

For Authors & Referees

For Authors

For Referees

## For Referees

On this page: About the journal | Criteria for publication | The review process | Selecting referees | Upon receiving a manuscript to referee | Confidentiality | Writing the report | Editing referee reports | Timing | Conflicts of interest | Publication policy and ethical considerations

### About the journal

*Laboratory Investigation* is an international journal owned by The United States & Canadian Academy of Pathology (USCAP) and edited by a board appointed by the Council of the Academy. *Laboratory Investigation* offers prompt publication of high-quality original research in all biomedical disciplines relating to the understanding of human disease and the application of new methods to the diagnosis of disease. Both human and experimental studies are welcome. Particular emphasis is given to original research exploring the pathobiology of disease, including insights gained into the structural and molecular pathogenesis of disease, and the biological basis for morphologic manifestations of disease.

*Laboratory Investigation* also constitutes a forum for translation of basic research findings into the progress of diagnosis and assessment of human disease, by means of any laboratory diagnostic methodology. Consideration is given to novel technical advances in the diagnosis of human disease or in the investigation of human or experimental disease. *Laboratory Investigation* also publishes regular Pathobiology in Focus articles and occasional Minireviews.

The journal features the following types of papers:

- Editorial
- Inside Lab Invest
- Pathobiology in Focus
- Perspective
- Letter to the Editor
- Minireview
- Research Articles
- Technical Reports

## Criteria for publication

*Laboratory Investigation* receives many more submissions than it can publish each month. It is therefore important that manuscripts are critically evaluated for compliance with the following criteria:

- strong evidence for the conclusions that are drawn
- novelty (abstracts, meeting reports and *www* preprints are not considered to compromise novelty)
- broad biological significance
- importance to the specific field

## The review process

All submitted manuscripts are assessed by the editor(s) for suitability for the review process. The views of an editorial board member may be sought for further input towards this decision. To save authors and referees time, only those manuscripts judged most likely to meet our editorial criteria are sent out for formal review.

Manuscripts that are sent for formal review go to two referees. Based on their advice, the editor decides to:

- accept the manuscript, with or without minor revision

- invite the authors to revise the manuscript to address specific concerns before a final decision is reached
- or reject the manuscript, typically on grounds of specialist interest, lack of novelty, insufficient conceptual advance or major technical and/or interpretational problems

Reviewers may recommend a particular course of action in their confidential comments to the editor, but should bear in mind that the editors may have to make a decision based on conflicting advice. Furthermore, editorial decisions are not a matter of counting votes or numerical rank assessments, but rather are based on an evaluation of the strengths of the arguments raised by each reviewer and by the authors. The most useful reviewer reports, therefore, are those that set out clear, substantiated arguments and refrain from recommending a course of action in the comments directed to the authors.

Reviewers may, on occasion, be asked for further advice, particularly in cases where they disagree with one another, or where the authors believe that they have been misunderstood on points of fact. This kind of discussion is sometimes necessary to provide an effective and fair review process. We do understand, however, that reviewers are reluctant to be drawn into prolonged disputes, so we try to keep consultation to the minimum we judge necessary to come to a fair conclusion. In certain cases, additional reviewers or members of our editorial board may be consulted to resolve disputes, but this is avoided unless there is a specific issue on which further advice is required.

## Selecting reviewers

Reviewer selection is critical to the review process, and our choice is based on many factors, including expertise, reputation, specific recommendations, and our previous experience with the reviewer. We avoid using reviewers who are chronically slow, sloppy, too harsh or too lenient. We invite reviewers and only on

acceptance of the invitation will a reviewer have access to the full paper.

## Upon receiving a manuscript to review

To avoid unnecessary delays in processing manuscripts, please do the following immediately upon receipt of a manuscript for review:

- double-check the deadline to ensure that there have been no misunderstandings regarding timing and contact the editorial office immediately if you anticipate any difficulties in meeting it
- read the editor's letter carefully and be sure to note any points specific to the manuscript that the editor may have requested your opinion on
- skim the manuscript and consider whether there might be a conflict of interest for you (with the authors, their institution, their funding sources) and whether you can judge the article impartially
- consider whether the topic seems to fit the scope of the journal and is likely to be of sufficient general interest for publication

