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Best Practices for Peer Review of Scholarly Books

SECOND EDITION

Contents

AUPresses Foreword	1
Why Peer Review Is Essential	2
SECTION 1.	
The AE's Choices about Why, When, and How to Conduct Peer Review	3
SECTION 2.	
Selecting Peer Reviewers	7
SECTION 3.	
Working with Peer Reviewers	9
SECTION 4.	
Sharing Peer Reviews with Authors	12
SECTION 5.	
Peer Reviews as Documents of Record	14
Acknowledgements	16



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AUPresses Foreword

Demonstration of the highest standards of editorial rigor and peer review in their publication programs is fundamental to membership in AUPresses and is the very substance of our members' authority to validate, curate, and disseminate long-form scholarship.

The Association first launched this handbook, *Best Practices for Peer Review of Scholarly Books*, in 2016 after an extended process of development, community consultation, and leadership approval. Since then, practice has evolved in a number of ways—especially with respect to the increased centering of equity, justice, inclusion, and belonging in every aspect of the work our community undertakes.

A project of the AUPresses Acquisitions Editorial Committee, this deeply considered new edition of the *Best Practices* handbook is offered as a resource for member publishers, acquisitions editors, faculty editorial boards, scholarly authors and researchers, and new scholarly publishing programs.

Why Peer Review Is Essential

Peer review is essential to the university press mission of advancing and disseminating scholarship. It is the process through which university press editors commission formal evaluations from experts (“peers”) on the contribution to scholarship, teaching, and public debate of a work being considered for publication. These formal evaluations are considered by press staff and shared and discussed with authors as a crucial prepublication step in an editor’s evaluation of the merits of proposed projects. This process ideally provides balanced feedback that is both stringent and fair, enables an author to strengthen a work in progress, and adds value and meaning to the work that is ultimately published. By facilitating the review process, university press editors enlist the expertise of a wide community to create productive engagement between reviewers and the authors whose work they are asked to evaluate. Given the essential role that university presses play in shaping scholarly conversations and knowledge production, it is vital for acquisitions editors (AEs) to prioritize equity, justice, and inclusion in the peer review process.

As a principal university press advocate, the Association of University Presses (AUPresses) actively supports the essential role that peer review plays in developing and validating high-quality scholarly publications. This is reflected in the Association’s membership eligibility requirements, which require member presses to detail their peer review processes.

The purpose of this document, written by the AUPresses Acquisitions Editorial Committee, is to articulate a set of suggested best practices that constitute a rigorous and equitable process of peer review. The Committee acknowledges, however, that the peer review process is complex, highly individual, and must be responsive to the norms of the appropriate fields and the nuances of each project. Thus, while the steps discussed below are recognized as generally acceptable best practices, this document is not intended to prescribe the conduct of an acceptable peer review in every case. Moreover, although strong peer reviews are necessary for moving forward with a project, they are only one among a broad range of factors that together lead to a publishing decision.

SECTION 1.

The AE's Choices about Why, When, and How to Conduct Peer Review

When does the peer review process begin?

The initiation of peer review depends in part on the stage at which a project reaches the press. If a project is first submitted to or invited by the acquisitions editor at the proposal stage, peer review offers the AE a chance to develop a project, stave off competition from other presses, and shape the project to best fit the press's editorial program. If a project is placed under contract at the proposal stage, it is good practice to have the full manuscript draft peer reviewed when it is complete. Works initially submitted as complete manuscripts receive one or more rounds of review. At times a book is subject to several rounds of review and revision, depending on the content of the reviews and what manuscript work the editor considers necessary in order to present the project for faculty board approval.

Regardless of the stage and circumstances under which peer review is successfully completed and a contract for a book signed, university press contracts usually specify that publication is contingent upon both peer reviews of the complete manuscript and the project's acceptance by the press's faculty, editorial, or governance board (hereafter we will use the terms *faculty board* and *faculty editorial board* interchangeably). AEs at most presses will not present a work to the faculty board for final approval unless it is in a penultimate or final draft.

The AE should keep an author informed before peer review begins and as the process progresses. This will include ensuring that the author is aware of any materials being sent out for review, what any given stage of the process entails, and what the stage of peer review may indicate about the press's commitment to the project.

What are some exceptions to the general practice of seeking peer review before offering a contract? Is peer review ever waived?

