

Peer review: Can we do better?

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Every paper published in *The Angle Orthodontist* has been subjected to a traditional peer review process similar to one used by most, if not all, highly respected scientific journals in the world. When a manuscript arrives via the online submission system to the editor's desktop, a preliminary evaluation is made of the subject matter to make sure it is within the scope of the journal. Once that is confirmed, the paper is designated for peer review. In other words, experts will be chosen and asked to evaluate the paper for quality of content.

Who are these experts and of what value are their opinions? It seems obvious at first glance but, really, choosing the right reviewers involves some knowledge and expertise in itself. For example, I may not be qualified alone to evaluate a paper on a new, anti-carries cement being tested in orthodontic patients, but I can find a materials scientist, a clinical orthodontist, and a statistician, perhaps, who could each evaluate the paper from their respective viewpoints. Even better, however, would be if I had a colleague whose expertise was in the field of biomaterials who could then identify precisely the **right** materials scientist, orthodontist, and statistician, all of whom might be actively doing research in this area. That is exactly what the Assistant Editors at *The Angle Orthodontist* do. Each focuses on a narrower area within the journal's scope of content to improve our ability to direct each prospective article to the right expert reviewers.

When a paper is ready for review, I, or one of the Assistant Editors, generally identify at least 3 appropriate experts in that specific field. This process first involves doing a little research into the topic. Unless I know off the top of my head who I would like to have evaluating a particular manuscript, I turn to PubMed online and conduct a current literature search narrowly focused on the area of interest. There are also the

Editorial Board members and other frequent *Angle* reviewers from whom to choose. Invitations to review are sent out by email and reviewers accept the requests depending on how busy they are, their level of interest, and familiarity with the topic. Participation is voluntary but the experts' demonstrated commitment to perform anonymous, constructive, and honest peer review is vital to the quality and reputation of the journal.

The Angle Orthodontist operates using double blind peer review. This means that neither the authors nor the reviewers know who the others are. Possible alternatives include "dynamic", "open", and "single blind" procedures. The premise of the completely anonymous process we use is that it reduces bias and encourages free commentary without fear of retribution. The goal is to filter submissions, provide constructive suggestions for authors, and result in the highest quality papers being published in each issue of the journal.

Is this process perfect? The answer is clearly no, but there are so many reasons why **any** peer review process is imperfect that it is impossible to list them all in the space available. Perhaps we can explore them together in the future. In the meantime, I believe that we use the best process available to evaluate fairly the manuscripts we receive.

While the current review process is imperfect, it works extremely well to help the editors of *The Angle Orthodontist* make decisions regarding which of the many submissions we receive each month should be published online and in our pages. The dedicated reviewers deserve all the credit for the journal's success. We base our decisions on what the reviewers tell us and, although there is not enough space for every good article to be accepted, we do try to present to you in every issue what appears to be the "latest and the best."