## Confidentiality

Reviewers should treat the review process as being strictly confidential, and should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- manuscripts reviewed for *Laboratory Investigation* should not be discussed with anyone not directly involved in the review process
- if colleagues are consulted, they should be identified to the editors
- if experts from outside the reviewer's own laboratory are consulted, reviewers should check with the editors

beforehand to avoid involving anyone who may have been excluded by the editor

- reviewers should, as a rule, not disclose their identities to the authors or to other colleagues since they may be asked to comment on the criticisms of other reviewers and may then find it difficult to be objective. Should they feel strongly about making their identities known to the authors, they should do so via the editor. We strongly disapprove of any attempt by authors to determine the identities of reviewers or to confront them, and encourage reviewers to neither confirm nor deny any speculation in this regard.

## Writing the report

The primary purpose of reviewer reports is to provide the editors with the information that they need to reach a decision, but they should also instruct the authors on how to strengthen their manuscript if revision is a possibility. Reviewers are asked to submit both confidential comments to the editor and those that can be directly transmitted to the authors. We recommend the following division of the report:

### **Comments for transmission to the authors**

Reviewers are asked to maintain a positive and impartial, but critical, attitude in evaluating manuscripts. Criticisms should remain dispassionate; offensive language is not acceptable. As far as possible, a negative report should explain to the authors the weaknesses of their manuscript, so that they can understand the basis for a decision to ask for revision or to reject the manuscript.

The ideal report should include:

- an initial paragraph that summarises the major findings and the reviewer's overall impressions, as well as highlighting major shortcomings of the manuscript.

- specific numbered comments, which may be broken down into major and minor criticisms if appropriate (numbering facilitates both the editor's evaluation of the manuscript and the authors' rebuttal to the report)

The report should answer the following questions:

- what are the major claims and how significant are they?
- are the claims novel and convincing?
- are the claims appropriately discussed in the context of earlier literature?
- who will be interested and why?
- does the paper stand out in some way from the others in its field?
- are there other experiments that would strengthen the paper?

For manuscripts that may merit further consideration, it is also helpful if reviewers can provide advice on the following points where appropriate:

- how the clarity of the writing might be improved (without necessarily going into specific details of spelling and grammar)
- how the manuscript might be shortened
- how to do the study justice without overselling the claims
- how to represent earlier literature more fairly
- how to improve the presentation of methodological detail so that the experiments can be reproduced
- the submission of supplementary data on the *Laboratory Investigation* website to enhance the presentation (depositing, for example, crystallographic information, source code for modelling studies, microarray data, detailed methods, mathematical derivations, long tables and movies)

This author report should not include a recommendation regarding publication, which is regarded as confidential information since the final decision regarding acceptance, revision or rejection rests with the editor.

## Editing reviewer reports

As a matter of policy, we do not suppress reviewer reports. Comments intended for the authors are almost always transmitted. On rare occasions, however, we may edit a report where the reviewer has made an obvious factual mistake, or to remove offensive language or comments that reveal confidential information. We ask reviewers to avoid saying anything that may cause needless offence, but also expect authors to recognise that criticisms are not necessarily unfair.

## Timing

*Laboratory Investigation* is committed to rapid editorial decisions and publication as efficiency in this process is a valuable service both to our authors and the scientific community as a whole. We therefore ask that reviewers respond promptly or inform us if they anticipate a significant delay. This allows us to keep the authors informed and, where necessary, find alternative reviewers.

## Conflicts of interest

In order to ensure fairness in the review process, we try to avoid reviewers who: have recent or ongoing collaborations with the authors, have commented on drafts of the manuscript, are in direct competition, have a history of dispute with the authors, or have a financial interest in the outcome. Because it is not possible for the editors to know of all possible biases, however, we ask reviewers to draw our attention to anything that might affect their report, including commercial interests, and to decline to review in cases where they feel unable to be objective. We do not

find it necessary to exclude reviewers who have reviewed a paper for another journal; the fact that two journals have independently identified a particular person as well qualified to review a paper does not decrease the validity of her/his opinion in our view.

## Publication policy and ethical considerations

In spite of our best efforts to identify breaches of publication policy or ethical conduct, such as plagiarism or author conflict of interest, the reviewers who are more familiar with the field are more likely to recognise such problems and should alert the editors to any potential problems in this regard.

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