Each press has its own criteria for deciding which types of books can be put under contract prior to peer review. Sometimes a decision to offer a contract is time sensitive: situations involving an agent or competition with other presses may not allow sufficient time for complete review of a proposal or manuscript. But even under high-pressure or competitive conditions, the AE will often draw on their advisory network for a quick or informal vetting of the project and the author's qualifications. Projects placed under contract prior to peer review normally will later be presented to the faculty board, and at that point, peer reviews of the full manuscript will be required.

AEs may also proceed without peer review when working with new editions of previously published works, copublications, and occasionally works intended for general readers. Even in these cases, the AE may wish to solicit reviews to assist with revising such manuscripts or positioning them in the marketplace. Projects should be excused from peer review rarely and only for carefully considered reasons.

Do different types of books require different types of peer reviews?

Scholarly monographs, trade nonfiction, textbooks, reference works, professional volumes, art and architecture books, fiction, and poetry are distinct genres with unique readerships. Because one goal of peer review

is to evaluate a manuscript's appeal to its intended audience, the review process should be aligned with the specific expectations for these different types of books. For instance, a textbook for classroom use would not be expected to focus primarily on cutting-edge research in the same way that a monograph would. Peer reviewers of a textbook might be asked about the accessibility of the writing and about classroom potential in addition to the currency of the content. Reviewers of a trade project might focus on the project's contribution to a broader public conversation or on the author's narrative skill, as opposed to its engagement with contemporary scholarly discourse. In general, the AE should formulate questions for the peer reviewer that clarify the work's intentions and guide the reviewer in assessing its strengths and weaknesses in light of its intended readership. (See *Guidelines for reviewers*, see page 9).

The decision to publish a translation may be made on the basis of peer reviews of the source text, published reviews of the original work, or some other supporting materials. The translated text should be peer reviewed to ensure the quality of the translation. The review process for translations should be aligned with the expectations for a specific book. A reviewer of a translated poetry book, for example, might be asked to focus on the literary quality of the poems in translation while a reviewer of a translation of a scholarly text might be asked to focus on the accuracy of the translation and its relation to contemporary scholarly discourse. AEs should select reviewers who have expertise in the source language.

Do different disciplines have different types of peer reviews?

Different disciplines work with distinct materials and methods, and so it is inevitable that they will bring diverse criteria and conventions to the process of evaluating books. A review of an edited volume in economics, for example, might address a decidedly different set of questions than would a report on a monograph in literary criticism. AEs are typically attuned to such variation, as are faculty board members, who take it into account in their assessment of a work.

Do multimodal projects such as born-digital publications, platforms, apps, and enhanced ebooks require a different type of review than do printed books and standard ebooks?

Digital projects and publications should be peer reviewed. The timing and choice of reviewers will vary greatly, however, depending on the scope of the project. Large or multimedia projects may require an editorial board that guides development from the proposal stage onward. In addition to scholars in the field, technical experts may need to be enlisted to make sure that user interfaces comply with state-of-the-art technology and best digital practices.

The peer review process for digital projects may also follow a trajectory different from the one for peer review of a traditional monograph. Peer review questions may need to be customized to ask readers about the usability of the project in addition to its scholarly merit and structure. If the project is a serial, or is multimedia based, editors will likely find it useful to have sections or particular multimedia elements peer reviewed during the creation process rather than waiting for the final product. Given the costs associated with developer time, an editor would not want to see a project progress too far if certain elements will not be favorably reviewed by peers. Platforms for digital publication may allow for scholarly objects to be revised, updated, or transformed over time in sometimes invisible ways, which becomes a challenge for peer reviewing. It is important to track versions across the development and peer review process (and potentially beyond that, past publication, if changes will continue to be made).

AEs may also consult scholars in the digital humanities who have been working on best practices for evaluating and preserving digital scholarship. The "Annotated Bibliography on Evaluating Digital Scholarship for Tenure & Promotion," compiled by Cheryl E. Ball, Carrie A. Lamanna, Craig Saper, and Michael Day, offers many potentially

useful resources for AEs (<https://praxis.technorhetic.net/tiki-index.php?page=Bibliography+on+Evaluating+Digital+Scholarship>).

