

- 6 Resorting to telephoning a late reviewer can work and elicit a review. But some reviewers cannot be contacted by phone or will also ignore those reminders and then more drastic measures need to be taken (see this chapter, page 72).

Beware!

Take care to avoid email headers that may classify reviewer reminder messages as 'spam'.

Problems during review

Throughout the review process, it is important that a dialogue is kept up between the editorial staff, reviewers and editor. Problems may crop up for which reviewers need help or advice, or on which editors need to be given feedback and may need to advise on action to be taken. What kinds of things might arise?

- 1 A reviewer finds a problem with a manuscript. If this is relatively trivial and straightforward, it can be dealt with by the editorial office. For example, a wrong figure or table may have been submitted in error by the authors, perhaps one from an earlier draft of the paper (hopefully, if all the right checks were made on submission – see Chapter 3, page 32 – there shouldn't be any omissions). The authors need to be contacted and asked to send the correct item(s) as quickly as possible to avoid too much delay in the review process. Some more serious problems may come to light, for example suspected fraud or plagiarism, and the review process may need to be halted while they are resolved (see Chapter 9, page 186).
- 2 A reviewer finds they will be considerably delayed in returning their review or they may no longer be able to review a manuscript. Whether another reviewer needs to be found to replace them will depend on a number of factors and should be evaluated by the editor. If the other review/s is/are in and is/are thorough and helpful, then the editor may feel there is no need to find a replacement reviewer. Conversely, if the other review/s is/are superficial or too brief to provide a thorough assessment, the editor may decide to go out for another review. The course of action will also depend on what the reviews say. If they suggest that there are serious flaws and the editor finds these to be correct, there is no need to go for another review as those flaws render the manuscript unacceptable. If the original reviewer whose review is going to be late is a particular specialist or someone whose opinion the editor values highly, the editor may decide to wait for their review even if it's going to be considerably delayed. In cases of extended review, let the authors know what is happening as this will help maintain good relations. Many authors will be glad to be kept informed and won't begin to wonder if their manuscript has been forgotten or start to suspect that someone is intentionally delaying the review process.

- 3 The authors contact the journal with information about a change in circumstances. These will range from the trivial to the serious. Editorial staff will be able to deal with the former – such as address changes, missing sentences, periods of absence – but will need to contact the editor about more serious issues – for example, if the authors find in work done subsequent to submission that the data they have submitted are not as sound as they originally thought, or that the new data change the interpretation given in the submitted paper. How such cases are dealt with will depend on the severity or extent of the problem. It may be sufficient to provide the new information to the reviewers to be used in assessment. Alternatively, the manuscript may need to be withdrawn and resubmitted at a later date with the new data, and new interpretation if relevant, incorporated. In other cases, authors collaborating with commercial partners may find they are not able, after all, to obtain the permissions from them that are required to comply with journal policy – for example, if a journal has a requirement that materials reported in its papers are made freely available and distribution of some materials reported in the manuscript under consideration is not going to be allowed by the commercial partner. The editor will need to decide whether the new circumstances or restrictions are acceptable or whether the manuscript should be withdrawn from review and declined for further consideration. When a manuscript is withdrawn from review by a journal, the authors must be given clear reasons why this is being done and be given the opportunity to respond if appropriate.
- 4 Issues concerning authorship may arise and these need to be dealt with. The sorts of problems that can occur are described in Chapter 8 (page 156). If they are serious, the review process may need to be halted until they've been resolved. Journals should not get involved in authorship disputes. It is up to the authors to resolve their authorship problems and disagreements. Authors may, however, contact a journal or editor for advice on, for example, what qualifies someone to be an author or the order in which names should appear, or for guidelines and references they can cite to someone who is perhaps trying to be an author on their paper but who has made very little or no contribution to the work reported in it (see Chapter 8, page 151, for information on this).
- 5 If one of the authors dies during the review process (or has died quite recently) some reviewers may find it difficult to submit an unbiased review, particularly a negative review, and especially if they had personal or professional links with the author or admired and respected them and their scientific work. If any such reviewers contact a journal, new reviewers should be found and appropriate messages of sympathy should be sent to the original reviewer(s).

Reviewers not returning reviews

There will be times when, even in the best-run and most efficient journals, reviewers do not return their reviews. It seems that whatever the editorial staff and/or editor