

We hear you

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Last year, we came to the realization that online supplemental material had gotten out of control. In our conversations with authors and referees, we heard that the time needed to produce it and thoroughly review it was increasing at an unsustainable pace. In response, we changed our policy on supplemental material. Well, we're still listening. And we're hearing author frustration with seemingly endless rounds of external review at high-impact journals. We want to let you know that the editors of *The Journal of Experimental Medicine* have been working hard to avoid contributing to this problem.

Among the papers published in the *JEM* in 2012 (January–March issues), 95.7% underwent only one or two rounds of external review. No papers endured more than three external review cycles.

Our belief is that if we invest additional editorial effort at the point of decision, we can avoid protracted cycles of review and re-review. For example, we neither expect nor require all referees to agree on the merits or deficiencies of every manuscript. When referees disagree, *JEM* editors will come down on one side of the fence by carefully sorting through reviewers' requests and criticisms. We do our best to clearly indicate in our decision letters which referee requests are of priority, and which are not.

Our decision-making process has benefited from last year's changes to our supplemental material policy. As the supplement is now reserved for data types not easily incorporated into the

main body of the paper, detailed clinical information, and complex methods required to reproduce experiments, it can no longer be used as a “dump” in which to deposit data generated in response to requests to continuously and perhaps unnecessarily expand the scope of a manuscript. The knowledge that the supplement is not an available outlet has helped editors to better prioritize experimental requests for authors. It has also more clearly outlined the bounds of a manuscript, thereby helping to distinguish manuscripts that require a minor revision from those that need a more substantial refocusing and restructuring.

It is important to point out that this extra editorial effort at the time of decision does not unduly extend or delay the assessment of manuscripts submitted to the *JEM*. During the 2011–2012 period, the time from submission to first decision for manuscripts externally reviewed at the *JEM* averaged 30.7 d.

If a manuscript requires relatively minor changes after the first round of external review, and if we feel that we have the expertise to make a decision

without sending the revision back to the referees, we do so. Ideally, we prefer to make a decision after one round of external review every time, but we do not delude ourselves into believing that we are experts in the technical details and aspects of all of the diverse fields covered by the *JEM*. After all, speed and efficiency cannot come at the expense of quality and confidence in what we publish.

In the relatively rare instances that issues deemed important by the referees and editors are not addressed during revision, we typically will not send the revised manuscript back to the referees. We appreciate the tremendous amount of time that referees dedicate to reviewing papers for the *JEM* (and

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other journals). Thus, we prefer that they spend it reading only thoroughly revised manuscripts.

We will continue to work hard to ensure that our decisions are as reasonable, informative, and expeditious as possible. As always, we welcome, and listen carefully to, your feedback.

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