Confidentiality and anonymity in the peer review process

University presses typically promise anonymity to their peer reviewers with the intention of assuring a candid discussion of a project's strengths and weaknesses. In contrast to the review of journal articles, the review of book manuscripts is generally not fully anonymous, given the challenges of masking an author's identity in full-length manuscripts. Book manuscript peer reviewers also assess the contribution of an author's work in their field, the place of the current manuscript in an author's oeuvre, and the reception of previous publications as part of the overall project assessment.

In some cases, a peer reviewer may wish to reveal their identity to the author whose work is being reviewed. It is good practice in these cases for the AE to first show an anonymous version of the peer review to the author, so that the author's first response is not influenced by the reviewer's identity. Once the author has had a chance to consider the report, the AE may then choose to reveal the reviewer's identity but is not obliged to do so. It can be fruitful for an author and reviewer to be in contact, either directly or via the AE, for additional consultation on revisions.

To assure confidentiality, AEs should remove any identifying metadata and may need to make minor edits to a peer reviewer's text. This could involve rephrasing references to a reviewer's own work or deleting mention of areas of expertise or a specific institution with which the reviewer is associated. Reviewers are not always aware that they are divulging their identity, and it is the AE's responsibility to read reviews carefully with confidentiality in mind. However, AEs should take great care to ensure that their edits do not threaten the integrity of the reviewer's comments. When in doubt, it is best to send a marked-up document to the reviewer for approval.

Even though anonymity is maintained throughout the review process, presses will often approach reviewers at a later stage to request permission to use quotations from the reviews in promotional copy or to include mention of a reviewer in a book's acknowledgments. At many presses, the AEs make these requests as the staff member in regular contact with the reviewer.

Should all peer review be anonymous?

As noted above, maintaining reviewers' anonymity is often beneficial, since it allows reviewers the opportunity to offer candid feedback to authors. However, there are various ways to approach the peer review process, each of which offers its own benefits. Most scholarly presses use a partly closed or partly anonymous process, where the reviewer is informed of the author's identity, but the author does not know the identity of the reviewer(s). In journals publishing, editors frequently employ a fully closed or fully anonymous process, where neither the reviewer nor the author knows the other's identity. These have commonly been referred to as "single-blind" and "double-blind" review. However, we recommend that AEs discontinue the use of these terms, as they are ableist.

Some presses have started employing other, more open forms of peer review that draw upon a larger community of reviewers and readers to offer feedback on a project. Open peer review may rely upon a platform such as CommentPress or Hypothesis to organize and curate feedback from reviewers. On these platforms, the AE can stipulate the terms by which reviewers may contribute their comments (e.g., with names or anonymously). The AE may also decide to conduct a more traditional peer review alongside this more open format. There are various forms of open review, including community review (where the work is made avail-

able to an invited set of scholars); crowd review (where the work is made visible and accessible to anyone who would like to offer feedback); managed crowd review (a crowd review moderated by a community of scholars); published review (where a traditional partly anonymous peer review is made visible to others); and consultative or peer-to-peer review (where author and reviewers interact and collaborate in their discussion of the work).

An AE's decision to use an alternative approach to peer review should be made in consultation with press leadership and the author to ensure that everyone agrees on the aims and methods of the process.

How many reports should be solicited and in what order?

Generally, AEs seek two simultaneous reviews of manuscripts they wish to pursue. However, at times this may be insufficient to support the diversity of perspectives that a rigorous evaluation and development process requires. AEs may want to solicit additional readings to represent the full range of expertise in the project itself, to gauge the potential readership across different fields, and to invite a broader range of feedback. Textbooks, reference works, and translations may also benefit from more than two reviewers for similar reasons.

But when the AE is uncertain about a project or about press acceptance of a project contingent upon the response from a particular readership, they may start with one review and follow it with a second only if the first is favorable. The evaluation of the first reviewer can also assist the author with plans for revision before the AE commissions a second review. This process adds time to the publication schedule but conserves AE and press resources.

An additional review may also be beneficial in cases in which the peer reviewers provide widely divergent assessments of a manuscript. AEs should be aware of their responsibility to amplify the work of historically underrepresented scholars as well as to help a discipline become more diverse and should let those considerations inform their decisions about seeking out additional readers or assessing the value of any one report. It is important for an AE to be able to advocate for a worthy project, even if it receives an equivocal or even negative review: pathbreaking scholarship is often controversial, and the AE has a vital responsibility to articulate how each project fits the mission and aims of their list.

How many times does a manuscript need to be reviewed?

