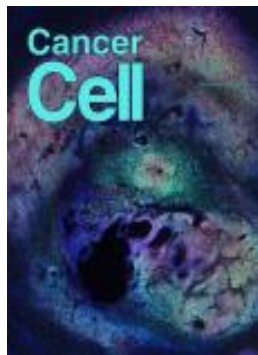
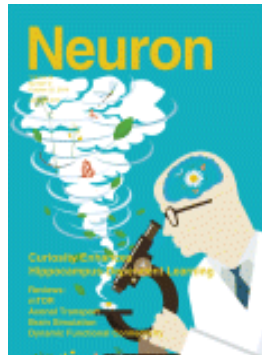
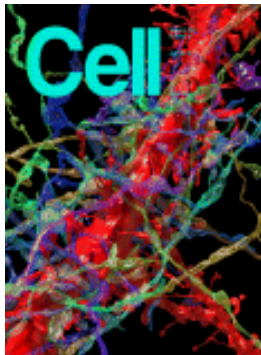
Publishing in Scientific Journals:

A “Behind-the-Scenes” look at the Editorial Process at CELL PRESS

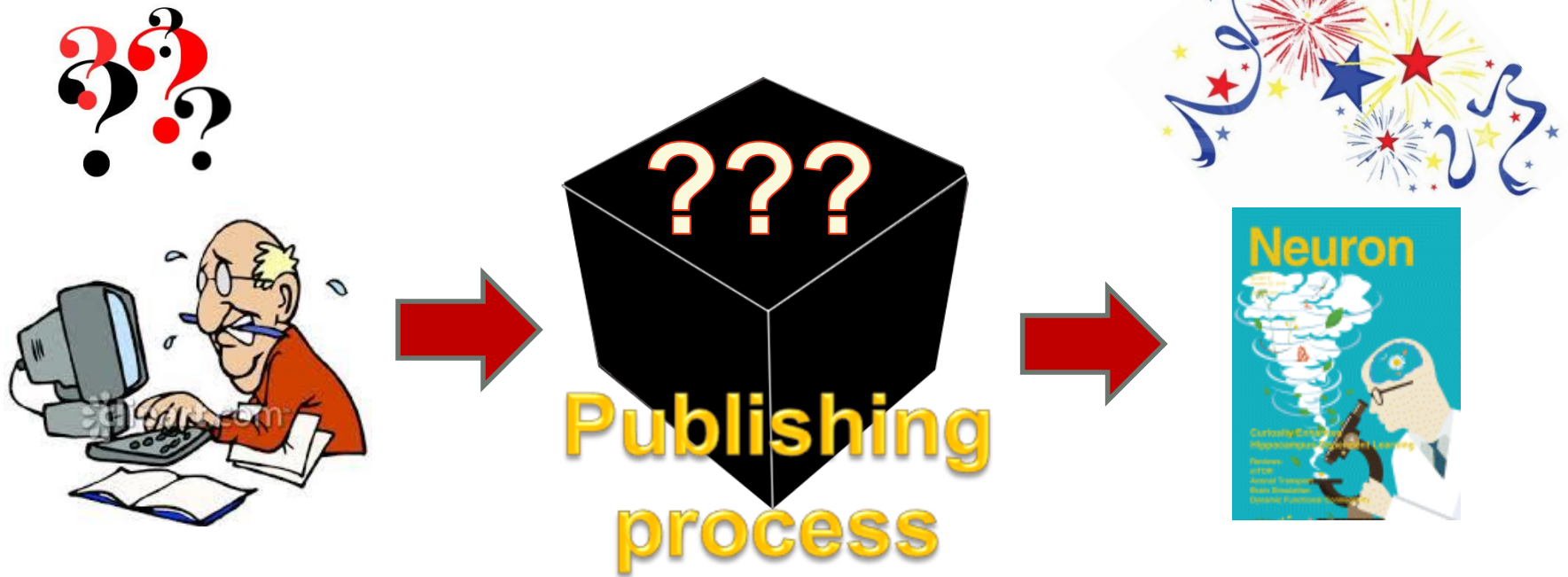
Katja Brose, PhD

Editor in Chief, Neuron
Editorial Director – Cell Press

UC-Berkeley
February 10, 2016



Opening the Black Box



Topics

- Some background on Cell Press and Neuron
- Choosing where to submit your paper
- Submission---presubmissions, cover letters
- Path of a typical submitted paper to NEURON
- Navigating decision letters---rebuttals and appeals
- Peer review from the other side: Contributing as a reviewer
- Other tips for navigating publishing process and beyond

- Other topics? Questions?

