SURVEY RESULTS

EDITING OF REVIEWER COMMENTS

Survey results 2020

COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) is a forum for editors and publishers of peer reviewed journals to discuss issues related to the integrity of work submitted to, or published in, their journals. **COPE** recently conducted a short survey on 'editing of reviewer comments' following a discussion on this topic at a COPE Forum. The survey was disseminated online to **COPE** members and non-members. A total of 149 responses were received.

59% reported being in their role for at least 4 years

Journal category

80% The majority of the journal disciplines were science related: health sciences, basic sciences, and applied sciences

17% Arts, social science and humanities

3% Other journal disciplines

Country

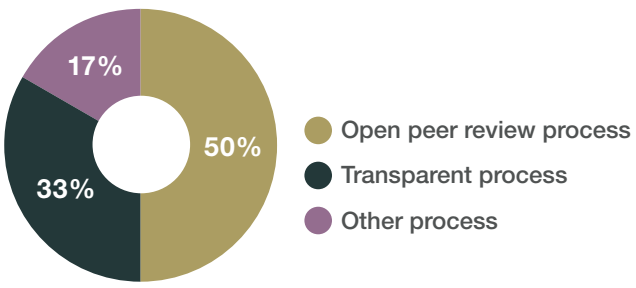
Respondents were mainly from these countries:

35%	31%	5%	3%	3%
United States	United Kingdom	Canada	France	Germany

The remaining respondents were from Croatia, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, Egypt, Israel, China, India, Japan, Nepal, the Russian Federation, Australia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, and New Zealand.

Peer review process

The majority of journals (66%) said that they invite two peer reviewers per paper (range 1 to >3). The majority (62%) use a single blind system



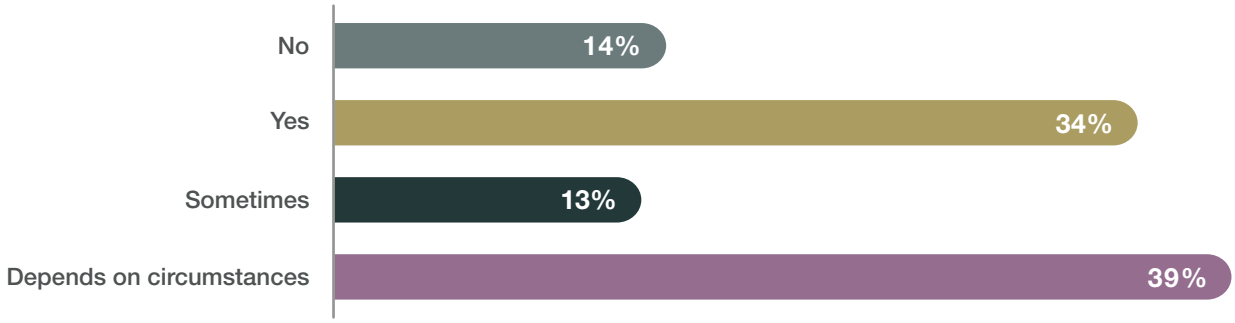
Cite this as: COPE Council. Editing of reviewer comments - Survey results — English.
https://doi.org/10.24318/gyZ99iXA Version 1: June 2020.

RESULTS

Question 1

145 respondents

Is it acceptable for an editor to make changes to the contents of a peer review before sending to the authors?



Reasons given by respondents who selected yes, sometimes, or it depends:

- Content considered objectionable, unhelpful, or incorrect
- Non-adherence to editorial guidelines for reviews
- Copyediting the review
- Miscellaneous

Yes Sometimes Depends

Reasons given by respondents who considered it unacceptable to edit reviewer comments:

- If the editor were to remove citations contradicting their own viewpoint, they might have undue influence on a field
- To give the reviewer feedback about objectionable text
- Under no circumstances
- Gives too much power to the editor