Completed manuscripts may undergo multiple rounds of review. On occasion, a peer-reviewed full manuscript is put under contract with the stipulation that the work will be reviewed again after extensive revision—either by one or both of the original reviewers or by a third independent reviewer, depending on the AE's or the faculty board's preference and reviewer availability. The number of rounds of review will depend on the needs of the project and the established practices set by the press and its faculty board.

SECTION 2.

Selecting Peer Reviewers

Who is qualified to write peer reviews?

With the goal of soliciting feedback to help craft excellent books, AEs should choose reviewers for their expertise in the subject matter of each individual publishing project. Peer reviewers are most often established scholars with relevant expertise. Scholars who have published at least one relevant book (or have a book forthcoming) are preferred, although an extensive record of journal publications on relevant topics is acceptable. Some presses prefer tenured faculty; however, with an increasing number of scholars in nontenured or contingent positions, or in other types of work entirely, this requirement may no longer be practical or desirable. It is also important to note that in some disciplines or areas of study, the leading thinkers are often still early career faculty. When reviewing a project intended for course adoption, extensive teaching experience at the level of the book's intended audience may be more pertinent than publication record or tenure. Journalists, civil servants and elected officials, professional writers, activists, and artists and other respected authorities outside the academy with relevant experience can also be used as peer reviewers in certain circumstances. The AE should be ready to speak to a reader's expertise as needed to the faculty board, author, or press colleagues.

AEs should prioritize soliciting reviews from scholars representing diverse perspectives and positions. Employing a diverse set of reviewers goes hand in hand with creating a more equitable and inclusive publishing environment for authors by addressing scholarly publishing's historic exclusion of scholars from marginalized backgrounds, as well as actively supporting work that challenges dominant perspectives and disciplinary paradigms. However, AEs should be aware that underrepresented groups within the academy are often overtaxed by service commitments, and should be prepared to ask more people, give more time for conducting reviews, and generally accommodate the needs of readers.

The peer review process is a collective effort that draws on the expertise of reviewers, AEs, series editors, faculty boards, and the press as a whole. Although the unique expertise of underrepresented scholars can be important to this process, it is not a substitute for the AE's own judgment and responsibility for identifying potential biases, gaps in citations, or otherwise problematic material. AEs may want to consult resources on bias in peer review, such as "Anti-racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors" (<https://tinyurl.com/reviewheuristic>).

The peer review process also plays a critical role in building an AE's advisory and author network. As such, AEs may also consider soliciting feedback from readers who might help promote the book later or adopt it for courses or who might themselves be potential press authors.

Where do AEs find appropriate peer reviewers? Are suggestions from authors acceptable?

A vital part of the AE's role is to develop a robust network of advisors. (See *Who is qualified to write peer reviews?* above) The AE's reviewer selection process may be informed by, but should be independent of, suggestions from the author. An author's suggestions may alert AEs to other experts in the field or signal an author's conception of their ideal reader. If authors ask that some scholars not be approached to review the manuscript because of intellectual differences or potential biases (e.g., those based on positionality, identity, or the material being reviewed), the AE may wish to abide by the request but is not obligated to do so. The

author's list of potential reviewers or veto of others can reveal conceptual or disciplinary boundaries of the author's work, highlight conflicts of interest the AE is not aware of, or flag reviewer directions that might be problematic. (See *What should an AE do about a problematic or biased report?* see page 10).

Similarly, suggestions from trusted advisors, such as other press authors in the field, faculty board members, and series editors, can be helpful. Still, a degree of independence and evaluation by the AE is crucial. Other authors can have their own priorities and biases and although these are rarely consciously manipulative, they can have a disproportionate influence on the verdict emerging through peer review.

AEs can access a list of discipline-specific and community-created resources for finding scholars on the *UP Commons* site (<https://acquisitions.up.hcommons.org/peer-review/finding-peer-reviewers/>).

If a project is intended for a series, can or should the series editor (or one of the series editors) act as a peer reviewer?

AEs should be attentive to the possible tension between the role of series editors as champions of work cultivated for their series and their role as potential peer reviewers. The simplest way to avoid this tension is to commission at least two peer reviewers and to ask the series editor to offer an assessment of the reviews along with summary comments on a project's potential fit with the series. A series editor's role ideally is to commission, vet, and possibly help develop projects. The series editor often comments on a project via a letter of endorsement, which will have a different status in the faculty board's approval process than a full, independent peer review will have. If an AE asks a series editor to provide an endorsement it may be the deciding factor when outside reviewers do not agree on a project's merits.