Cell Press: some background information

- **Cell Press is a division of Elsevier. We're based in Cambridge Massachusetts**
 - **15 research journals** --- newest member of the family is **CHEM** (launching 2016)
 - **15 Trends review journal titles**
 - **5 partner and society journals**
- All Cell Press titles are **professionally edited by staff of PhD editors**
- **Cell Press journals are supported by Editorial boards.**

Editorial board members provide **support and advice** to the journals, but members do not themselves handle manuscripts or make decisions on submissions.
- **The Cell Press titles are each editorially independent** but the journals collectively share common goals and policies and we have options for coordinated review and transfer between journals
- **Key features of the Cell Press publishing experience:**
 - **high level of editor-author engagement**
 - **high impact and reputation of the journals in their respective fields**
 - **reputation for rigor**
 - **high visibility and read by a broad audience**
 - **choices for format and access options**
 - **high production quality**
 - **commitment to customer service from submission to publication and beyond**

Some background on Neuron

- **Neuron was founded in 1988** and is published **twice per month**, on-line and print
- **Neuron is run by eight professional editors**
- Estimated world wide readership is >>30,000 (estimate based on download, print and institutional subscriptions), with monthly downloads >>500,000 (and growing).
- **Neuron's scope covers the broad spectrum of the neurosciences—from basic to disease, pre-clinical, neuroengineering.**
- We publish and Primary Research Articles and a variety of reviews content. Our aim for Neuron is to be the leading publication forum for the best in neuroscience research.
- We receive > **2000 papers per year** ---**180+** new submissions each month.
 - **We peer review about 50% of submissions.**
 - **Final acceptance rate is about 10-15%** (**although there is no quota).
 - **Most papers are revised, though not all require two rounds of review.**

Writing and Submitting a Paper:

The first step is picking a strong project

- **A strong research project is the most important step to a strong paper**
- **Carefully consider the biological problem and question you want to address.**
 - What are the important questions in the field?
 - Do you have an idea for how to creatively tackle the problem?
- **Read the current literature to help you choose a strong project and to put your project into context.** Avoid the lemming effect---jumping on a crowded topic and approach
- **Pay attention to experimental design:** Plan logical and well-designed experiments
- **Quality of the experiments is more important than quantity**
- **Critically assess your experiments and interpretations—become your own “most critical reviewer.”**
 - Get feedback. Talk to your colleagues, actively participate in journal clubs/lab meetings/department retreats.



A strong project and rigorous and sound science are keys to a great paper

Choosing where to submit: Selecting the journal that “fits” your paper

- **Choose a journal that matches the scope and intended audience for your article.**
- **Consider the significance and reach of the impact ---good to reach high, but be realistic.**
- **Are there logistical factors that you need to consider?** Timing constraints; competition?
- **Are there other factors about journal format and style that matter to you?**
 - Format*—length, # figs, presentation
 - Style of review process; Editorial style*--How involved/accessible are the editors?
 - Likely length of review/revision process?*
 - Publication model*--open access, “not for profit” vs “for profit,” Society journals.
- **If you are unsure, ask colleagues for advice, their own experiences.**
- **Consider sending a presubmission inquiry to the journal to assess their interest.**
- **Avoid Impact Factor/Citation Index obsession**



Be a consumer! You have choices about where to submit and your submission decision impacts the trajectory of your paper

