

ACM TODS Associate Editor Manual

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Abstract

This document outlines the major duties of a *TODS* Associate Editor and provides some free, unsolicited advice. It summarizes the work flow of the Manuscript Central web-based manuscript tracking system used by ACM for its journals.

1 Introduction

The task of a *TODS* Associate Editor (AE) is a typical scholarly activity: a lot of work, for the benefit of the scientific community, with no pay and only the prestige of a title and the knowledge of a job well done as a reward.

In this document, I describe this task in some detail.¹ The three goals are (1) to provide excellent service to the database community, while (2) maintaining the high standards that accord the premier database journal and (3) minimizing the AE's workload. As we will see, it is possible, with care, to simultaneously achieve all three goals.

In this manual, I first list the primary tasks of an Associate Editor. Section 5 provides the body of the manual, enumerating in detail the almost two-dozen steps in the *TODS* reviewing process. Discussion of special cases rounds out this manual.

This manual can be read before, after, or in parallel with the official ScholarOne **Editor Guide** that is available from the Manuscript Central training site.

¹Throughout this document, "you" refers to the reader, which is presumably an Associate Editor of *TODS*. "I" refers to the author of this manual, Richard Snodgrass, giving background experiences and viewpoints. First-person sentences should be interpreted as gentle advice, to be ignored if needed.

2 Associate Editor Tasks

Your primary function, as an AE, is to handle submitted manuscripts, “to provide clear, timely impartial feedback.”² *TODS* is somewhat unusual in that full authority for accepting and rejecting papers resides in the AE. The AE doesn’t make a recommendation to the Editor in Chief (EiC); rather, the AE makes the final decision. The EiC is involved only when requested by the author or by the AE, as discussed in Section 7.

Other tasks of an AE include the following.

- *Know the rules.*

It is important that the *TODS* Editorial Board be consistent in its process and in its decisions. To that end, ACM and *TODS* have both invested significant effort in documenting policy guidelines.

New AEs should carefully study the procedures, submission requirements, referee rights, and other information on the *TODS* web site.³ In particular, AEs should read the information under “About *TODS*”, “For referees” and “For authors” on the web site. Note that this material is all publicly accessible.

AEs should also know and understand *TODS* policy, which is *not* publicly accessible. All new AEs should go to the “Editors-only” portion of the *TODS* web site and read the policy statements.⁴ Usually included in these policy statements is background on the policy. It is critical that there be consistent handling of papers submitted to *TODS*.

AEs should also be familiar with ACM policy more generally, in particular the “Journal Editors Manual”⁵ and the “Rights and Responsibilities in ACM Publishing,”² as it is the AE who ensures most of these rights. In particular see the rights that ACM accords editors and the responsibilities that ACM assigns editors.

Finally, you should become familiar with the ManuscriptCentral site. This document explains how to use the site. There is also a more generic PDF manual available at the link entitled “Associate Editor Site Verification Guide.” ManuscriptCentral is a complex system, which will take some time to become comfortable with.

- *Work with the EiC to develop policy.*

Policy ultimately is determined by the EiC, but generally is developed in close discussion with the Editorial Board.

- *Promote *TODS* within the database community.*

The Rights and Responsibilities document mentions that ACM expects editors to “be an advocate for their publication and to represent the ACM well.”

- *Encourage authors to submit their best work to *TODS*.*

This encouragement can take various forms, from mentioning *TODS* when talking with colleagues to formally invited articles.

²<http://www.acm.org/pubs/rights.html>

³<http://www.acm.org/tods>

⁴This site can be reached from <http://www.acm.org/tods> clicking on “Editors only” or directly (<http://www.acm.org/tods/editors/index.html>). Note that this is an entirely different site than ManuscriptCentral (which is at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods>, or <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/acm> for all ACM journals).

⁵http://www.acm.org/pubs/editors_manual.html

3 ACM Support

The ACM Rights and Responsibilities policy states that ACM will “provide a clerical and software infrastructure that supports tracking of submissions and administration of publications.” MC is of course that software infrastructure.

The clerical infrastructure is divided between Mark Mandelbaum, ACM Director of Publications, and Jono Hardjowirogo, Publisher of Journals at ACM. Jono will help AEs, generally via email, with the following tasks.

- Addressing problems with user accounts: passwords, duplicate accounts, wrong email address
- Disabling a reviewer account upon request
- Addressing problems uploading a manuscript, such as PDF not accepted
- Determining what to do when MC does not respond
- Addressing questions on how to do something specific in MC (if there is a mistake in this manual or something that could be profitably added to this manual, please notify the EiC)

The AE is responsible for extending a revision deadline.

The EiC is responsible for submitting or withdrawing a manuscript, for adjusting MC configuration parameters (in cooperation with Jono), and for submitting change requests about MC to Mark.

Finally, Mark is responsible for collecting change requests for MC and working with ScholarOne.

We now turn our attention to the reviewing process. But before we get into the nuts and bolts of handling submissions, I’d like to digress briefly.

4 Myths

Significant space will be devoted here to *turnaround time*, which is the time interval between the submission of a manuscript and the communication of the editorial decision to the author. It commences when the manuscript is received by the EiC (for *total* turnaround time), or when the manuscript has been assigned to and is received by the AE (for *AE* turnaround time). In either case, it ends when the AE sends the decision to the author by email. Turnaround time does *not* include the time the paper is in transit, nor the time the decision is in transit.

There are several prominent myths about the reviewing process. These myths have been exposed through interviews I have had with efficient AEs and EiCs of several ACM journals, and through my own experience.

Myth: A long turnaround time is the fault of slow reviewers.

On the contrary, it is possible to have a uniformly fast turnaround time, even when using many reviewers, of varying responsiveness.

Myth: The excessive length of TODS submissions, often 50 pages long, sometimes with extensive appendices, leads to long turnaround time.

With the proper procedures, it is possible to handle such long submissions in the same amount of time as a 25-page double spaced submission.

Myth: Some journals are known to have long review times, and so turnaround time for those journals will of course be longer.

Some AEs who have served on several editorial boards achieve a uniformly short turnaround time, independent of journal.

Myth: Reducing turnaround time puts an inappropriate burden on both reviewers and AEs alike.

A quite short turnaround time can be achieved while giving reviewers a full three months for a review, and with *less* work on the part of AEs than a longer turnaround time.

Myth: While authors might appreciate a short turnaround time, reviewers despise the pressure for a review.

Seemingly paradoxically, anecdotal evidence shows that reviewers of efficient AEs are a happier lot.

As a concrete example, as of August 2006, the average turnaround time for papers submitted to *TODS* that go out to reviewers is 3.4 months (14.7 weeks); including desk rejects lowers this average to 3.0 months (12.7 weeks).⁶ This average is for all the papers submitted over a twelve-month period.

Let me be very clear about this: the responsibility for a short turnaround time, and the means to achieve this, is in the hands of a single person: the editor in charge of the paper. When you hear of an editor bemoaning slow reviewers, sloppy authors who write too long papers, and the community at large for its acceptance of long reviewing cycles, you have an editor who is not discharging his or her duties properly. And when a paper *you* have submitted takes an excessively long time to review, you know exactly who to blame, even if you probably don't want to confront that person directly.

The secret, if there is one, is in the process.

5 The Reviewing Process

I will outline the process imposed by the tracking system. We don't have much control over the process; it is dictated by ACM. Some of the details are dictated by ACM policy, such as the Rights and Responsibilities Policy; others are imposed by the EiC, generally after discussion with the Editorial Board; some are imposed by limitations of MC. However, I have configured the system to the degree possible to be efficient for all concerned. At some points in this commentary, I've indicated an optional action by the AE.

The rough schedule is as follows.

Manuscript submitted There are no stated submission dates, except for papers invited from conferences.

Associate Editor identified Within a week of submission.

Reviewers identified Within a week of the AE being assigned the submission.

Reviews received Within three months of the reviewer being asked.

Editorial decision Within four months of submission. (I'll request four months, and expect at the outside, five months from submission. But as mentioned, the reviewing process to be enumerated will result in a decision in four months.)

Revised manuscript received Within a week to six months from decision, a period dictated by the AE.

⁶The full story may be found at <http://www.acm.org/tods/TurnaroundTime.html>

Reviewers permission obtained Within a week of submission of the revised manuscript. (In all cases, a reviewer should be asked before being sent a submission.)

Reviews received Within *two* months of submission (subsequent reviews take much less time).

Decision on revised manuscript Revised manuscripts require about a month less time, so I will request three months and expect four months.

Paper is published ACM requires three months to typeset, etc., an issue of *TODS*. So the minimum is three months, with the actual time depending on the backlog: how many papers are ahead of this paper (including special issues).

For the average paper, the first review takes four months, plus four months to revise, plus three months to review again, plus one month to produce the final version, plus six weeks of backlog and three months of production, or seventeen months total. In rare cases a paper is accepted on the first round and only takes eight to ten months. Papers invited for a conference are on a somewhat tighter schedule; papers that require more than two rounds can take up to two years to appear.

Another issue is that of page length. The Editorial Board is working aggressively to reduce the average and maximum page lengths for accepted articles. This is done by successive ratcheting down of the length at each editorial decision, from a submission of 50 pages plus appendices down to an average of 25–30 pages in *TODS* format, a maximum of 45 pages, and a goal of an average length of 33 pages. The electronic appendices can be of unbounded length, allowing for thorough exposition of the material, in an economically-feasible way.

Now we turn to the details of the reviewing process.

1. The author submits their paper to the system (<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods>). To do so requires an account. This account is different from the author's ACM account. The author enters the following details.

Manuscript type of which the only allowable values are “Paper” and “Survey”.

Institutions of the author(s).

Contributing Authors and affiliations and email addresses.

Paper title limited to 50 characters, with no special symbols, other than the character palette (“Special Characters”) provided, which has Greek letters (lower and upper case), a few mathematical symbols, and minimal formatting (bold, italic, underlined, superscript and subscript).

Abstract limited to 100 words, again with no special symbols other than the character palette.

Computing Classification System which I was opposed to, as it seems premature at this point. Fortunately, the system accepts anything here, including nothing.