There may be times when it is appropriate for an AE to ask a series editor or a member of a series editorial board to provide a peer review. Different presses may have different policies about using series editors or members of a series editorial board as peer reviewers. The AE should be careful to avoid conflict of interest when asking series editors to serve as reviewers and such a review ought to be balanced by at least one external reader.

What constitutes a conflict of interest that would prevent someone from acting as a peer reviewer?

AEs should steer clear of relatives, existing or previous connections by marriage or serious relationship, and an author's dissertation advisor. Best practice also dictates avoiding reports from colleagues at the same institution, members of the author's dissertation committee, members of the author's graduate student cohort, and close friends or collaborators. There are myriad gray areas that may require further discussion; the enlistment of former or preexisting collaborators, such as volume coeditors or paper coauthors, for example, should be weighed carefully. Best practice is to err on the side of avoiding conflict or the perception of conflict. In certain circumstances exceptions may be made in consultation with the AE's supervisor.

SECTION 3.

Working with Peer Reviewers

Guidelines for reviewers

Presses often provide reviewers with a list of questions to guide their evaluation of a project and to highlight the issues most pertinent to a press's publication decision. This list should prompt reviewers to focus on key areas such as the quality of argument, evidence, and writing in the context of subject-specific, audience-specific, and manuscript-specific issues, as well as to address issues of equity and marginalization, whether those are around methodology, citational diversity, or perspectives. Just as different reader criteria are brought to different projects, so too is it useful to have a range of reviewer questions tailored to particular kinds of projects, such as scholarly monographs, edited volumes, course books, trade nonfiction, fiction, or poetry. (See *Do different types of books require different types of peer reviews?* above). In addition to the standard list of questions, AEs may add questions meant to call reviewers' attention to specific areas of concern (e.g., length, contribution to a particular scholarly debate). The list may end by asking reviewers to recommend whether a project should be (1) rejected, (2) revised and resubmitted, or (3) accepted for publication (either with or without additional revisions). Though important, such opinions should not outweigh the AE's own judgment of the manuscript's potential and their assessment of the reviews. It is not uncommon for two reviews to offer similar feedback and yet make different recommendations about publication.

AEs should explain to reviewers, either in the initial query or when sending the materials provided for the review, that their reports will be confidential and their identities concealed from the author, unless the reviewer explicitly requests to have their identity revealed to the author. The query or the review guidelines should specify who will see the reports (such as AEs and their assistants, the author, faculty board members) and who will know the reviewers' identities (AEs and their assistants, other press staff, faculty board members). (See *Confidentiality and anonymity in the peer review process*, see page 5; also see *Besides the AE, author, and press staff, who is permitted to see anonymous peer reviews?* see page 14).

AEs can access a library of sample peer review questions on the *UP Commons* site (<https://acquisitions.up.hcommons.org/peer-review/peer-reviewer-guidelines/>).

How should readers be remunerated for reports?

Presses generally offer readers an honorarium in return for their evaluations of projects. Conventionally the compensation is considered an honorarium, not a fee, to highlight the fact that peer review is a form of service that academics and other professionals offer to their communities. The term also points to the fact that a press is not buying an expert opinion in the way that, say, a defense attorney may pay an expert to offer a particular reading of evidence. A peer reviewer is expected to provide an unbiased, candid, well-supported evaluation of a project's merits.

An honorarium generally takes one of two forms. A reviewer may be offered a cash payment or a selection of books from a press's catalog up to a certain dollar amount (usually larger than the amount of the cash payment, as the unit cost of books is significantly lower for publishers than for retail buyers). Some presses offer a combination of cash and books. AEs should tell a potential reader what the honorarium is in their initial queries, before the review begins. If certain categories of books are ineligible for selection, such as distributed books from other publishers, this should be noted on the honorarium form.

Honorarium amounts vary widely by presses, and AEs should be familiar with their own press's conventions. The amounts should reflect the scope of the work the reviewer is being asked to do; honoraria are typically larger for full manuscripts than for proposals. In addition, asking a peer reviewer to evaluate a particularly long manuscript or to provide a report in an unusually short amount of time often warrants increasing the amount of an honorarium. Honoraria are paid on receipt of reports. Also, if the press ultimately publishes the work in question, the reviewer typically receives a gratis copy.