The importance of presenting your work as a scientific story



- **Don't hide the caveats and missing links.** Try to make them a part of the ongoing narrative
- **A paper is more than a collection of scientific data and facts**
- A paper needs to be rigorous and complete, but **as important is the narrative and story**
- This is **different than a hyped “sales job” or a “pitch”**
- Use meetings and presentations to **craft your presentation and message**
- The **ideal paper brings the reviewers and the readers along**, so that they are completely convinced by your interpretations

Submitting your paper

- **Presubmissions: should you send one?**
- **Cover letters: do they matter?**
- **Exclusions and suggestions for reviewers.** Do the journals pay attention to these?
- **Writing the paper --- think about the journal you are submitting to. Format and style**
- **Importance of presenting a story. Consider your audience.** Be sure to accurately and fairly reference related literature and present your conclusions and interpretations critically, without “overselling”. **When writing always think about your message: why are these findings important for the field and audience reading the paper? What have we learned?**
- **Get feedback. Be your own “toughest reviewer”**
- **Accuracy matters---**pay careful attention to the writing, figure formatting and avoid careless errors: e.g. mistakes in figure formatting, grammar/spelling errors, missing citations. **Sloppy mistakes can impact reviewer confidence and there is less tolerance these days for mistakes, even “honest errors”**

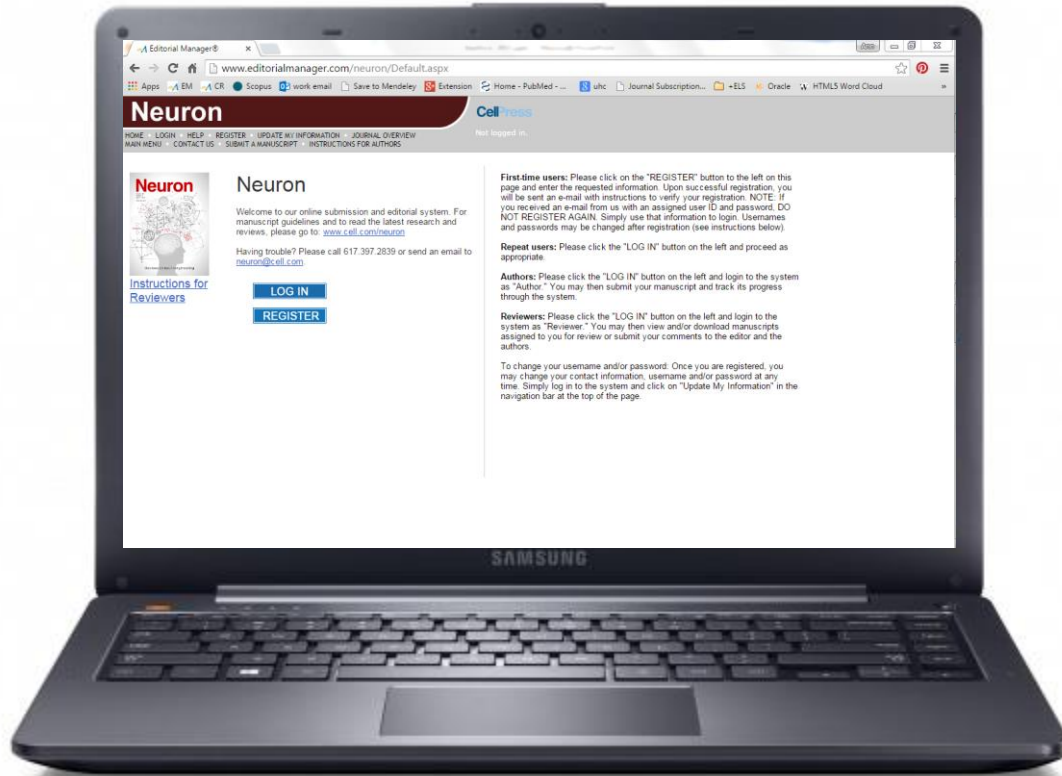
Before you submit:

Check, double-check and check again



- Avoid sloppy science and sloppy presentation
- **DON'T** submit a paper before it's ready. Peer review can and does improve papers but **don't submit preliminary work**--it wastes your time and the reviewers' time
- **Especially pay attention to figures, data presentation and statistics**---but also presentation basics, **spelling, page numbers.**
- **Less tolerance these days for mistakes, even "honest errors"**

When you are ready---Submit!