Author(s) each of which can have multiple institutions and departments.

Preferred and non-preferred referees

Cover letter

The author is then instructed to upload two or more files, including the required main body of the submission, the required cover letter, and optional low-res image, high-res image, multi-media, or supporting document. My guess is that the vast majority of authors will upload just the main body and the cover letter. Allowed document formats are .doc, .pdf, .rtf and .ps. All are converted

automatically to PDF. \LaTeX files may also be uploaded; Manuscript Central⁷ (referred to hereafter as “MC”) will *not* convert those file. (I suggest requesting a PDF file if anyone tries to upload a \LaTeX file.) Figures, in .jpg, .gif, .tif or .eps format are also allowed; the system will convert each of these into a smaller .jpg image and leave the original update “Files for Production.”

Consistent with the *TODS* double-blind reviewing policy, the manuscript must be blinded by the author, following the author guidelines, with identification information and details on anonymous citations and conflicts of interest included in the required cover letter (which is not available to reviewers).

When the author selects “Submit Manuscript”, MC responds with a manuscript number, of the form *TODS-2005-XXXX*, where the last four digits are sequentially assigned, starting with 1 for that year.

2. MC responds with the following email to the corresponding author. (Throughout this discussion of the process, the designations used by MC will be indicated. This email template is “Paper Submitted Corresponding Author” in the area “System E-Mails”.)

Dear ...:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your submission to Transactions on Database Systems (TODS), entitled "...".

I will assign your paper to an Associate Editor and will let you know soon who that person is.

TODS now utilizes double-blind reviewing, in which the identity of the author and the reviewer are not revealed to the other. Please visit the TODS web site to ensure that you have followed the directives listed there, including blinding your manuscript and providing required details in your cover letter.

The TODS web site has a Prior Publication Policy, at

<http://www.acm.org/tods/Authors.html#PriorPublicationPolicy>

which lists specific responsibilities that you have with regard to papers by any author of this submission that are in submission, have been accepted for publication, or have been published. Please read that policy to ensure that you are meeting these responsibilities.

Thank you for your interest in the ACM Transactions on Database Systems.

Richard Snodgrass
Editor-in-Chief, ACM TODS

=====
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MC then sends an email to each of the contributing authors (“Paper Submitted Contributing Authors” in “System E-Mails”). Several times in the past a paper has been submitted without one of the co-author’s permission (or even knowledge!). This email helps detect such anomalies.

Dear ...:

This is to acknowledge receipt of the submission by the contributing author to Transactions on Database Systems (TODS), entitled "...” by author names....

TODS now utilizes double-blind reviewing, in which the identity of the author and the reviewer are not revealed to the other. Please visit the TODS web site to ensure that you have followed the directives listed there, including blinding your manuscript and providing required details in your cover letter.

⁷<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods> or, for all ACM journals, <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/acm>

The TODS web site has a Prior Publication Policy, at

<http://www.acm.org/tods/Authors.html#PriorPublicationPolicy>

which lists specific responsibilities that you have with regard to papers by any author of this submission that are in submission, have been accepted for publication, or have been published. Please read that policy to ensure that you are meeting these responsibilities.

Thank you for your interest in the ACM Transactions on Database Systems.

Richard Snodgrass
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Finally, MC sends an email message to the EiC, to start the processing of the paper (“PaperSubmittedEiC” in “E-Mail Notifications and Reminders”).

MC logs all email, and indeed all actions, in its Audit Trail. If you send an email to a reviewer or to the author or whatever, please do so within MC by clicking on that person’s name, in the context of the manuscript (within “Manuscript Details”. This keeps all the information and actions regarding a manuscript in one place.

3. The EiC performs a preliminary scan, to check for several things.

- (a) Obviously inappropriate papers are desk rejected. This avoids bothering the AEs and reviewers with papers that are inappropriate for *TODS* (in which case, alternative venues can be indicated) or which are clearly unacceptable. In 2006, 13 papers out of 93 submissions (the latter includes major revision submissions) were desk rejected.
- (b) Submissions that violate the 50 double-spaced pages requirement are returned with a request to shorten the paper. The EiC will be flexible with regard to what double-spaced means (in LaTeX, double spacing really generates 1.5 spacing), and also will allow appendices beyond the 50 page limit.
- (c) Submissions that violate the Prior Publication Policy⁸ are returned to the author, with a request to properly describe changes from previously-published papers in the body of the submission and to reference those papers in the bibliography.
- (d) Submissions that are not properly blinded according to the Double-Blind Policy⁹, specifically the six steps explained in the author submission instructions, are returned to the author, with a request to properly blind the paper.
- (e) The cover letter is examined to ensure that it lists all authors of the submitted manuscript, that full information on each anonymous citation is provided, and that conflicts of interest are listed, along with the six categories listed in the instructions to the author.

If the manuscript has any one of the above problems, the EiC can “unsubmit” the paper, allowing it to be revised by the author. (Note: AEs cannot unsubmit a paper; their procedure is different,

⁸<http://www.acm.org/tods/editors/SelfPlagiarism.html>

⁹<http://www.acm.org/tods/editors/DoubleBlind.html>

as discussed below.) This is done by the EiC going to the details of the manuscript, clicking on the Manuscript Files tab on the left, and then clicking on “Unsubmit Manuscript” which will send a “Your manuscript has been unsubmitted” email. When the author has completed the changes requested, they will just hit the submit button and the manuscript will return to the EiC, retaining its ID number.

4. The EiC uses the area of the paper as the primary determiner of who should be assigned the paper, but also attempts to balance the load, taking into account (a) the number of papers the AE has handled in the past, (b) the number of papers the AE is handling, and (c) the number of major revisions expected soon.

The EiC invites an AE with an email (“Assign Associate Editor” in “E-Mail Notifications and Reminders”).

```
Dear ... ,  
  
Would you be able to handle the following paper?  
"..." by ...  
  
You can access this paper at http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods  
  
Thanks in advance,  
  
Rick
```

5. Go into MC¹⁰, log on, and go to the “Editor Center.” Here you are presented with two “Associate Editor Lists” on the left side of the page. The “Editor Queue” designates five pending tasks that you are responsible for: “Awaiting Referee Selection,” “Awaiting Referee Invitation,” “Overdue Referee Response,” “Awaiting Referee Assignment,” and “Awaiting AE Decision,” as well as two pending tasks that you referees are responsible for: “Awaiting Referee Scores” and “Overdue Referee Scored.” Each of these queues has a number by it. If all the numbers are 0 you don’t have to do anything(!) Note that it is *not* necessary to periodically check MC. Whenever you need to do something, MC will send you an email. This submission will be listed under “Awaiting Referee Selection.”

You can click either the queue name (here, “Awaiting Referee Selection,” to see a list of those manuscripts in the queue, which are selected by clicking “Take Action,” which only takes the innocuous action of displaying the manuscript information) or the number, to see the first manuscript, with a little arrow at the top left to advance to the next such manuscript. (You can do this even before you agree to handle a paper, for example, if you want to scan it first.)

We do so to arrive at the manuscript display. In this display, you can click on the tabs on the left to select kinds of information.

Manuscript Information Here, one can “Scroll To...” in the pulldown box to “Peer Review Milestones,” “Version History,” “Author-Supplied Data,” “AE Decision,” “Assign to Issue” (which will not concern you), “Companion Papers,” and “Notes.”

Note that the cover letter will no longer appear in either the PDF and HTML at the top of the Manuscript Details. Instead, you should scroll down to the bottom of “Author-Supplied Data” to the field “Author’s Cover Letter,” which will include important information such as conflicts of interest and the full citation of anonymous citations in the submitted manuscript.

Audit Trail This display shows a *breadcrumb trail* for this manuscript, with each letter and some of the workflow transitions.

¹⁰<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods>

Manuscript Files This display allows you to see all the components (main body, response, etc.). Note that the “Manuscript Files For Review” are combined into the HTML, PDF, and Abstract buttons listed at the top, which are also available to reviewers.

Please respond (manually, with an email you send to the EiC) within a day or two with a “yes” or a “no.” Feel free to say no if there is a conflict of interest or some other reason you really can’t handle this paper. (A conflict may be real or it may just be a possible conflict. In general, we should be conservative, and avoid even the *perception* of a conflict of interest.)

Note that the tracking system is not involved with this email response that you send. All email sent by the system is retained, and listed in the “Correspondence” portion of the display for that paper. As this “accept handling of the submission” email is a manual one, it won’t be logged.

6. If you can’t handle a submission, MC will (through the EiC) indicate that with a “Disassign Associate Editor” email.
7. When an AE has agreed to handle a submission, by sending a “yes” email, the EiC sends (manually) an email to the corresponding author, giving the name of the AE who will be handling the paper, and CCing the AE.

Dear . . . ,

This is to acknowledge receipt of your submission to TODS, entitled “. . .”.

I am assigning your paper to . . . ; I have sent the manuscript to him. He will let you know how the review is proceeding. We plan to have a decision to you within five months.

Please direct all your future correspondence to . . .

Thank you for your interest in the ACM Transactions on Database Systems.

Sincerely,

Richard Snodgrass
TODS Editor-in-Chief

Submissions (co-)authored by a *TODS* AE are treated somewhat differently, in that identity of the handling AE is to remain confidential to all of the authors, to avoid any conflict of interest, as specified by *TODS* policy.¹¹ So the letter from the EiC in such cases does not mention the identity of this person. This letter also mentions that all correspondence between the authors and the handling AE should go through the EiC.

8. Once you (as the AE) have agreed to handle the paper, you should first do is an initial *P*⁴: *Prior Publication Policy Prescreen*, generally as a quick Google or DBPL search (e.g., Google “dblp authorname”). Examine the paper body (by clicking the “PDF” icon in the top of the Manuscript Information to see a PDF of the assembled files generated by MC) as well as the citations listed in the cover letter, to ensure that past work has been adequately discussed, including unreferenced past work you find via Google.