What is a reasonable amount of time to allow a peer reviewer to read and report on a project?

While it is generally in both an author's and a press's interests to receive reports as quickly as possible, AEs should be aware that properly reviewing a manuscript is both time and labor intensive. It is customary to give peer reviewers at least six to eight weeks to review a full manuscript and three to four weeks to review a proposal, although in competitive situations an AE may request a faster turnaround. It may be necessary to allow more time for particularly long or complex projects. AEs and reviewers should agree on a deadline before the process starts, and it is generally recommended that an AE or assistant check in with reviewers as the deadline approaches. AEs or their assistants should track due dates for reviews in some kind of database—an essential tool, given the volume of projects an AE may have out for review at any given time.

What should an AE do when a peer reviewer fails to produce a report within an acceptable period of time? Can compensation be withheld in such cases?

Given the time it can take to secure appropriate readers for a project, AEs should accommodate modest delays. Reasonable requests for additional time are the norm, and AEs should be respectful of the reviewer's efforts and commitment to a project. That should be balanced with timeliness and the author's needs. AEs should exercise caution in granting longer extensions. If a second deadline passes without a review, the AE should consider securing an additional or replacement reader rather than risk longer delays for the author. A new reader should also be found if a reader does not respond to follow-up queries. In such cases, the AE should notify the original reader that the press no longer expects a report and will not compensate them. There is always the possibility, however, that a late review will surface, and an AE will need to decide whether to provide the normal honorarium and whether to take the review into consideration.

In light of the enduring challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, AEs should be generous in tone in recognizing the difficulties for reviewers in meeting deadlines, even if the AEs are not always able to be generous with deadline extensions.

As challenging as the lack of review can be, AEs also face situations in which a review is unsatisfactory: either it fails to address the questions posed, it does so without sufficient detail, or its assessment is unclear. AEs should first try to encourage the reviewer to flesh out the report, but if a full review does not materialize, the honorarium may be prorated. Similarly, if a reviewer fails to submit a review, the press is not obliged to pay the honorarium. If, however, the press decides it no longer needs a commissioned report (for example, if a project is lost to another press in competition), the reviewer should still be offered the honorarium, even if the report has not yet arrived.

What should an AE do about a problematic or biased report? Can a commissioned report be disregarded?

Peer review is meant to provide an honest and rigorous assessment of the merits of a project. The ideal report offers constructive advice for helping a project realize its fullest potential. It is the AE's responsibility, in turn, to assess the reviews to ensure that reviewers have met expectations. The decision to address a flawed review directly with the reviewer can be a vexed one for AEs, who should discuss such reports with their supervisors before proceeding.

Upon receipt of an opaque or inadequate review—for example, a review that does not engage with the content of the work or offers insufficient support for a reviewer’s criticism—the AE should request amplification or clarification for the sake of the author and the press. Specificity is important in such situations. The ultimate goal is to secure a suitable review, and so giving the reviewer an opportunity to revisit the report is in most cases worthwhile.

If the report is hostile to the author’s disciplinary or methodological approach, the AE should consider it in the context of the scholarly discipline in question. If the field is deeply divided and the author and reviewer are on opposing sides of that divide, then the review may help the author anticipate and address criticisms. Ideally, the AE will be aware of such disciplinary politics and will take them into consideration in selecting peer reviewers.

If the reviewer expresses personal bias against the author or the AE detects some other form of bias, the AE needs to decide how and whether to use the review. The review may include feedback that would be helpful to the author, and the AE may choose to edit or frame the report in a way that highlights the most useful elements of the report. However, if the review does not adequately assess the manuscript itself, the AE could choose to disregard it.

For the sake of expediency, it is often best to extend the usual courtesy to a reviewer and process their honorarium, even if the reviewer’s report is disregarded. If the AE chooses not to share the report with the author, the report may still be a part of the official review process. For example, presses differ in whether they include such reports in packets for the faculty board. If such a report is included, the AE’s statement should take care to contextualize the review and its criticisms and explain whether it has been shared with the author.

If a report is delayed, what should the AE say to the author? Should the author be told that the reviewer is at fault, or is it best to simply cite unavoidable delays?