No

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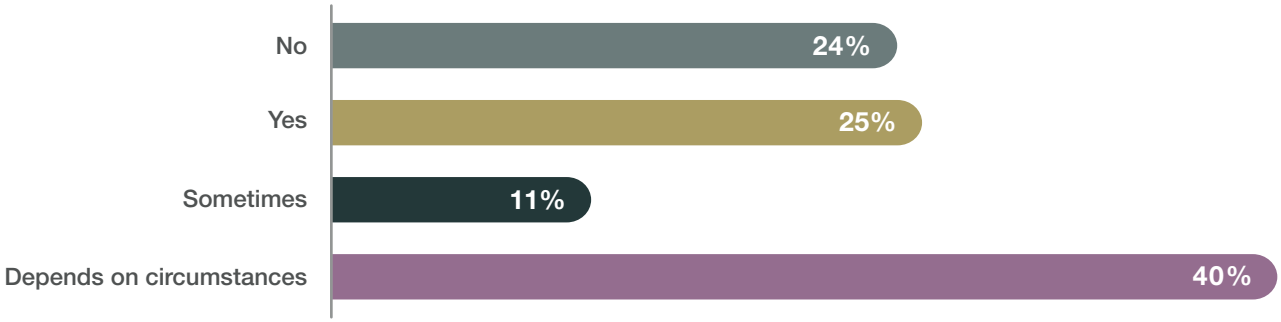
Question 2

142 respondents

Is it acceptable for an editor to withhold a review from an author?



Reasons given by respondents who said withholding a review is acceptable at least in some circumstances:

- Content considered hostile, objectionable, unhelpful, or incorrect
- Non-adherence to editorial guidelines for reviews
- Miscellaneous
- Editorial decisions
  - The editor is in the position to evaluate a review and decide on its use
  - The editor can provide clarification if necessary

☑ Yes ☑ Sometimes ☑ Depends

Reasons given by respondents who said it is unacceptable to ever withhold a review:

- Under no circumstances
- Editors should inform the reviewer if they disagree with them
- The editor-in-chief needs to give the full range of comments to the authors

☑ No

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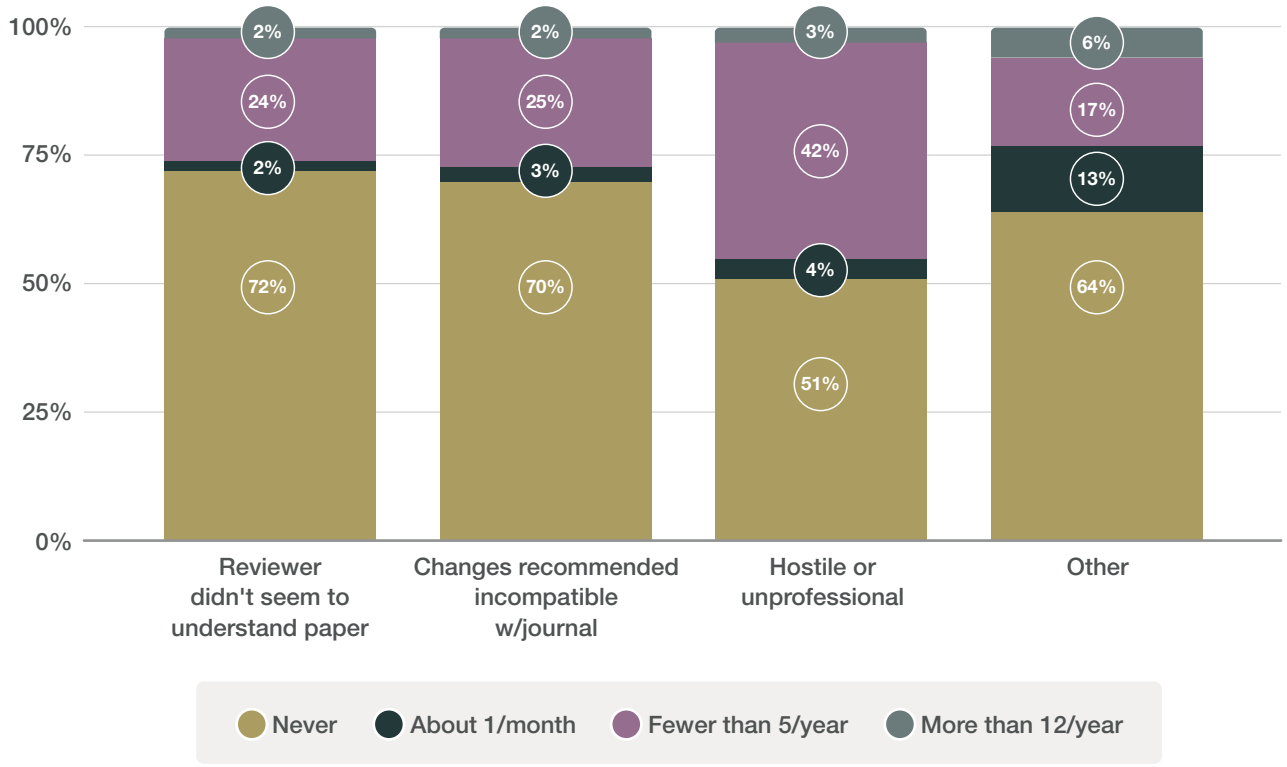
Question 3