If the paper violates the prescreen, you have two choices. (1) The author can be invited to rewrite the paper and resubmit (allow this by providing a “major revision decision,” as discussed below),

¹¹<http://www.acm.org/tods/editors/AECOI.html>

providing a new version of manuscript that doesn't violate the policy. (2) You can desk reject the paper. This would be totally your decision.

Either way, you will get credit for handling the paper, towards your quota.

9. One consideration is how to handle manuscripts that were extended from previously-published conference papers. This is allowed by the prior publication policy and the double-blind policy. Indeed, submissions are invited for top papers from some conferences, e.g., *PODS*.

The Prior Publication Policy requires that the paper itself reference the underlying conference paper and explain the differences. This policy continues to hold with double-blind reviewing. Specifically, the reference to the underlying conference paper will be an anonymous citation, fully documented in the cover letter. (The EiC will have already checked for this in their scan when the paper was submitted.)

TODS has a specific novelty requirement: "A submitted manuscript that is based on one or more previous publications by one or more of the authors should have at least 30% new material. The new material should be content material: For example, it should not just be straightforward proofs or performance figures that do not offer substantial, new insights. The submitted manuscript affords an opportunity to present additional results, for example by considering new alternatives or by delving into some of the issues listed in the previous publication(s) as future work. At the same time, it is not required that the submitted manuscript contain all of the material from the published paper(s). To the contrary: only enough material need be included from the published paper to set the context and render the new material comprehensible."

This novelty requirement is checked in two phases. First, you will check the paper to ensure that statements about contributions beyond prior published work (e.g., "We added a section on algorithms", "We now present a detailed proof of Theorem 4") are accurate, consulting with the referenced papers, whose citations are in the cover letter. (The author instructions states, "you [the author] may be asked to submit a copy of one of these papers corresponding so such [anonymous] citations. An editor will contact you during the review period if this becomes necessary." So feel free to ask the author for such a paper, if you can't locate it easily yourself.) If in this analysis you decide that the added contributions are less than 30%, you can desk reject the paper.

Note that it is up to you how much effort you expend in this check. (The editorial on double-blind reviewing in the March 2007 issue of *TODS* states clearly on page 22 that one of the principles used in devising the policy was that "AEs retain flexibility and authority in managing the reviewing process.") If you are quite familiar with the area, you can do a fairly detailed analysis, or you might choose to ask that that analysis be done by one or more reviewers.

The second phase of checking the novelty requirement is a determination of the degree of additional contribution by the reviewers. Here again you have a lot of leeway. You might have done this analysis already, and so you don't have to mention it to the reviewers. You may just want to ask one reviewer to do this check, or at the other extreme, you might want to ask all of the reviewers to do the check. You should to balance out the work required with the amount of feedback you desire.

Each reviewer who is explicitly asked to judge the novelty over other publications will need to know the full citation (recall that the citation will necessarily be anonymous in the submitted manuscript). It is probably best to reveal that citation with the request for checking, just to make things simple. Note that such information will partially unblind the manuscript, and so should be done conservatively. For

most papers there is no need for three or four or five reviewers to all independently judge the novelty over prior papers; one or two reviewers should in most cases be sufficient to evaluate this requirement.

For papers invited from conferences, you should use as some of the reviewers the program committee members that reviewed the original conference submission, as discussed on page 33. As these reviewers are familiar with the underlying paper, and will already know the identity of (some of) the authors already, they are ideal for judging the novelty requirement. That way, the other, independent reviewers need not be asked to make this judgment, and thus will be able to provide an unbiased review.

10. Your next task is to decide if this is a desk reject, based on appropriateness or content. To do so, go directly to “Make Decision” within the “AE Decision” portion of the display.
11. However, in most cases, you will need to assign referees. When I receive a manuscript, I skim it to get a feeling for its chance of acceptance, as well as the difficulty of review. I also read the intro and conclusions, and skim the bibliography, to decide who would be the best referees. If the paper will be a difficult review, I send it to reviewers I especially trust. If the paper is really bad, I don’t burden reviewers, but simply desk reject the paper, sometimes after writing a review myself.

You should check the cover letter for conflicts of interest. There are six categories of such conflicts.

- (a) Known family relationship as spouse, child, sibling, or parent.
- (b) Business or professional partnership.
- (c) Past or present association as thesis advisor or thesis student.
- (d) Collaboration on a project or on a book, article, report, or paper within the last 48 months.
- (e) Co-editing of a journal, compendium, or conference proceedings within the last 24 months.
- (f) Other relationship, such as close personal friendship, that you think might tend to affect your judgment or be seen as doing so by a reasonable person familiar with the relationship.

Another conflict you should take into consideration is “The reviewer has been a co-worker of the author in the same department or lab within the past two years.” Don’t get too hung up on “within the past two years.” Just use your existing knowledge of where the reviewer is and has been to ensure that you don’t ask direct colleagues to review this manuscript.

Go to MC and click on “Awaiting Referee Selection” then “View Details” of the paper you have just been assigned. Notice the “Select Referees” action tab at the top right of this page. Clicking this tab brings up a list of “Author’s Preferred / Non-Preferred Reviewers” and search areas. Note that author preferences are just that: advice to you that you can follow or not at your discretion. I generally don’t use non-preferred reviewers, because often the author has a good reason to state that non-preference. I may use one or two preferred reviewers, but attempt to have the majority of the reviewers chosen by me, rather than the author. I also study the preferred reviewers carefully to ensure that they are truly objective.

MC shows how many papers that reviewer has reviewed this year. If a person has reviewed one or more papers this year, it is still acceptable to ask if they could review another paper (see below for more discussion of this). You just shouldn’t push too hard. You can mention that you realize that the person already is reviewing a TODS paper, but if s/he would be willing to also look at this paper, that would be great. (I do this occasionally.) It also means that if you were choosing between this person and a person without any reviews, priority should be given to the latter.

After doing a search, you can “Add” a person in the search results to the referee list.

You can select a referee through “Referee Search” if that person is already in the system, or click “Create Referee Account” to create and assign a new reviewer. The “Add” button after a search adds the referee to the list. (You may want to look up related papers in the *SIGMOD Anthology* or use DBLP¹² to find reasonable reviewers.)

If you make a mistake when adding a referee, or if a referee contacts you about problems with his/her account, please send email to Jono Hardjowirogo (jono@hq.acm.org) know. He has “assistant” privileges and can fix such problems relatively easily.

Once a referee has been selected, you can then “Invite” that person, which brings up an email template that you can edit.

Most of the email messages sent by the system can be edited before being sent. (An example of an exception is the email sent by MC to each of the reviewers once a decision has been made on the paper.) Most of these messages appear to be sent by the AE, even though MC actually sends the email (after logging it). You can look at the “Audit Trail” to see exactly what has been sent out.

If the system has an incorrect email address for that person, the easiest approach seems to be to let MC generate the Invite email using the wrong address, and just edit it manually. Then add a short request to change their own address immediately within MC, so the system can route stuff rightly, something like the following.

```
I note that your email address in ManuscriptCentral is incorrect.  
I cannot change this, but you can, by logging into ManuscriptCentral  
and clicking the "Edit Account" link at the top right-hand corner.  
This will allow subsequent emails to be delivered correctly.
```

TODS policy requires three reviews for most papers (if the paper is quite poor, you can request only two reviews; if the paper is obviously unacceptable, you can desk reject it). I generally go with four reviewers, one more than required. If only three reviews are requested, and one of the reviewers is unresponsive, you are held hostage by the recalcitrant reviewer, a situation that happens rather frequently at other journals. One of the four reviewers is often someone I haven’t used before; I pick such people to broaden the reviewer pool. If I don’t have much experience with several of the reviewers, then I will ask a total of five reviewers, just for safety (more on this shortly).

The number of reviews that *you* feel is necessary to make a decision is indicated in the “Progress” indicator on the right. You can change this number whenever you wish: just enter a new number and click “Save”.

How is this number used? From MC’s Editor Guide: “Manuscripts move to the next task list/queue only after all requirements for the current task have been met or exceeded. For example, if a manuscript has one reviewer selected but two are required [as indicated in the Progress Indicator], the manuscript remains in the Select Reviewer task list until the second reviewer has been selected.” The possible tasks are listed on page 8. So if you only need three reviews, but asked for four, state that “3” are required. If you want to be notified only when all the reviews have been received, state that “4” are required.

¹²<http://www.acm.org/sigmod/DBLP>

See below for a discussion on the TODS “no overloading” policy, to be considered when selecting referees.

You invite each referee with an email message (“Invite Reviewers”) that specifies a deadline. It is *TODS* policy that a referee be given at least two months on a first formal review. I personally give my referees a full three months. There are two theories on this. One is that referees are deadline-driven, and so two months or three months is immaterial: they will do it the last week. The other theory is that some referees are insulted by short deadline requests, and simply ignore them. I’ve had experiences with journals that have taken eight to twelve months for a review of one of my papers, but then ask me to do a review in a few weeks. I tell such journals that I can get it done in three months, or not at all, but other referees just sit on the paper.

Email templates have portions automatically filled in by the system, like your return email address, the title and author of the paper, and the abstract. There are portions that you should fill in, indicated with “** . . . **”. (The elisions without asterisks are parts that MC fills in for you; you won’t see these elisions in MC.) For example, the referee invite letter has three such portions: “**MORE HERE IF NEEDED**” (to motivate why you are inviting this particular referee), “**THREE**” (to state how many months you are giving this referee), and “**DATE**” (where you can fill in the date the paper is due). In all cases, you simply delete out this prose and replace it with whatever you want to say.

You can also modify the rest of the email message in whatever way you see fit. For example, you may wish to use a less formal salutation. Some AEs, in areas where they have expertise, or am playing the skeptical pragmatist, include some notes on issues to all the reviewers, making it clear that the reviewers are free to ignore. Also, as discussed above, you might want to ask one or more reviewers to evaluate if 30% is really new.

Note that when editing email messages, MC will not automatically insert line breaks, though many email readers do. The templates do not have line breaks within paragraphs. So the line breaks shown in this document are those that would be displayed by an email reader that breaks every 80 characters (for illustration).

Dear ...:

I have just received a submission to the ACM Transactions on Database Systems (TODS) entitled "...". Attached is the abstract for this paper.