In general, transparency in the author-editor relationship is paramount, and the AE should tell the author about any delays in the review process promptly. However, AEs need not always reveal the source of the delay. In deciding whether to inform an author that a delay is due to a reviewer’s tardiness, the AE should avoid giving the impression that the report is hastily or haphazardly prepared. Peer reviews need to carry authority with an author because they form, at least in part, the basis of a press’s judgment about whether to accept or reject a project. If a reviewer submits a well-constructed but delayed review, its tardiness should not undermine its force. If a reader fails to submit a review, the AE should alert the author of the reader’s unresponsiveness, although ultimately it is the role of an AE to manage the peer review process as efficiently as possible.

What if a reviewer jeopardizes a project by revealing their role to others in the field?

In spite of the press’s best intentions in assuring the confidentiality of peer reviews (see *Confidentiality and anonymity in the peer review process*, see page 4), in some cases a reviewer may discuss the project with interested parties other than the author. The AE should consult with their supervisor to determine the best way to address the situation. The AE may decide to write to the reviewer to remind them of the need to maintain confidentiality about the project. The reviewer may simply be enthusiastic about the project and unaware that speaking about it to others could compromise the author and the press. If the AE suspects that the reviewer is acting in bad faith, they should consider finding a replacement reader for any subsequent round of reviews and/or they may choose not to solicit any more reports from the reviewer. If the breach in confidentiality comes to the AE’s attention through someone other than the author, the AE will need to determine whether to inform the author about the situation and how best to rectify any harm.

SECTION 4.

Sharing Peer Reviews with Authors

How should an AE handle split or negative reviews?

Reviews don't always lead to a clear positive or negative decision. If peer reviewers' views diverge and a third party, such as a series editor, isn't available to assess and advise on the difference of opinion (see *If a project is intended for a series, can or should the series editor (or one of the series editors) act as a peer reviewer?* see page 8), a useful first step is for the AE to discuss the reports with the author or request a preliminary written response to the reviews to see how an author assimilates and addresses the feedback. A commanding author response can make a compelling case to pursue a project further, even in the face of strong criticism. The AE may solicit a review from a third reader; invite the author to revise and resubmit and then send the project out to be reviewed again; or, in some circumstances, proceed to the faculty board for final approval on the strength of the one supportive review and the author's thoughtful and thorough response. The last option is most likely when a series editor or a faculty board member can also be called upon to weigh in on or contextualize the reviews, as well as to offer their own view of the project's merits.

If both reviews are overtly negative but the AE feels the project is still viable, they may craft a plan with the author for revisions that would enable further consideration. However, the AE should be very clear with the author about the time frame and the likelihood of eventual publication.

Is a formal response from the author to the reviews necessary in every case? If not, what are the exceptions?

With some exceptions, a formal response from the author should be solicited before a project is taken to the faculty board for approval. Occasional exceptions include cases where the reports are strong, the project is competitive, and the press must move quickly.

Is it okay for the AE to edit the readers' reports before sharing them with the author?

The AE may decide to edit readers' reports for a variety of reasons including but not limited to clarifying language or correcting typos, removing statements about publishing model or pricing, ensuring reader anonymity, or even, in rare situations, to adjust unduly aggressive language, making sure to retain the substance of the reader report. In doing so, the AE should use their best judgment, possibly in consultation with their editorial director.

How much help should an AE offer in guiding an author's response to readers' reports?

The author, ultimately, is responsible for their response, but most authors benefit from the AE's guidance in the content and tenor of the response. The AE should help the author write a response that offers a strategy for revision and addresses the reviewers' criticisms productively. The AE should highlight the sections in the peer reviews that need to be addressed and that likely will be of most concern to the press and the faculty board. The AE should offer the author guidance on the readership for the response (e.g., internally for contract request, the faculty board, the reviewers).

When is it appropriate for the AE's vision for a project to take precedence over reviewers' suggestions about desirable revisions?

Sometimes the press and author's vision of a work does not align with that of reviewers. For example, a more scholarly reviewer may recommend expanding the reference or scholarly apparatus of a trade book. Or a reviewer might argue for a topic that is beyond the scope of the project to be covered. In such instances, the path forward should involve discussions between the AE and the author, and, when appropriate, a series editor, who ultimately will need to agree on an ideal structure for the work informed by the press's or the faculty board's expectations.

If the author does not agree with elements of a review, they need to be prepared to make a compelling case for their preferred approach. AEs should pay careful attention to how authors frame their decision not to heed some of the reviewers' suggestions.