146 respondents

As an editor, have you ever suppressed an entire review and, if so, for what reason and how often? As a publisher, have you ever seen this done?



Reasons for 'other' being selected:

- Review was of poor quality/factually incorrect/provided insufficient feedback
- Review was unconstructive, hostile, unethical, or contained defamatory comments
- Reviewer's email account did not appear genuine
- Reviewer had not evidently read the paper/someone else prepared the report
- Raised concern with the reviewer so they can revise
- Report did not appear to correspond to the paper being reviewed
- Paper was submitted in a language other than English to an English-only journal
- Review was addressed to the editor
- Review was submitted late

Other

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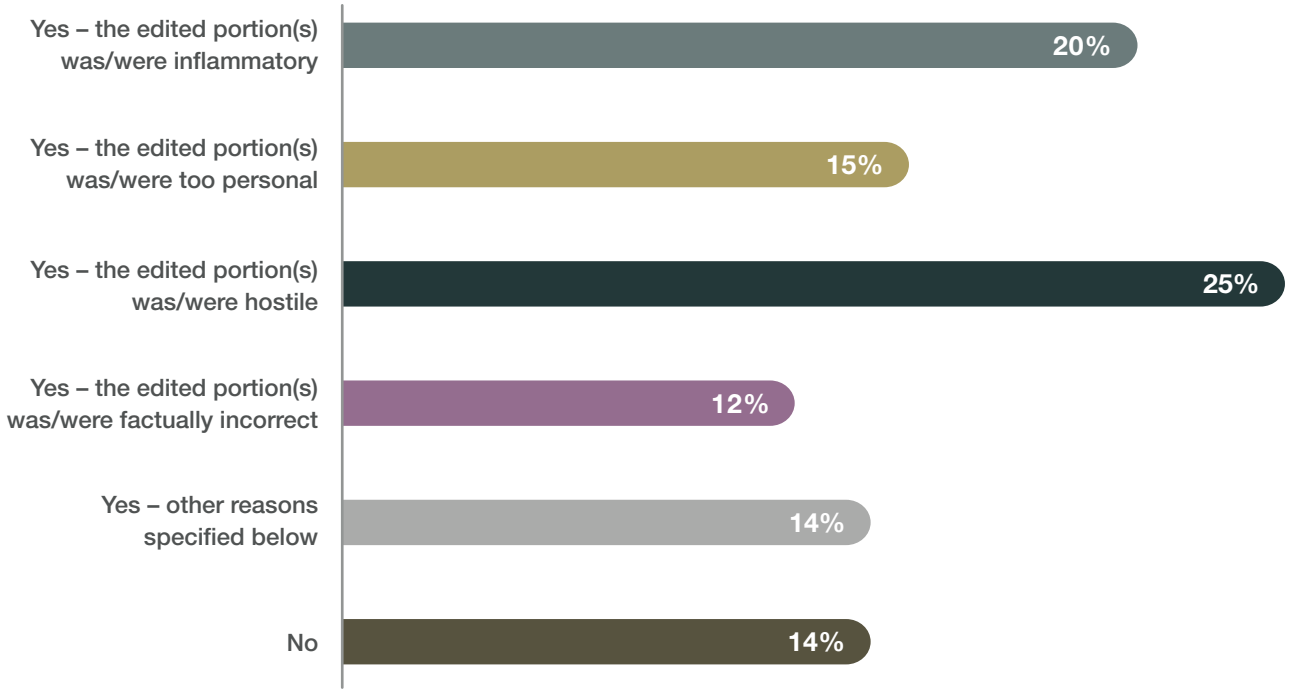
Question 4