What happens when your paper arrives at the journal?

Step 1: Initial Editorial Evaluation

- After submission, the **paper is assigned to an editor**, who will handle the manuscript throughout the review process. Although there is one handling editor who will guide the paper through the review process, the decision is made in consultation with other editors and on behalf of journal.
- At most journals, there is an initial stage of “**editorial triage.**”
Percentages of manuscripts sent out for peer review varies from journal to journal.
At Neuron approximately 50% submissions are sent out for peer review.
- **Editors read the manuscript and evaluates the submission for initial review .**
The handling editor will also review the related literature, previous publications on the topic, etc and based on this evaluation will make an initial decision as to whether the manuscript is likely to be a strong candidate for review.
- If the manuscript is selected for formal review, **editor selects and invites appropriate reviewers--usually 3 reviewers.**
- **If the paper is not seen as a strong candidate for Neuron, the editor will send authors a decision letter, with reasons for rejection.**



IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT REJECTIONS: A rejection doesn't necessarily mean that the paper is a “bad” paper, just one that we did not view as a strong candidate for favorable review for Neuron. There can be many reasons for this.

What are editors looking for in their evaluation?

- **SCOPE and FIT FOR THE JOURNAL**

Does the study ask an interesting and important question?

Does it change the way we think about a field, a process or a particular issue in some way?

- **POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE and ADVANCE**

Does it provide a significant conceptual advance beyond what was already known?

Does the work provide insights into mechanism? Are the effects likely to be physiologically relevant?

- **EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN, TECHNICAL COMPETENCE and INTERPRETATION**

Are the experiments logically designed?

Are these the right experiments to test this question?

Are the interpretations reasonable and consistent with the data?

At this stage, editors are not usually evaluating technical aspects as a reviewer would but looking more generally at “big picture” issues.

- **CLARITY OF PRESENTATION**

Don't assume that readers (or reviewers) will all share your understanding of the relevant background information.

Don't forget to pay attention to the abstract and the cover letter

- **REVIEWER STANDARDS and FEEDBACK on related submissions**

How does this paper relate to reviewer and editorial standards in the field?

What are the issues that are likely to come up in review?



For initial editorial evaluation, Editors are mainly looking for **POTENTIAL**

Path of a typical submitted paper:

Step 2: External Peer Review

- **Editors select and invite reviewers, covering the technical and conceptual angles of the work.**
Usually 3 reviewers, but in rarer cases, > 3 may be invited if the paper requires additional expertise. In some cases, only two reviews may be used.
- **Reviewers are chosen by editors for a variety of reasons:** expertise (technical or conceptual) related to the subject matter, consistency with previous/current manuscripts on similar topics, past history with the reviewer. **Authors can make reviewer suggestions and also request exclusions**
- **Editors screen for potential biases or conflicts of interest** to insure that reviewers selected are able to provide a fair and balanced review.
- **Editors work with the reviewers to insure that reviewers provide constructive and timely reviews.** “Chasing” reviewers to keep things on time. For new reviewers, this may mean a discussion about journal standards and what the expectations for the review are. We actively monitor review quality, provide feedback to reviewers. Reviewers can see one another’s comments (after submitting their review).
- **After receiving the reviews, editors may return to reviewers or other experts in the field for additional feedback, clarification, discussion.** In some cases, authors may be engaged at this stage to offer a preliminary response to the reviews.

Path of a typical submitted paper:

Step 3: The Decision and Beyond

- **After the reviewers have submitted their evaluations, the editor and editorial team will evaluate the reviews and make a decision on the manuscript.**
- **Many decisions are made based on “split reviews” but we’re not necessarily looking for reviewer consensus.**
- **Decision is not a simple summation of reviews.** Editor integrates all aspects of paper---reviewer comments; editor’s own assessment and editorial team feedback; nature of anticipated revisions.
- **Editors communicate the decision in a decision letter.**
Three “flavors” of decision: **ACCEPT, INVITATION TO REVISE, or REJECT**, but **there are many gradations of decision.**

For papers invited to be revised, editor will outline what would be needed for revisions

For Neuron, we limit papers to two rounds of review so in the decision to invite a revision we are looking for papers that can be revised with a contained and manageable set of revisions.



