

Transparent Peer Review: A Look Inside the Peer Review Process

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Peer review is a critical and necessary part of the scientific and scholarly publishing process, but one that has traditionally remained closed to the readers of a published article. To give readers insight into the interactions between authors and anonymous peer reviewers, there is a movement in the scientific publishing ecosystem to enhance transparency in the publication process through the publication of peer review reports alongside the final publication. We are pleased to announce that beginning November 3, 2021, *ACS Central Science* and *The Journal of Physical Chemistry Letters* will be offering transparent peer review to our authors.

This pilot project is motivated by a desire to explore new types of peer review beyond the traditional single-anonymized peer review model and represents further commitment from the ACS to open science. This initiative offers readers a look into the peer review process and gives authors the option to have peer reviewer comments, as well as the author response, published alongside their accepted manuscript.

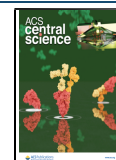
Traditionally, ACS journals have used a single-anonymized peer review model. In this model, the identity of the author(s) and the handling editor of the manuscript are shared with reviewers. However, the identities of the reviewers are not shared with the author(s). This is done to encourage objectivity and more constructive peer review. In this model, only the final publication and Supporting Information are available to the public; the peer review process is kept strictly confidential. As ACS Publications seeks to promote open science, we felt it important to evaluate the impact of increased transparency in the peer review process through exploring and experimenting with different models for peer review. This new approach is similarly a response to a growing call for increased transparency from our authors and reviewers.

In our transparent peer review model, a manuscript proceeds under the same single-anonymized peer review model until the manuscript is accepted. Once an accepted manuscript is published, a peer review package detailing aspects of the peer review history of the manuscript is published alongside the article. It is important to note that in our transparent peer review model, the identities of the reviewers and handling editors will remain anonymous as a default. Reviewers can request that their identity be revealed to the author by signing their name in their review; this request is then approved or rejected by the editor. In this case, this request will be carried through to what is published publicly in the peer review report.

We believe that transparent peer review offers several benefits for our journals and the broader chemistry community. This model allows for more recognition of the exceptional work of our reviewers. Giving readers insight into the peer review process provides educational opportunities (particularly for new and early career researchers) through concrete examples of reviewer reports and author responses to those reports. As editors, we strive to maintain objectivity and eliminate any potential bias from ourselves or from peer reviewers, and we hope that transparent peer review can help us do that. This process can also improve the accountability of authors, reviewers, and editors during the peer review process.

Authors will be given the option to participate in transparent peer review during the submission process in ACS Paragon Plus. Participation will be entirely voluntary, and authors will have the ability to change their choice to participate when submitting their revised manuscript in

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response to reviewer comments. Reviewers will need to agree with the possible publication of their report as a condition of accepting an invitation to review. Our journal communications will be updated to reflect this change, notifying reviewers in invitation letters. If a reviewer is not comfortable with the possibility that their review could be published, they will have the option (as always) to decline the invitation to review. Again, in transparent peer review, reviewer anonymity will continue to be maintained as it has been in our traditional single-anonymized peer review model, unless a reviewer requests otherwise by signing their review and receiving approval from the editor.

If a manuscript is accepted for publication and the author(s) have opted into transparent peer review, the peer reviewer comments, as well as the author's response letter for all rounds of revision, will be collected into a single peer review package that will be published alongside the manuscript as Supporting Information. If necessary, the peer review package will be edited to maintain anonymity. Per our ethical guidelines, the decision to reveal the identity of a reviewer (only when explicitly requested by the reviewer) lies with the editor.

More information about ACS's transparent peer review pilot project and associated FAQs can be found [here](#). We believe that transparent peer review will enhance the author and reviewer experience with *ACS Central Science* and *The Journal of Physical Chemistry Letters*, as has been the experience with other journals that have previously rolled out similar transparent peer review pilots.

We are excited to receive your manuscripts and look forward to the results of the pilot. If you have any questions, please contact tpr@services.acs.org.

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Notes

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