***“What’s in a name?”:*** *considerations for identifying preferred reviewers*

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So, the final manuscript draft is written…and then re-written, and if you’re anything like me, you’ve created a convoluted naming system that ends ‘..final draft v7b’ or similar. Now you start the process of manuscript submission to your favourite journal (the Journal of Proteome Research, hopefully!). It’s at this point the realisation hits that while you’ve been desperately re-reading the manuscript for typos, and checking that the Figures are legible and correctly referenced, you’ve not yet decided who to suggest as potential reviewers of this latest masterpiece. So, while waiting for figures to upload to the submission site, you mentally trawl through the list of your most respected peers (or possibly just your ‘friends’ in the field), while firing off a quick email to co-authors for suggestions.

Hopefully this is not actually the way it works for you (though I’m sure this is a path familiar to many), and you don’t actually get to the submission stage before you start to think about this important aspect of the publication process, but I’m guessing that maybe you don’t spend as much time thinking about it as you should. I understand: as an author I can say that I have submitted a few manuscripts over the years which have played out to scenarios not that dissimilar; is it even worth worrying about when some Journals probably have their own (dare I say it, archaic) rules in place and might ignore the suggestions anyway? However, as an Editor at *JPR*, I can assure you that suggesting appropriate people as potential reviewers for your new study can go a long way towards facilitating its ultimate publication. I’m not saying that this is the be-all and end-all (obviously, the quality of the science, interpretation of the data, and the relevance of the story to the journal plays a vital role), but it IS important. If you’re anything like the scientists that I know, you probably spend much more time thinking about potential reviewers for your next funding application than you do for the outputs of all that hard-won grant money! So, its time for this to change, or at least bump it up your checklist prior to submission.

Suggestion of preferred reviewers is often fraught with repeated mistakes: authors either name people who arguably do not have a track record in an area relevant to the submitted manuscript, or suggest a really big ‘name’ in the field who is often less likely to have the time to review your study (you’d be amazed how often the same names get suggested in proteomics, for example). That box in the submission system that asks for a reason why a preferred reviewer has been selected has a purpose – it enables the Editor to understand your rationale for reviewer suggestions. As well as saving the handling Editor some time in checking reviewer suitability (always a good thing if you consider that, at least at *JPR*, we all have ‘day jobs’), it means that we know you’ve thought about the process; rather than suggesting someone you just happen to have a good working relationship with, that person is (also) qualified for the role. It undoubtedly helps if you can highlight people as preferred reviewers who are likely to consider your manuscript in a favourable light, but herein comes another issue – if that preferred reviewer, who is qualified, does not review your manuscript as a ‘critical friend’, that review is essentially wasted and an additional opinion will need to be sought, wasting both time and effort (and in very competitive fields, possibly risking being scooped).

Preferred reviewer suggestions (and even non-preferred reviewers for reasons of potential conflict or time/availability) are particularly important in the current era, as people within the community have more calls on their time, both personal and professional. In extreme circumstances, I have, unfortunately, desk rejected some potentially interesting manuscripts having been unable to identify suitably qualified reviewers. Occasionally, this is inevitable (bad timing?), but is undoubtedly mitigated by authors giving due thought to those named (and dare I say it, framing the title /abstract of the article appropriately for the readership of the Journal, but that is perhaps best discussed at another time). At *JPR,* we typically approach ~6 reviewers on average per publication under consideration, although in some instances this can be many more for the initial (rather than a revised) manuscript. As for the named ‘non-preferred’ reviewers, we do indeed take this seriously; the ACS Editorial system has been configured so as to prevent these people from inadvertently being invited.

As Editors at the *Journal of Proteome Research* it is ultimately our responsibility to make sure that we find and select appropriate reviewers for manuscripts that we are considering for publication, helping ensure the integrity of the peer review process. As submitting authors, it is in your best interests to help us achieve this. So, some considerations for selecting potential reviewers for your manuscript:

1. Do they have a track record (i.e. publications) in areas relevant to the submitted manuscript? If the expertise of the reviewer cannot be confirmed, they will not be selected, no matter what the rationale provided.

2. If they have a limited track record in the area, what is the rationale for selecting this person as a preferred reviewer?

3. Are they in the same institution as any of the authors (yes, people still do it!) or even in the same city? Let’s face it, the world is your oyster in the digital age of peer-review, so as an Editor, I am less likely to choose someone who is literally down the road.

4. Diversify your selection – we should all aim to be more inclusive in science in terms of equality, diversity & inclusion, and reviewer selection is no different. Think about suggesting potential reviewers that are e.g. not all the same gender, ethnicity, or from the same continent.

5. Think about suggesting senior post-doctoral research scientists with relevant, documented expertise. We receive numerous requests from up-and-coming scientists to review manuscripts; they are often willing and able to devote more time to providing a critical review than more senior people. Early career researchers are also still working at the coalface, and are thus less likely to request additional experiments that are unwarranted in the context of the conclusions being drawn. For those early career researchers interested in doing some reviewing for *JPR* or another ACS journal, you may wish to consider undertaking the [ACS Reviewer Lab](https://www.acsreviewerlab.org/) course, free peer reviewer training provided by ACS.

6. When considering ‘non-preferred’ reviewers, again, think about your rationale. Excluding a significant proportion of relevant names in the area will compromise our ability as Editors to acquire useful reviews. If you are going to exclude people, keep the list small. In reality, it’s highly unlikely that there are that many direct competitors, and one job of the handling Editor is to weed out apparently biased reviews!

There is no doubt that our reviewers (thank you all!) are a cornerstone of the scholarly publication process. Without them, journals like *JPR* would not exist. But, while the name is important, the quality (and relevance) of the review is key.