65 respondents

As an editor, have you ever edited reviewer comments, and what were your reasons for doing so? As a publisher, have you ever seen this done?



Other reasons include:

- To edit typographical errors/grammar/spelling or clarify meaning
- If the reviewer made suggestions to cite the reviewer's papers
- To edit antagonising, inflammatory, or hostile comments
- To remove the reviewer's suggestion to revise/accept/reject
- To remove incorrect or unreasonable suggestions
- If suggestions made were incompatible with journal/editorial process
- If new points raised on re-review contradicted earlier or other reviewers
- Comments were intended for the editor
- Edited unclear language for authors/reviewers whose first language is not English
- To maintain reviewer's anonymity

Other

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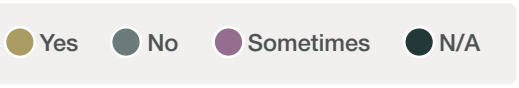
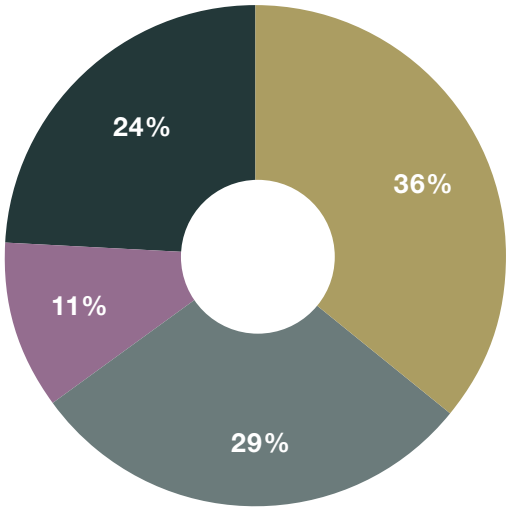
Question 5

147 respondents

As an editor, if you do withhold or censor reviewer's comments, do you make a note in the editorial system? As a publisher, have you ever seen an editor do this?





SUMMARY

A total of 145 individuals completed some or all of the survey. About 15% said they believed it is never acceptable for an editor to edit a peer reviewer's comments and about 25% said they believed it is never acceptable to suppress a complete review.

The most common reasons cited for editing reviews were related to unacceptable reviewer comments because they were inflammatory, hostile, or otherwise offensive, or factually incorrect. Other important reasons why editors said they edited reviews were because the reviewers were non-compliant with the journal's instructions for reviews.

Some comments supported the role of the editor-in-chief as responsible for the peer review process and that editors should have the freedom to set the tone of the content of the peer reviews. Although a minority believed it was never appropriate to edit or suppress reviews, they raised concerns that allowing this would invest too much power in the editor; some described this as a 'slippery slope'.

Of those who said that they edited reviewer comments, about 61% (67/109) said they either always or sometimes make a note of it in the manuscript manager system. The question was not specifically asked, but several respondents commented about communicating with the reviewer if the editor edited their comments.

Next steps:

COPE will consider the results and the issues raised in this survey, and determine how best to provide guidance to our members on this issue.

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