I would appreciate your guidance as to whether this paper is acceptable for publication in TODS. **MORE HERE IF NEEDED**

Once you accept my invitation to review this manuscript, you will be notified via e-mail about how to access Manuscript Central, our online manuscript submission and review system. You will then have access to the manuscript and reviewer instructions in your Reviewer Center.

I realize that our expert reviewers greatly contribute to the high standards of the Journal, and I thank you for your present and/or future participation.

Would you be willing to review this paper within **THREE** months, by **DATE**? Please e-mail me with your reply.

Sincerely,

...
TODS Associate Editor

P.S. ACM TODS recognizes that reviewing is a service to the profession. As such, TODS strives to not overload referees with TODS reviews. Specifically, TODS will not expect referees to formally review more than one TODS paper in any twelve-month period. Other rights are listed at

<http://www.acm.org/tods/Referees.html#rights>

MANUSCRIPT DETAILS

TITLE: ...

ABSTRACT: ...

Click on “Save and Send”; the letter goes out and is logged by the system.

The email message is written carefully to ask the referee whether they are willing to review the paper (this is *TODS* policy) and specifying a deadline for the review from them (also *TODS* policy). It is helpful to edit the message to explain why you think they are the perfect reviewer (generally in glowing terms; flattery helps here).

This email message includes an important postscript letting reviewers know their rights. (I don’t know of any other journal that does this.) Note that this postscript is carefully worded: “*TODS* will not *expect* referees to formally review more than one *TODS* paper in any twelve-month period.” But that doesn’t mean that a reviewer who is or has already reviewed a paper cannot be asked if s/he would be willing to review another one, with the stated understanding that they shouldn’t feel compelled to. What I do is add a sentence to the effect of, I know you are (or have been) reviewing another *TODS* submission. But I thought you would be especially interested in this submission, because ... However, if you are overloaded with reviewing, just let me know and I’ll find someone else.”

12. You should send out the initial requests for reviewers within a day or so of receiving the paper. Any delay at this point simply increases turnaround time while not reducing your workload one iota.

If you haven’t done this within two weeks (say, if for some reason an email to you was lost by a mailer), you will receive a reminder (“SW - Reviewer Selection now due”).

Dear ... ,

This is just a gentle reminder that Manuscript ID *TODS*-2000X-???? entitled "... " with ... as contact author is currently sitting in your Associate Editor Center at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods> .

This e-mail is a reminder that reviewer selections are now due.

Sincerely,

Rick

13. You wait for the responses, and sends followups after a few days. A followup is a manual email. The followup email sends a perhaps not-so-subtle indicator that the AE is organized and expects a fast response.
14. The reviewer responds to your email with a “yes” or a “no.” This is done with a manual email, outside of the system. If the reviewer states that they cannot do the review, respond very nicely (with a manual email). It is much better to receive a “no” to your request now than a “yes” followed later with a very late review. It is helpful to keep records, and stop asking if you receive repeated rejections from a prospective reviewer. (As of 2003 I have made over 500 requests for reviews, with 56 “too busy”

and 7 who just never responded, implying that over 85% of prospective reviewers agreed to do the review, which is really astounding to me and provides a striking indication of the professionalism of our community.)

At this point, the tracking system does not enforce the twelve-month policy for requesting reviews (although it could, because it has all the needed information). So we are relying on referees to tell us when they have previously reviewed a paper in the past twelve months. If they do so, expect that they are telling the truth, and thank them generously for their other review.

When a reviewer declines, select the “Declined” entry on the “Response” pull-down list to tell MC the status of the reviewer. This sends the “SW - Reviewer Declined” email, which you can edit (there are no replacements required).

Dear ...:

Thank you for replying to my invitation to review for the ACM Transactions on Database Systems.

I'm sorry that you are unable to review this manuscript at this time. I'll find someone else, and will keep you in mind when future manuscripts come in that fall under your area of expertise.

Sincerely,
...
TODS Associate Editor

When I receive a declination, I immediately go down my list (I generally start with a list of 5 or 6 names, and ask the first four). The tracking system should be used to send the invitation email, because it keeps records for you.

15. If the reviewer says yes, with an email sent to you, you respond with an acknowledgment sent through MC giving details on how to do the review, and explicitly stating the deadline again. You do this by selecting “Agreed” from the “Response” pulldown list. This opens another email (“Referee Agreed”), acknowledging the reviewer, and providing information on how to access the system. This has only one replacement needed: “**REQUESTED DATE**”.

Dear ...,

Thank you for agreeing to review the paper entitled "..." which has been submitted to ACM Transactions on Database Systems (TODS).

I would like to know if you believe this paper meets the standards of a TODS publication. If you like, you may return the manuscript with your suggested changes indicated to me.

To provide the authors with a timely response, I request that your review be returned within three months. I would greatly appreciate it if you could arrange for me to receive the review by **REQUESTED DATE**. Rest assured that we will pursue rapid reviewing of your TODS submissions with similar vigor. If you have difficulties with this deadline or are unable to review the paper, please let me know as soon as possible.

Please visit <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods> to view this paper and enter your review. This submission is paper TODS-200X-XXXX.

If you have never used this system before, you will need to specify your email address (the one listed above) as your User ID. The system will offer to send you a password, which you can then modify.

Anonymous verbatim copies of your review will be sent to the author. Copies of all completed reviews for a given paper will be sent to all reviewers of that paper. You will also be informed of the disposition of this paper. As you are aware, all manuscripts are to be treated confidentially. Please do not distribute or reference a manuscript under consideration.

I thank you in advance for your effort in maintaining a high quality archival journal and for adhering to the tight reviewing schedule. Your help and advice are appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you.

Papers for TODS must be of high quality and fall within the scope of the journal. There are four main ingredients to an acceptable paper.

1. The technical quality is high.
2. The relevance to the database community is high.
3. Interest and novelty is high.
4. The presentation is effective.

More referee guidelines may be found at

<http://www.acm.org/tods/Referees.html#Guidelines>

I ask that you read these guidelines, as they provide important considerations to be taken into account when reviewing a submission. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

...
Associate Editor, ACM TODS

The reviewer now has access to the paper. Under "Referee View Manuscripts," under the section "Review and Score" the reviewer can see the PDF as well as the review form (under "View Details") for all open reviews.

16. Sometimes a reviewer responds late, after you have assigned a sufficient number of reviewers. In such cases, you can select "Late Response" from the "Response" pull-down menu, which sends the following email ("SW - Reviewer Late Response"), which is editable.

Dear ...:

Recently, I invited you to review a manuscript for the ACM Transactions on Database Systems. However, it has since become apparent that I will not need you to review for the journal at this time. One less thing to worry about!

I hope in the future you will be able to review other manuscripts submitted to the journal.

Sincerely,

...
Associate Editor, ACM TODS

17. For a revision under review, MC notifies the AE, requesting an editorial decision within three months. You first click "Invite Referees" in the top right-hand corner, then clicks on the "Invite" button to the right of each referee to send them a request for them to review this revision. (I know: this is rather counter-intuitive; the button should be something like "Request Subsequent Review"). The email message (Revised workflow - Invite Reviewers, below) is much shorter than the original request, for the same reviewers should be used as with the original submission. For the second and subsequent reviews, you can specify a deadline shorter than two months.

Note that this letter is less formal than the first solicitation. (The reviewer's first name is used rather than his/her last name.)

Dear ... ,

Thank you for earlier preparing a review of the paper entitled "...''.

I have just received a revision of this paper. By TODS policy, the original reviewers are requested to examine the revision to see if it is acceptable for publication in ACM TODS.

To provide the authors with a timely response, I request that your review be returned within two months (I imagine that this review will be much faster than the first time around!).

Would you be willing to review this paper by **DATE**?

Sincerely,

...
Associate Editor, ACM TODS

18. If the reviewer says yes to this request to review a revised manuscript (the vast majority of reviewers will agree), with an email sent to you, you respond with an acknowledgment sent through MC giving details on how to do the review, and explicitly stating the deadline again. You do this by selecting "Agreed" from the "Response" pulldown list. This opens another email ("Referee Agreed Revision"), with only one replacement needed: "* *REQUESTED DATE* *".

Dear ... ,

Thank you for agreeing to review a revision of the paper entitled "..."

I would like to know if you believe this paper now meets the standards of a TODS publication. If you like, you may return the manuscript with your suggested changes indicated to me.

To provide the authors with a timely response, I request that your review be returned within two months. I would greatly appreciate it if you could arrange for me to receive the review by **REQUESTED DATE**.

Please visit <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods> to view this paper and enter your review. This submission is paper TODS-200X-XXXX.

I again thank you for your efforts in maintaining a high quality archival journal and for adhering to the tight reviewing schedule.

Sincerely,

...
Associate Editor, ACM TODS

Of course, the other responses (declined, late response, and no response) are also available, but rarely used. For the late response, here's the email ("Referee Late to Accept").

Dear ... ,

Thanks for getting back to me.

I've already identified a sufficient number of reviewers, so your review of "... " is not needed.

Sincerely,

...
Associate Editor, ACM TODS

In “View Manuscripts”, the reviewer has access to all of his/her reviews, under “Scores Submitted” (the open reviews are listed separately, under “Review and Score”).

When a reviewer agrees to review a revised manuscript, and you designate so in MC, the revised manuscript appears under ”Review and Score”. Also in View Manuscripts is the original submission (under ”Scores Submitted”), with the original PDF, the reviewer’s original review (under ”View Details”), the decision letter (under ”view decision letter”), and the author’s response, under ”Response to Decision Letter”. Hence, the reviewer has all they need for their review of the revised manuscript.

19. Within a week, you should have four or five reviewers who have agreed to referee the paper. It is helpful to then send a manual email to the author, giving a date (about three weeks after the deadline promised by the reviewers) for a decision. This dramatically reduces the concern of the author, because it (again, not so subtly) conveys to the author that you have things under control. It is good form to let authors know when they can expect a decision. You can click on the author’s name to send this email, which will then ensure that it is logged.

I use the following for my manual email.