At Cell Press, we encourage a dialogue between authors and editors. BUT “dialogue” is not the same as “arguments”!

After receiving the reviews and decision letter, authors may contact Editors to discuss the reviews/decision, request clarifications, or to request an opportunity to resubmit.

Navigating decision letters. Next steps

- **Read the decision letter and reviews carefully**
What are the issues raised and the reason for the decision? Do they relate to specific technical points? Concerns about advance or significance? Differences in opinion or fundamental misunderstandings?
- **Focus on the scientific issues raised and aim for a realistic and objective view of the reviews**
If the reviews or editorial evaluation cite legitimate limitations (technical or conceptual) or lack of sufficient general interest, it is usually in your best interest to submit the manuscript to another journal.
- **Are there issues in the reviews that need clarification? Do you think you can address the reviews and want to resubmit.?** It is OK to contact the editor to discuss
- **When and how to appeal a negative decision. And when to move on.**
If you appeal, usually the editor will want to see a “point by point” response, outline of what revisions you can add and clarification around the issues you can’t address.
Carefully weigh the risks/benefits before deciding to appeal.
- **Options for transferring a paper**
At Cell Press, we offer the option for transferring paper and reviews to another Cell Press title.
Can save significant time and avoid re-review, but appropriate for only some circumstances



Step back from the decision letter and reviews and make an objective and realistic decision about your next steps.

Your paper has been accepted!

Congratulations!

- **Congratulate yourselves and celebrate the achievement!**
- **Acceptance is only the first step in the publication process for us**
- **Production staff work with you post acceptance.** Our goal is to provide highest-quality copyediting, production and figure reproduction and maximum visibility for the work
- **We aim to publish the paper rapidly, within 4-6 weeks,** online first and then in print.
- **We commission Previews to provide context for your work.**
- **We actively promote the paper** via our e-Alerts, on our website and via social media
- **Our Press Department will work with you and your institute's press office to target the paper to the media**
- **We also welcome your feedback on the review process and feedback from readers on the papers we publish**

Peer review from the other side---

Contributing as a reviewer

- **You're a busy person, why volunteer your time for yet another time consuming task like reviewing papers?** Peer review is a community service---without good, fair reviewers being willing to volunteer their time, peer review would not function. But aside from altruism, especially for more junior investigators, reviewing papers is an important skill to learn and can be a benefit to your career.
- **Acting as a reviewer is a great way to learn about the peer review process and how to navigate it. It is also a good way to get to know a journal and the journal editors.**
- **Confidentiality.** All documents related to peer review (from abstract to manuscript and reviews) are confidential documents. Reviewers should not engage directly with authors.
- **Be mindful of ethical guidelines for reviewers, especially around conflicts of interest.** If you are asked to review and have a COI, decline or discuss with editors. COIs include a personal or professional relationship with an author; financial COIs; working on similar or closely overlapping topics; or for any reason not being able to give an unbiased review. A good rule of thumb: “would **you** be comfortable having this author review your own paper.”
- **Be a rigorous and critical reviewer, but also consider the perspective of the author.** Are your comments clearly presented or are they ambiguous? Are your recommendations appropriately calibrated for the journal? Critical and fair? As a rule of thumb, “would **you** think your review is fair?”
Work with the journal editors. If you are going to be late or issues come up, keep the journal editors informed. Be willing to re-review if necessary and be available if further advice is needed.