What is the best course of action if an author refuses to write a formal response to peer reviews or writes something inadequate?

It is rare for an author who is serious about publishing a book with a university press to refuse the opportunity to respond to peer reviews. If an author does refuse, the AE should reassess their working relationship with the author and may even decline publication on these grounds. If the response is inadequate but the AE is still interested in the book, they should work with the author to revise the response.

SECTION 5.

Peer Reviews as Documents of Record

Besides the AE, author, and press staff, who is permitted to see anonymous peer reviews?

The review of proposals and manuscripts is intended to be entirely distinct from any professional review an author may be undergoing. For this reason, AEs are strongly discouraged from sharing materials with an author's hiring, tenure, and promotion committee without the author's explicit permission. Peer reviewers are not being asked to comment on an author's professional experiences beyond what is conveyed in the proposal or manuscript itself, so repurposing reader reports for any professional situation not related to the book may constitute misuse, and the reviewers' identities should not be revealed without their permission. Of course, the outcome of a university press's peer review and publication process will often have considerable impact on the author's professional evaluations, but it is critical that the intentions of the manuscript review process be maintained separate from any other evaluative process.

If members of a hiring or tenure and promotion committee request copies of the reviews, the AE should refuse to provide them and should contact the author to tell them to communicate with the committee about the issue directly. The author is free to share the masked reader reports and other information about the peer review process with their committee. However, an AE may choose to inform hiring or tenure and promotion committees about the project's current status—out for review, under contract, or in press—or provide a letter of support with the author's permission.

Do members of a press faculty editorial board know the identities of all peer reviewers? If there are exceptions, what are they?

As the charge of university press faculty boards is to assess the integrity of the review process, it is essential that the identities of the peer reviewers be shared with board members. However, even at this stage, it is important that the promise of reviewer anonymity be incorporated into the preparation of board materials. All of these materials are confidential, and everyone involved in compiling and reviewing them should be aware of this. Many presses circulate separate reviewer identities with their board materials so as to avoid including peer reviewer identities in the dockets themselves. When a faculty editorial board member has a potential conflict of interest the AE should be prepared to adjust the board materials for the project so that confidentiality and anonymity are preserved. (See *Confidentiality and anonymity in the peer review process*, see page 5).

If peer reviews include endorsements that could be used as blurbs in marketing materials, what is the best way to request this kind of use from peer reviewers?

Many presses harvest blurbs from reviewers' reports. Because peer reviewers have been promised anonymity, this process cannot be automated. If a press wishes to extract comments from a report, it is essential that press staff request the reviewer's permission and offer them the opportunity to refine or edit the quoted material. Some reviewers may wish to see the revised manuscript before authorizing use of their words in marketing materials.

Can reports be shared with other presses if an AE decides not to pursue a project?

Every AE will experience a situation in which the peer review process does not lead to a contract, faculty board approval, or even board presentation. In some cases, in order to help an author find a viable publishing alternative, AEs may want to share reports with AEs at other houses to help expedite the decision-making process. The reviews should only be requested by and given to another AE; this exchange should not occur through the author. In any such situation, the AE at the original press should contact the reviewers, explain the circumstances, and ask for their permission. If a reviewer does not wish for their review to be shared, the AE should not pass it along to the other press.

What about long-term storage of reports and the identities of reviewers?

Reader reports, both digital and print forms, become part of any press's archival holdings. The utility of reader reports following book publication usually decreases, although the comments may come to have historical value. For practical purposes, it may not be possible to protect reviewers' anonymity in perpetuity. Many presses have opted to adhere to their parent institution's embargo protocols on tenure and promotion review files. These often set the duration of reader protection for periods of fifty years post review, or this period may be benchmarked by the timing of the decision about whether to publish. Those presses that archive their book files with their institutional libraries or repositories should actively consult with collections managers to be certain that, as materials are digitized, issues of anonymity are discussed and protocols agreed upon.

What if lawyers or other parties external to the university ask to see the reviews?

As noted above (see *Besides the AE, author, and press staff, who is permitted to see anonymous peer reviews?* see page 14), presses should refuse outside requests to see reviews. In some cases, however, public records laws may conflict with press policy—for example, where an author is a civil servant or a press is part of a state university. When legal issues arise, presses should consult with university counsel before responding to such requests.

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