This is to acknowledge receipt of your manuscript, entitled ”...,” which you submitted on ... for publication in the ACM Transactions on Database Systems. Your paper has been assigned to me for processing.

I have sent your paper to several reviewers. The decision on whether the paper should be published will be made on the basis of their reports.

I expect that a review of your paper will be completed within a few months. I will let you know as soon as a decision has been made. In any case, I will contact you by ... to let you know of the status of the review.

Again, if this is a manuscript authored by one of the AEs, such correspondence should be sent indirectly, through the EiC.

20. If you never hear from a reviewer after asking for a review, that is a bad sign. Such people are generally very unreliable and should be used sparingly if at all. You should send a “No Response” letter (“SW - Reviewer No Response”) through the “Response” pulldown. This is editable.

Dear ...:

Because I have not heard from you regarding reviewing the manuscript entitled "...” for the ACM Transactions on Database Systems, I assume you are unable to review for the journal at this time.

I hope in the future you will be able to review other manuscripts submitted to the journal.

Sincerely,

...

TODS Associate Editor

Even though this reviewer has been somewhat insulting by not even responding to your solicitation, it is important to remember that you are asking for volunteer effort, and so this email is worded quite gently.

21. The total time you will have invested thus far, including responding to emails, is perhaps two hours. The system does not handle reminders, so that duty requires you to keep track of things. I keep a calendar, with two dates, all on Mondays: one for an email reminder sent two months after the reviewer agreed, or equivalently, one month before the review is due, and one the day after the deadline for the review, asking for the status. I then forget about the paper.
22. If a referee responds way later to a request for a review, the system can send a “Review Late Response” email, which is a gentle “thanks, but no thanks.” While this email is editable, it has no replacements.

Dear . . . :

Recently, I invited you to review a manuscript for the ACM Transactions on Database Systems. However, it has since become apparent that I will not need you to review for the Journal at this time. One less thing to worry about!

I hope in the future you will be able to review other manuscripts submitted to the Journal.

Sincerely,

. . .

TODS Associate Editor

It is very important to always treat authors and referees kindly, even when they do aggressive or abusive or irresponsible things. The journal lives and dies by its authors and referees; treat them as you would like to be treated.

23. (Optional) Each Monday, I check my *TODS* calendar, which is a simple text file listed in date order. When the first date rolls around, I send out an first reminder email. This can be done by simply clicking on the referee’s name. (I used to send out postal mail, but I’ve found that that is no longer needed. Also, it would be much better if MC sent these out automatically, but that is not possible at this time, because MC insists on a global review period for all papers submitted to the journal.)

Here is what I send out for the first reminder, inserted by cut and paste from a template file.

Dear . . . ,

Thank you for agreeing to review the paper entitled “. . .” for the ACM Transactions on Database Systems.

This is just a friendly reminder. I would greatly appreciate your arranging for me to receive the review by Monday, . . . Please go to <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods> to enter your review.

All of the reviewers have agreed to this deadline, and I plan to respond back to the authors within a day or two of receiving the reviews. If completing your review by that date now looks unlikely, please contact me immediately so that I can locate another reviewer.

I realize that doing a quality review takes significant time, and I appreciate your willingness to take on this important task.

Sincerely,

This serves to make the commitment more firm, and adds a sense of urgency to the review.

24. When the second date rolls around, I send out a second reminder to each reviewer, also by email.

Thank you for agreeing to review a TODS submission. If by chance you never received the paper, please let me know immediately.

Please go to <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods> to enter your review.

Your efforts in reviewing this paper in a timely fashion are most appreciated.

Sincerely,

Rick

This takes all of fifteen minutes. I then forget about the paper again.

25. The referee goes to the system to view the paper (and most likely print it out) and later to enter their review. The review is done on-line, but the reviewer can attach files (such as output from L^AT_EX or Word).

The reviewer sees two sections: “Review & Score” and “Scores Submitted.” The first section lists manuscripts for review; the second lists those manuscripts already reviewed by that person, including prior versions of the revised manuscript in review. Reviewers can see their review as well as decision letters and responses by reviewers to the decision letter.

When a reviewer views the PDF, that single file (which is also accessible to you) contains all the materials submitted by the author (manuscript, comments, whatever).

26. As the referee is reading the paper, they may come across an anonymous citation that they are curious about. The guidelines to reviewers states, “Should you [the referee] need access to the material referenced by anonymous citations (those stating “details omitted due to double-blind reviewing”), say to judge the novelty requirement, simply notify the Associate Editor handling this paper and give your reason and the full citation will be revealed to you.” The procedure is clear on your authority: “It is completely up to the AE to decide which reviewers should be told about an anonymous citation.” If the reviewer gives a reasonable reason for needing to know this information, then that information can be provided, thereby partially unblinding the submission. An example where it might be better to keep the manuscript blinded would be if one reviewer wished to ensure that the paper had made a sufficient contribution over past work, but you had already designated that task to other reviewer(s). You could then just explain to the reviewer that they needn’t worry about that requirement, that it is already being checked.
27. When the review is submitted by the referee, MC sends an **automatically-generated** thank you note to the reviewer (“Thank You to Referee”), with a BCC to you (so that you know that a review has been submitted). (In this manual, we highlight the few email messages that are automatically generated by MC.)

Dear ,

Thank you for your review of the paper "...".

I realize the effort that such reviews require, and I appreciate your help and cooperation.

Sincerely,

. . .

Associate Editor, ACM TODS

The reviewer can later go into MC and view their review.

28. You go into MC, which shows that the review has been received. Clicking on the paper then on "View Review Form" opens up another window with the review.

Some reviews have prose (e.g., "very little contribution") inconsistent with the overall recommendation (e.g., "minor revision"). You should go back to the reviewer on such reviews, because it is important that both you and the author understand the review. Some reviewers want to hide behind an overly positive summary recommendation that is inconsistent with the body of their review; (gently) do not let them do so. In the past, I've asked a reviewer if I can change their review to "Reject", because it seemed that they didn't want to see it again. If they say "Major Revision" then they have to feel that it is fixable and that they would be willing to review it again.

Some reviews are simply inadequate or inappropriate: they are too short, or use inflammatory language, or otherwise do not reflect well on the reviewer or on the journal. It is important to work with the reviewers to obtain a review that is appropriate. Again, this must be handled outside the system.

Occasionally it is useful to engage in a discussion with two or more reviewers, if the reviewers disagree and if you feel that a discussion might shed light on the reviews and help you with your decision. ACM policy¹³ has this to say.

"Editors and administrators of ACM publications must keep the identities of all reviewers of particular manuscripts hidden from authors, other reviewers, and the public. Identities of reviewers may be divulged to members of a publication's Editorial Board or to ACM staff as needed to solicit expert advice in special circumstances. In such cases, identities of a reviewer may also be made known to other reviewers of the same manuscript, provided that the consent of all affected reviewers is obtained. Reviewers must also maintain the confidentiality of reviewer identities, as well as the reviews themselves, that are communicated to them at any time."

If an editorial decision *has not* been made, and you wish to change a review, ask the EiC to do it, as an admin. The admin should go into "Make a Decision" and look at the "Reviews" panel on the right. There is a "rescind" button below the reviewer's name and to the right of the reviewer's recommendation. Clicking that button causes the review to be available for modification by the reviewer. You

¹³http://www.acm.org/pubs/reviewer_anonymity.html

would then send a manual email (by clicking on the reviewer's name), asking that reviewer to go into MC and modify their review, and then then resubmit it. When they do so, this will result in another **automatically-generated** thank-you note.

If you've already made an editorial decision, no review contributing to that decision can be rescinded. You can add or remove reviews anytime. However, the procedure is a little different once the required number of reviews is reached.

Say you asked for three reviews and have gotten those reviews. The paper goes into "Make Decision" mode. You then want to add a reviewer.

The Save button on Manuscript Information doesn't work. What you have to do is go into the Make Decision tab, change the "# reviews required to make decision" to four, then hit save. The tab will change to Select Referees and you can add a referees.

Similarly, say you asked for three reviews, but two reviews were sufficient for you to make your decision. You can cancel the third review, then change the required number of reviews to two, and the tab will change to "Make Decision."

29. It is important to get on late reviewers. On the day following the deadline for the reviews of a paper, I generally have received two or three reviews. You should manually send a short email to the laggards, asking (gently) about the status of the review, and mentioning that other reviews are in hand. If they ask for an extension, give one, but only for a week. If the reviewer says that it will be two weeks or more, thank the reviewer and then gently cancel the review. I generally call reviewers only when they have not been responsive, as a last resort.
30. If you originally asked for four reviews, you can easily cancel one, and still have the required number. A few times I have received an adequate number of reviews, and so have nicely canceled a reviewer who hadn't yet started the review. You can dis-invite a referee by clicking selecting the "Response" pulldown of "late Response", as discussed above. *(Note: If you still have reviews requested when you make a decision, those reviewer(s) will be automatically sent a message that cannot be edited, as discussed below. If you would like to edit the message, dis-invite them before recording your decision.)*
31. If two or more reviewers flake out (hopefully a very infrequent situation), there is the alternative of asking a knowledgeable friend for a fast review, in a week or two. This is a big favor to ask, but a reasonable one if done rarely. Or you can do a review yourself.
32. Once the required number of reviews have been received, MC lets you know, via the "SW - Awaiting AE Decision" message (though you don't have to wait for all reviews: see above).

Dear . . . ,

All required reviews have been returned by the reviewers for Manuscript ID ... entitled "... " with ... as contact author.

Please look at the reviews and make an editorial decision.

Sincerely,

You read through the reviews and compose the decision letter. This step takes the most time of all. Click “Make Decision” then “Post Decision” which brings up a “Comments to Editorial Center” and a Final Decision. Click on “Finalize Decision” to bring up the decision letter.

If this manuscript has been authored by an AE, the email addresses for the decision letter should be changed to remove all the authors, and be sent instead to the EiC, who will forward it to the authors. *Note:* the AE should also remove his or her email address from the decision letter, as the decision letter will be visible to the author. The easiest thing to do is to have the letter from and to the EiC. The EiC, after sending this letter to the authors, will forward a copy to the AE, for their records (that email will be out of the scope of MC).