Final tips --- publishing and beyond

- **Get feedback on your work from colleagues both from your field and outside your field. Be your own most critical reviewer.** Attend meetings, give talks, participate in journal clubs.
- **Managing collaborations.** Know your collaborators. Consider parameters for collaboration, authorship, who is responsible for revisions, etc. long before you submit the paper.
- **Be aware of and abide by ethical guidelines and best practices.**
 - PI's: mentor your students and postdocs in research ethics.
 - Students and Postdocs: educate yourself in your ethical responsibilities.
- **Importance of record keeping, laboratory best practices and lab culture. Issues around data reproducibility.**
 - PI's: Your role is as leader of the group---creating a strong and ethical lab culture and introducing best practices and a as soon as you set up your lab.
 - Data reproducibility and rigor are key.
- **Be a consumer about where to submit your work. Matching your manuscript to the right journal. Balancing your portfolio of publications.**
- **Consider your interactions with the journal as part of a (hopefully) long term engagement.**
 - Act responsibly, as a reviewer and an author. "Do unto others..." is a good motto.
- **Similar advice applies for other professional relationships---ie your program officer, administrative staff, people in your lab, peers, etc. Your reputation matters and is your greatest asset**

Be a smart consumer --- you have many choices about where you publish



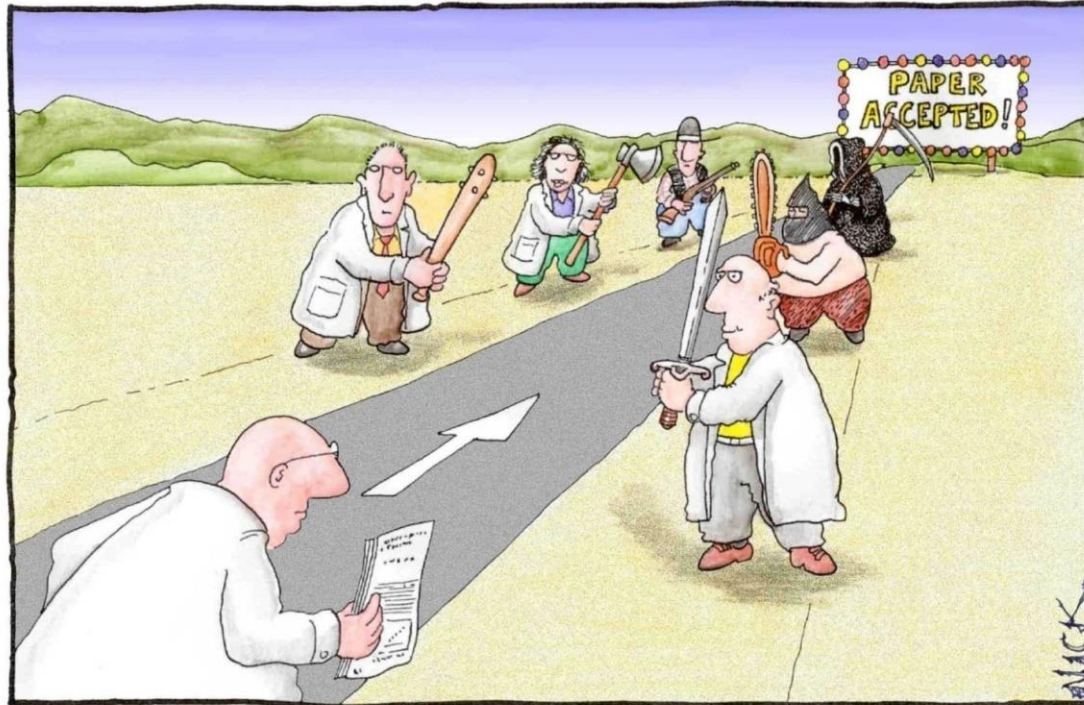
- **As an author you have choices on where to submit**
- **Different journals have different editorial styles, different peer review models, advantages and disadvantages**
- **Target your submission to the appropriate journal.**
- **Consider which journal best fits your paper and needs**

Understanding the process vs gaming the system



- Educate yourself on how the peer review process works
- You can learn to better navigate peer review
- **BUT** avoid treating the peer review process as a system to be gamed
- Be strategic but being too tactical can also backfire

Thank You Questions?



Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as 'quite an improvement.'

Please feel free to email

kbrose@cell.com

www.cell.com/neuron