The most time-consuming task of an AE is to deal with vague or conflicting reviews. Sometimes the AE even has to go back and read portions of the paper to make sense of the reviews. Your insight and experience is what you are paid for (!) in your role of AE. It might help to recall that the reviewers are just providing advice to you, advice you can disagree with or at times ignore altogether. (In such cases you need to explain your decision to the authors, so that they understand it.) This is the most subjective part of the entire process, and necessarily so.

There are four possible editorial decisions.

Accept The paper is fully acceptable, perhaps modulo a few minor corrections. It is fine to request the final version to check to ensure that those corrections—indicated very specifically in your letter—have been made adequately.

Minor Revision The paper is very close, but you want to see one last version before accepting the paper. This indicates to the author that you are serious about the changes you requested. Minor revisions rarely go back to the reviewers, and even if they do, it’s more for a sanity check than a formal review.

Major Revision The paper has significant problems that must be fixed before the paper is acceptable, but there is a good possibility that these changes can be made (otherwise the paper should be rejected). Major revisions are given more time (but again, no more than six months); four months are the norm. Major revisions also generally go back to the reviewers for a formal review, though that is not required—it is your call. (Note that a series of two or even more major revision decisions is possible, and indeed occurs several times a year.)

Reject It turns out that most papers are rejected on the first round; somewhat less than half are rejected on the second round (it is rare for a paper to go more than two rounds and still be rejected).

For revisions, these four possibilities also exist. Most papers are rejected on the first round. A very few are accepted or are requested for minor revision on the first round. For major revisions, more than half are accepted on the second round, but a significant number are rejected. A few papers have a major revision decision for the second round, and undergo a third round of reviewing. As always, the decision is entirely that of the AE, using the reviews as advice for this decision, advice that can be accepted or ignored.

We now examine each decision letter in turn.

There are two accept decisions: Accept and Accept for First Look. The latter decision will automatically send the manuscript back to the author upon acceptance. The letter templates are very similar: the Accept for First Look just has two additional paragraph explaining to the author how to look at the manuscript. For years, *TODS* has had the normal Accept decision. The Accept for First Look was added in late 2006; AEs are suggested to use this decision. Eventually the old Accept decision will probably be dropped.

The decision letter for accept (“Accept” in “Decision Letters”) is as follows. There are several places where you need to change the letter: “**NUMBER**” of reviews (MC knows that but doesn’t know how to put it in the letter), “**PERIOD FROM INITIAL SUBMISSION TO NOW**” (which MC also knows, but which you have to compute yourself), “**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS IF NEEDED**”, and “**DATE**”, which you calculate as one month from today (it is important to give this deadline, otherwise authors can take forever to prepare their final version of their accepted paper). You are free to allow more or less time for the final version.

The maximum length of their paper should be stated, if the paper can be shortened through use of electronic appendices. The maximum length is 45 *TODS* pages, though you are free to specify a shorter length (our goal is an average of 33 pages). This appears in two places, as “**45**”.

Note that the authors are identified in the salutation, and so will be revealed to the reviewers. This is OK, as the reviewers will find out anyway when the paper appears in print. We might as well let them in on the good news now.

All of the decision letters include the referee comments (that portion to be communicated to the author). All are CCed to the EiC. The accept letter is also CCed to Jono Hardjowirogo, Publisher, ACM Journals, Office of Publications, jono@hq.acm.org.

Dear ...,

I have received **NUMBER** reviews, attached, of your paper entitled “...” which you submitted for publication in the ACM Transactions on Database Systems. Attachments to these reviews may be available at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods>

The reviewers were quite prompt with their reviews, reducing the period from initial submission (on ...) to final decision to less than **PERIOD FROM INITIAL SUBMISSION TO NOW** months.

On the basis of the reviews and my own reading of the paper, I am pleased to accept the paper for publication in ACM Transactions on Database Systems. I feel that this paper is very well written and makes an important contribution. The high quality of this paper is consistent with that associated with *TODS*. You are to be commended for the manner in which you responded to the initial reviews in this version of the paper.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS IF NEEDED

The reviewers did have some minor comments. Please finalize your manuscript, addressing these issues, and send it to me. I ask that you do so within one month, by **DATE**, as we are attempting to reduce the time to publication.

ONLY IF NECESSARY: can state shorter than 45 pages
Your paper (the core of the paper, including the bibliography) should be no longer than **45** pages in the *TODS* format. Additional material can appear as an electronic appendix, pointed to by the paper. Both the core of the paper and the electronic appendix will appear in the ACM DL, but only the core of the paper will appear in the print copy. An example from the March 2004 issue of *TODS* is <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/974750.974756> which has a 13-page electronic appendix referenced in the core of the paper. Reducing the core of your paper to **45** *TODS* pages is a requirement for acceptance.

\begin{verbatim}

Please unblind your manuscript by undoing the changes you applied when blinding your manuscript for submission. Note that the discussion of underlying papers required by the *TODS* novelty requirement should be retained in your final version.

Note that the ACM Publications Board has decided to adopt the Computing

Surveys style of references. Please ensure that your final manuscript is consistent with that style. Also, please format your final version according to the directives found at

<http://www.acm.org/pubs/submissions/submission.htm>

At your earliest convenience, please forward to Mr. Jono Hardjowirogo (jono@hq.acm.org) the following materials needed in order for us to proceed with the publication production of your paper:

- * Postscript or PDF file of the final version of your article for reference and copy editing
- * Original File (in LaTeX or Word) for processing
- * All original artwork in .eps format as close as possible to their final publication size

Once your paper has been scheduled for publication in a specific issue, you will be notified by ACM HQ. You will receive a copyright release form and other relevant documents (e.g., page charge form, reprint order form) from ACM. You will also be informed as to when you can expect to receive the proof of your paper, so that you can go over it prior to publication. Finally, you will be contacted by Professor Curtis Dyreson, ACM TODS Information Director, so that he can put an electronic version on the web as soon as possible.

I thank you for selecting TODS to publish the results of your work.

Sincerely,

...
Associate Editor, ACM TODS

Title: ...

Authors: ...

Date Initially Submitted: ...

Revision date(s): ...

The “Accept for First Look” template has two additional paragraphs.

Your paper has been returned to your author center for you to review and make any final changes or corrections prior to production and publication.

You will find your manuscript in your author center under the list "Manuscripts Accepted for First Look." Click on the link to "submit updated manuscript" and follow the steps as you would during a manuscript submission process.

For an Accept decision, MC also sends a letter to Jono Hardjowirogo, ACM Publisher as well as the TODS Information Director, informing them that the paper has been accepted, CCing the EiC. (This letter, “Decision To Publisher,” can be modified by the AE.) Since this letter is not sent to the authors, it need not be changed even if the identity of the AE is confidential.

Jono (and Curtis),

The following manuscript has been accepted for publication in the ACM Transactions on Database Systems.

Identifier: TODS-2005-XXXX

Title: ...

Authors: ...

The authors had been instructed to submit the final manuscript and its corresponding illustrations directly to you at the ACM HQ.

Sincerely,

...

On any paper that has been accepted, if you click on the Manuscript Files tab, you will find a link "Click here to send the manuscript back to the author." This link will generate an email to the author to let him know that the paper was sent back.

Any papers that have been sent back to the author (either manually or with the decision) will be listed in the "Accepted Manuscripts Sent Back to Author" queue in your Admin and Production Centers.

For a minor revision, the following letter is sent. There are six adjustments needed: "**NUMBER**", "**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, AS NEEDED**", "**two (2)**", "**DUE DATE**" and two instances of "**45**". The number of months needed for a minor revision is up to you (as long as it doesn't exceed six months). However, if only a minor revision is needed, then presumably the author can complete that revision rather quickly. Recognize that the author will take all the time you give him or her, independent of the amount of time the revision will actually take. State an appropriate amount of time. Most minor revisions should be given only a month. This minor revision letter also contains the page restriction. Again, please adjust the required page length as appropriate.

If it is possible that this revision may go back to the reviewers, please leave the salutation as "Dear author;". If you plan to make the final decision without consulting the reviewers, you can replace the salutation with a more personal one.

It is helpful, especially if the reviews are inconsistent with each other, to provide guidance to the author as to which concerns are predominate.

Dear author,

I have received **NUMBER** reviews, enclosed, of your paper entitled ..., which you submitted for publication in the ACM Transactions on Database Systems.

These reviews, all by recognized experts in the field, have obviously been prepared with care.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, AS NEEDED

The reviews agree that this is an interesting paper that makes a substantial contribution. On the basis of the reviews and my own reading of the paper, I am pleased to accept the paper for publication in TODS, conditional on receiving a revision that addresses the concerns identified in the reviews.

Please submit your revision via <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods> I ask that you include comments to each of the reviewers, with the reviewer identified by number, indicating how you have addressed each of the points raised in the review. I also ask that you format your paper according to the TODS format.

****ONLY IF NECESSARY: can state shorter than 45 pages****
Your paper (the core of the paper, including the bibliography) should be no longer than **45** pages in the TODS format. Additional material can appear as an electronic appendix, pointed to by the paper. Both the core of the paper and the electronic appendix will appear in the ACM DL, but only the core of the paper will appear in the print copy. An example from the March 2004 issue of TODS is <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/974750.974756> which has a 13-page electronic appendix referenced in the core of the paper. Reducing the core of your paper to **45** TODS pages is a requirement for acceptance.

To revise your manuscript, log into <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods> and enter your Author Center, where you will find your manuscript title listed under "Manuscripts with Decisions." Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision.

You will be unable to make your revisions on the originally submitted version of the manuscript. Instead, revise your manuscript using a word processing program and save it on your computer. Please also highlight the

changes to your manuscript within the document by using the track changes mode in MS Word or by using bold or colored text.

Once the revised manuscript is prepared, you can upload it and submit it through your Author Center.

When submitting your revised manuscript, you will be able to respond to the comments made by the reviewer(s) in the space provided. You can use this space to document any changes you make to the original manuscript. In order to expedite the processing of the revised manuscript, please be as specific as possible in your response to the reviewer(s).

IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.

We are now trying to minimize the time to publication. This requires help from both the reviewers and the authors. Please ensure that I receive the revision within **one (1)** month, that is, by **DUE DATE**.

I thank you for selecting TODS to publish the results of your work.

Sincerely,

...
Associate Editor, ACM TODS

There is a place in MC to state the revision due date. This can be set to the actual date, or to say the end of the month containing the due date, to give the author a little leeway. Once this date passes, the author is forbidden by MC from revising their paper. If the AE wishes to extend the deadline for the revision (which is fine, if the AE feels that there is a good reason to do so), go to the submission for which the editorial decision was revision (generally the initial submission) via “Switch Details” under “Version History.” Click on the calendar within “Peer Review Milestones,” click on the new date, and then click “Save”. (Note that this calendar may be on the “Manuscript Information” page of the original submission or of the revision in draft; check both manuscripts to find this calendar.

For a major revision, the following letter is sent. There are seven adjustments needed: “**NUMBER**” of reviews, “**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, AS NEEDED**”, “**NUMBER**” of months for the revision, the “**DUE DATE**”, and two instances of “**45**”.

The due date is from one to six months (*TODS* policy states that it cannot exceed six months). For major revisions, less than two months is rare (otherwise, it would probably be a minor revision), but there is fine to give less than six months, especially if no additional experiments are requested. It serves our readers, and thus indirectly the authors, to push the process along as much as possible.

For major revisions, it is important to provide feedback to the author. You need to indicate fairly specifically what is required to achieve an acceptable paper (though the author may decide not to do what is required, or not be able to do what is asked). Here you can indicate which objections raised by the reviewers are serious and must be addressed, which are optional, and which you don’t agree with (in the end, the acceptance decision is yours and yours alone, so all three categories of comments are very useful to the author).

It is helpful to employ prose in your letter that refers to the paper, not the author, and to the review, not the reviewer. For example, “The paper’s understanding of . . . needs to be improved” will be accepted better than the roughly equivalent “The author’s understanding of . . . needs to be improved” and “The reviewer did not read the paper carefully” could be better stated as “The review covers part of the issue well, but . . .”. The idea is to avoid making your letter personal. A person who writes a bad paper or bad review is not a bad person, necessarily! Note that reviewers will see your letter to the authors, so be diplomatic to them and to the authors.

As mentioned above, it is fine to request a major revision of a paper that has already been revised, if

major concerns remain. In that case, please be very clear as to what concerns *must* be addressed in this second major revision.

For papers that have already undergone two major revisions, if there are still remaining concerns, the paper should be rejected, as the authors have had plenty of opportunity, but have failed, to realize an acceptable paper.

There is also a page length requirement. Use your best judgment on how restrictive to be. Note however that it is easier to be restrictive now than later.

Note that you should not include information in the body of the letter, including the salutation, that would identify any of the authors to the reviewers, who will be sent the body of this letter.

Dear author,

I have received ****NUMBER**** reviews, enclosed, of your paper entitled "...", which you submitted for publication in the ACM Transactions on Database Systems. (Attachments to these reviews may be available at the URL mentioned below.)

These reviews, all by recognized experts in the field, have obviously been prepared with care. The reviews appear to agree on the following points.

****ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, AS NEEDED****

On the basis of these evaluations, I suggest that you substantially revise the paper, addressing the comments of the reviewers, and submit the paper for another round of review. It appears that there is the possibility that you can satisfactorily resolve the problems present in this draft, thereby achieving a paper suitable for publication in TODS.

I ask that you also include comments to each of the reviewers, with the reviewer identified by number, indicating how you have addressed each of the points raised in the review. It is important that the revised paper be as solid as possible, addressing all of the major concerns, and addressing in a satisfactory way the remaining, smaller concerns.

I also ask that you format your paper according to the TODS format.

****ONLY IF NECESSARY: can state shorter than 45 pages****
Your paper (the core of the paper, including the bibliography, but not the appendices) should be no longer than ****45**** pages in the TODS format. Additional material can appear as an appendix. Reducing the core of your paper to ****45**** TODS pages is required.

To revise your manuscript, log into <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods> and enter your Author Center, where you will find your manuscript title listed under "Manuscripts with Decisions." Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision.

You will be unable to make your revisions on the originally submitted version of the manuscript. Instead, revise your manuscript using a word processing program and save it on your computer. Please also highlight the changes to your manuscript within the document by using the track changes mode in MS Word or by using bold or colored text.

Once the revised manuscript is prepared, you can upload it and submit it through your Author Center.

When submitting your revised manuscript, you will be able to respond to the comments made by the reviewer(s) in the space provided. You can use this space to document any changes you make to the original manuscript. In order to expedite the processing of the revised manuscript, please be as specific as possible in your response to the reviewer(s).

IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.

We are now trying to minimize the time to publication. This requires cooperation from the reviewers and the authors. The reviewers have done their part, by preparing their reviews in such a timely manner. Please ensure that I receive the revision within ****NUMBER**** months, that is, by ****DUE DATE****. To submit your revision, please go to <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods>

If I do not hear from you within this period, I will assume that you do not wish to revise the paper, and any future revision will be considered as a new submission.

Thank you for submitting your paper to ACM Transactions on Database Systems.

Sincerely,

...
Associate Editor, ACM TODS

The further revision email (“Further Revision Needed” in “Decision Letters”) starts out “Neither the reviewers nor I are are satisfied that the paper is ready for publication.” This is a signal that the authors really need to get on the ball if they wish to have their paper accepted.

In that email, you should not include information in the body of the letter, including the salutation, that would identify any of the authors to the reviewers, who will be sent the body of this letter.

For a rejection, the following email (“Reject”, or of a revision, “Reject Revised Manuscript”, both in “Decision Letters”) is sent. There are only two adjustments: “**NUMBER**” of reviews and “**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, AS NEEDED**” Note that the reason given is “inadequate contribution.” For many papers, there will be a different reason, so be sure to edit this message so that it conveys the appropriate reason. The authors have made a good-faith effort to produce an acceptable paper (assume this, even for horribly-written papers), and so the journal owes it to them to provide a carefully-stated rationale for this (often quite painful) editorial decision. You can go over your objections and rationale at great length, or you can simply point to the reviews, if they are adequate.

Desk rejections are a special case, because there generally aren’t attached reviews. In this case, your rejection letter should be more substantial, basically a mini-review.

It is important to realize that it is not your job to tell the author how to write an acceptable paper. That skill can only be learned through much practice and appropriate mentoring; many authors never achieve a *TODS* paper. The rejection letter should focus instead on the inadequacies of the submitted manuscript, so that the author has a clear understanding of the editorial decision.

Note that you should not include information in the body of the letter, including the salutation, that would identify any of the authors to the reviewers, who will be sent the body of this letter.

This is an advantage of double-blind review, as reviewers will not know the identity of authors whose previous submission has been rejected from *TODS*, thus not biasing reviews of future submissions by any of these authors.

Dear ...,

I have received **NUMBER** reviews, attached, of your paper entitled "...," which you submitted on ... for consideration for the ACM Transactions on Database Systems. Attachments to the reviews may be available at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tods>

These reviews, all by recognized experts in the field, have obviously been prepared with care.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, IF NEEDED

The reviewers agree that the topic is highly relevant to TODS and that the paper is well written. There were many specific concerns voiced, which probably could be addressed in a rewrite. However, the reviewers were also unanimous in their assessment that the paper makes an inadequate contribution. It appears that even a substantial revision will not satisfy the reviewers on this, the most important consideration.

On the basis of the reviews (and my own reading of the paper), I regret that I cannot further consider this paper for publication in TODS.

I hope you will find the reviews useful in revising the manuscript for publication consideration in another outlet.

I thank you for your interest in TODS.

Sincerely,

...
Associate Editor, ACM TODS

It is often useful to end the rejection letter on a positive note. I have heard cases where young scholars have simply given up after a particularly scathing review or rejection letter. Tell the author something you like about the paper (which can sometimes be challenging to identify!) and encourage the author to press on. As a personal aside, here is a note I received that illustrates this point.

Hi Rick—

I thought that I'd fire off a quick email and let you know that the paper I'd submitted to TODS in the Fall (that was rejected) was accepted by Just wanted to thank you for the encouraging note that you sent after the paper was rejected. For someone who is just starting out, it is easy to feel like it's the end of the world when a paper you'd spent months writing and worrying about gets a short, abrupt rejection. Your note took a lot of the sting out. I definitely appreciated it.

33. If there were still reviews that had not yet been submitted, and you made an editorial decision, MC **automatically** sends an email (“SW - Reviewer Scores no longer needed”) when the editorial decision has been made. This is not editable.

Dear ... ,

Recently, I asked you to review Manuscript ID ... , entitled "...." Since the other referees sent their reviews by the deadline, I proceeded to make a decision on the basis of the reviews received. I thank you for the time and effort that you may have already put in evaluating this paper.

I hope you will be able to review other manuscripts in the near future.

Sincerely,

...

34. For a major or minor revision, once the author submits their revision, MC **automatically** sends the following email to the handling AE (“Revised Paper Submitted Associate Editor”).

....

A revision entitled "..." has been submitted by ... as
TODS-200X-????R1.

As this is a revision, please make your editorial decision for this paper within three months.

Thanks,

Rick

As mentioned in Section 5, revised manuscripts require less time to handle, so I will request three months and expect four months. By *TODS* policy, you should use the original reviewers, except perhaps for reviewers who were comfortable with the paper the first time around.

To send a request to a review, click on the “Agreed” button by the reviewer’s name.

35. Once you’ve made an editorial decision, You should forward a copy of your decision letter to each reviewer separately, as mentioned in the automatic letter sent out by MC. It is best to do this from within MC, by clicking on the reviewer’s name, and pasting the decision letter.

Important! When you forward your decision letter, please be sure to delete the authors' names, unless your decision was an accept, in which case it is OK to reveal the identity of the authors.

36. Authors will occasionally ask for an extension to the due date for a revision. This decision is up to you, except for papers scheduled for special issues (invited from conferences), in which case coordination between papers is needed. An extension of a few weeks is generally reasonable. If an author asks for a longer period of time (especially if this request comes right at the last moment), consider whether the revision would constitute basically rewriting the paper. In such cases, I send out something like the following.

I have received your request for an additional three months to revise your manuscript. Given that this is on top of the original six months originally requested, it seems to me that the changes are more extensive than I had originally thought. The resulting paper appears to be a substantially different paper than just a major revision of the original submission.

If indeed the revision is only a major revision, it seems that you could complete it within the next two weeks, by ... But if more time is needed to prepare a substantially different paper, then I will change the decision to reject. You can later submit the paper as a new submission, which will undergo review by a different set of reviewers, perhaps under a different Associate Editor, as decided by the Editor-in-Chief.

Such a note sends a strong message to the author that we're serious about TODS deadlines.

Note that if a new submission is substantially similar to a previous submission, and I catch this (which doesn't always happen...), I will contact the AE handling the previous submission to ask if this new submission should even be handled. The prose above implicitly indicates that the EiC might now allow the paper to be reviewed again.

37. (Optional) You may want to periodically (say, once a year) send a letter to the reviewers you used during that time, thanking them once again for their help. When I do this, my secretary does the mail merge.

In summary, you will spend perhaps three hours the week you receive the submission, less than an hour during the next three months, and a few hours the last week, a total of less than one day per submission.

If you follow this process, you will spend almost no time nagging laggard reviewers, no time apologizing to irate authors who have waited too long for a decision, and no time apologizing to the EiC for a late decision. You will have few papers on your desk, because submissions are processed and filed within a few days. And you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your reviewers feel appreciated for work well done and your authors will appreciate the fast response you provide for their submissions.

When an author submits a major revision, the entire process starts again. The revision should be submitted through MC so that a complete record is kept of the interaction.

Generally the author provides a single document that responds to all the reviewers' comments, though occasionally a response is prepared for each reviewer. In that case, my recommendation would be to send all to each reviewer, as each reviewer has seen all the reviews, and might be interested to read how the authors responded to a concern of one of the other reviewers. However, this is your call.

When an author goes in MC in the "Author Center", they see a table "Submitted Manuscripts". The column "Processing Status" shows a short message. This status starts out as "Submitted". When the EiC

has passed the manuscript on to an AE, the status changes to “With Associate Editor”. When the first referee is assigned, the status changes to “With Referees”. When the first referee submits their review, the status changes to “With Associate Editor”. (This is a little strange, because the AE is probably waiting for the remaining reviews.) When the AE has made the editorial decision, the status changes to “Decision (View Letter)” and the author has access to the decision letter and the reviews.

Each major or minor revision editorial decision comes with a deadline. If you have not received the revision by that deadline, send the corresponding author a gentle email reminding them of the deadline, and asking them if they are going to be submitting a revision. If they want a week or two extension, that is usually fine. Sometimes authors decide not to resubmit. They rarely tell the AE this, which is why a reminder email is usually necessary. (While the revision decision letter states “If I do not hear from you within this period, I will assume that you do not wish to revise the paper,” this prose is there to signal that we are serious about the deadline. But it seems draconian to reject a paper that arrives a day after the deadline.)

If the author decided not to submit a revision (generally because they are uncertain they will be able to address the reviewers’ concerns), please ask them to go into MC and withdraw the revision submission, to terminate processing of this manuscript. Alternatively, the AE can click on the “Manuscript Files” tab on the left and scroll down to “Click here to withdraw the manuscript” to do this for the author.

Finally, you can access all the papers still in flight that you are handling in the Editor Center. From the Report Menu in the Editor Center, you can see Manuscripts Accepted and Manuscript Rejected reports.

6 Psychological Factors

I’ve found it is important to motivate people, primarily reviewers, to do the right thing. The following psychological considerations are central to the process.

- Potential reviewers should not receive papers before their assistance with a submission has been confirmed. Doing so annoys reviewers, and invariably increases turnaround time. Doing so is also against ACM policy.
- Reviewers, in accepting the paper, implicitly commit to the stated review deadline. Those few who agree to review the paper, but mention that they probably won’t be able to make the deadline, are politely thanked, but are not sent the paper.
- Reviewers are given a reasonable time to review the paper. I always give first submissions three months of reviewing time, and revised submissions two months, though some AEs give less time. (*TODS* policy requires two months for an initial review.)

Some journals, including some prominent ones, request a ridiculously short reviewing period, like a few weeks or perhaps a month. In my view, this back fires. The reviewer thinks, “this is an inappropriate request, so I will just ignore it, and take however long it takes,” thus resulting in very long turnaround times.

- The letter reminder and the email reminder both ask the reviewer to let you know if anything has transpired that would cause them to miss the agreed upon deadline. This forms an implied acceptance of the deadline by the reviewer. So when the deadline rolls around, the reviewer has agreed to the deadline *three* separate times, and so is much more likely to meet that deadline, to avoid the shame of missing it.

- When I contact laggard reviewers by email the day after the deadline, that sends a message that I am very organized and expect them to adhere to the deadline. Contacting them a week after the deadline would not have this effect. When a reviewer does not respond to email within a day or so (this is often a bad sign—they usually haven't even started reading the paper, much less writing up their review), I phone them.
- I thank reviewers four times, always explicitly: when they accept a paper for review, when they submit their review, when I send them the editorial decision, and later, by letter. It is important that they understand that I know how much work a good review entails, and that I appreciate their effort.
- I sometimes use printed correspondence; when I do, I often put a handwritten note at the bottom. Close personal interaction is key. I enjoy the exchange, as I often get to know the personality of the reviewer through their review and also our email exchanges, which makes the whole process very satisfying.
- Reviewers appreciate seeing the other reviews of the papers they read. This over time helps them to calibrate their reviews, and settles the community on a somewhat uniform standard.
- I always promise that I will treat their submissions with similar responsiveness, to emphasize the multiple roles we all play.
- I am happy to write promotion letters for my reviewers, especially ones who have done a good job.
- The projected decision date I give authors is always several weeks later than I expect to have that decision, for two reasons. One, I don't want to exceed this deadline, if the reviewing goes slower than expected. Also, I don't want authors sitting by their computers anxiously awaiting the decision. Rather, I want to surprise them with an answer weeks before they were expecting it. Even if the decision is negative, and it usually is, I think the authors take it better if the reviews are well done, if there are several of them, and if the reviewing was done quickly.

7 Special Cases

Desk rejects have already been discussed. You have the authority to desk reject (that is, reject without sending to reviewers) any submission. However, it is good form to provide at least a paragraph or two about why the paper is unacceptable.

You also have the authority to reject a paper after getting one or more quick short reviews, if you are unsure about the paper.

The underlying notion is that the reviews are primarily advice to you about the editorial decision. Normally three reviews are requested, but if fewer reviews are needed for you to make an informed and appropriate editorial decision, that is fine.

Submissions authored by a current AE have also been dealt with in the above process.

There are several *TODS* policies about papers invited from conferences (currently *EDBT*, *ICDT*, *PODS* and *SIGMOD*, as well as a general policy).¹⁴ These policies concern time frame, whether or not (some of) the original program committee members who reviewed the conference submission should be reused, instructions to provide to the reviewers, and other details. When you handle such a submission, please consult the relevant policy. (For example, you'll need to modify the Review Agreed to email that is sent to

¹⁴<http://www.acm.org/tods/editors>

reviewers to mention that the submission was invited but that a normal review is requested; for one or more of the reviewers, you will want to ask them to explicitly address the 30% rule. There is no special template for such an email.)

You may also invite submissions to *TODS*. Informal invitations (e.g., “I really enjoyed your paper in ... and hope that you can submit a follow-up paper to *TODS*” can be surprisingly effective. As an Associate Editor, you have considerable credibility. Ask the author to let you know when they submit the paper, so that you can request that the EiC assign it to you. Submissions that result from such informal invitations are handled exactly as other submissions.

At any time, if the reviewer or author needs to change his/her email or physical address or even user id, just ask them to “Edit Account” at the top-right of their screen when they first log into MC. (The EiC can also do this, by proxying in as the user and editing the account. The EiC can similarly delete a user by clicking on the details button after doing a user search. There is a link to delete the user under Admin Options. If the user is an author, reviewers, or editor who is associated with any manuscripts, the EiC will want to disable their account instead. To do this, edit the account, and click on step 4 Roles & Permissions. Click edit for *TODS*. Changing the member status to inactive will prevent the user from logging in. Setting start and end dates in the past for any role will remove that center from the user’s account. The EiC should uncheck a role only if certain that the user did not perform any tasks on a manuscript under that role. The last thing the EiC can do is to set the Reviewer Status to “Excluded,” which will remove the user from a reviewer search.)

If the editorial decision is revision (major or minor), and the author decides not to resubmit, ask the EiC to go to the paper as “Assistant” and rescind the editorial decision and replace it with “reject.” As mentioned on the first page of this manual, the final editorial decision is yours to make. Very rarely, an author disagrees with a decision (for some reason, always a rejection decision). There is a formal appeal process instituted by ACM and *TODS*.¹⁵ This process allows, but does not require, handing over the appeal to the EiC. If the author is not satisfied, the author can go higher, to the chair of the ACM Publications Board. You should know that I will not question your judgment on a particular paper.

8 Summary

There are three points in this lengthy document I would like to emphasize yet again.

1. Manuscript Central provides a work flow, described exhaustively here, for processing submissions. I think you’ll find it to be a natural one, once you acquire a little experience with it.
2. The submission guidelines state that “The Editorial Board is committed to provide an editorial decision within five months.” Following the process described here should enable you to meet this commitment, indeed, to complete in under four months.
3. Your primary function is to render clear, timely impartial feedback in the form of an editorial decision on a submission. This decision is yours and yours alone.

Finally, thanks again for agreeing to serve the research community as an Associate Editor.

¹⁵<http://www.acm.org/tods/Authors.html#Appeals>

9 Acknowledgments

My thanks to the many past AEs who provided numerous corrections and improvements to this manual.