# Options for Proof Review

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"Proof review is one of the key components of the publication process, ensuring the accuracy essential to a successful author experience. Two publishing professionals well versed in the proofing process provided insights into how publishers can best serve an author's needs at this stage of production. They described how, thanks to advances in technology, their publishing institutions are making the review process more productive, accurate, and efficient via improvements in workflows, use of automated tools, and best practices.

A former technical editor herself, Mary O'Hara currently manages a staff of editors as a vital part of the American Chemical Society's (ACS) publishing work. She also draws on her background as a business analyst to contribute to process improvement at ACS. O'Hara summarized the critical importance of the proof review process and its benefits to both author and publisher. Review of the proof is typically the final touch point for authors, allowing them to ensure their research is being conveyed as intended. It is also one of the final points of author-publisher engagement, providing publishers with another opportunity to build a positive relationship and ensure customer satisfaction. From the production standpoint, a publisher's goals are efficiency, high quality, and quick turnaround. "The use of technology," O'Hara noted, "allows publishers to employ efficiencies and provide an experience that authors will enjoy."

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In the last 10 to 15 years, technological innovations in the proof review process have offered the potential to significantly reduce time between acceptance and online publication. After decades of a paper-based system, the introduction of the PDF in tandem with automated composition systems has opened the door to digitally based workflows, offering greatly improved efficiency and accuracy.

ACS currently offers authors multiple approaches for reviewing proofs, including proofing in a Word template and annotating a PDF. Increasingly, however, ACS authors are migrating toward use of ACS's Direct Correct online proof review system, which allows the author to make corrections within the XML file via a browser-based tool. Many authors find the interface more intuitive, as it is similar to the track changes and querying features of Word, giving authors more control over the process. This approach also optimizes production efficiency and accuracy because it eliminates the transcription of corrections between multiple versions of files.

Looking ahead, O'Hara predicts two trends in particular will further refine the proof review process: 1) increased adoption of online authoring and editing tools and 2) the use of artificial intelligence by both authors and publishers. "The technology is here, and it is being improved and enhanced all the time," she noted. "As authorship changes and technology becomes more ingrained in the research, writing, and publication processes, the proof correction process will change with it, and we'll be able to continue to offer our authors a great experience while being very efficient in production," O'Hara concluded.

In addition to overseeing the production of Rockefeller University Press's (RUP) three journals, Camille Clowery plays a key role in vetting new tools, automations, and workflows as RUP continually refines its processes for efficiency and accuracy. In her overview of the RUP publication process, Clowery described how the current XML-based workflow has enabled use of an online proofing interface accessed via Sheridan's ArticleExpress. The staff uses this interface to make changes to the composed file, and the author can also access it for the proof review.

Previously, authors provided proof corrections via an annotated PDF, an inefficient method that could introduce errors. RUP still provides authors with the PDF option, but more than 80% of its authors now choose to use the online proofing interface, where only one person—the author—is making the edits, giving authors confidence their corrections will appear accurately. With staff no longer manually transferring the PDF annotations, the time from proof approval to online publication has been reduced by more than 40%. In RUP's surveys of author satisfaction, overall response has been very positive; 85% of authors indicate the online system is easy to use, a statistic that indicates to Clowery that RUP is "heading in the right direction."

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## How can we improve the author experience?

*"I do think that when the proofs are produced, the authors should be given a full list (e.g., and Marked-Changes document) of all changes made."*

*"Let the authors have a bit more time to check the page proofs, 48 h is not much."*

- Tracked changes of copy editing -?
- Authors rendering PDFs on the fly
- Continuous publication may ease proof deadlines
- Concise, simple instructions and interface
- Author's final experience should be fast and intuitive
- Over 80% of authors choose to use the HTML proofing system

Rockefeller University Press

"Authors are interacting directly with their content again while the publisher has control over the XML," noted Clowery. In this online proof environment, metadata such as ORCIDs or Crossref Funder Registry information are highly visible, "making it evident that we're providing a service by enriching authors' content, and ultimately, increasing the discoverability of the article," she explained.

Clowery recently solicited anecdotal feedback from two scientists on the author proofing process; she noted their biggest complaint (aside from the "sternly worded" proof emails) was the short turnaround time for review. "Scientists work on their papers for years, the editorial review may take weeks, even months, and then we ask them to drop everything and turn around their proof corrections in two to three days," she explained. While acknowledging the constraints of publishing deadlines, she would ideally prefer to provide authors with more time, recognizing that authors are highly motivated to turn their proofs around quickly. RUP's upcoming move to a continuous publication model may help to alleviate some of these deadline pressures.

Clowery offered this final thought: Authors are busy people, and the proof review process should be as user-friendly as possible. "It's important to remember that authors are our customers and we're providing a service to those customers," she noted. With the current proliferation of journals, authors have many choices, and she concluded, "I wouldn't underestimate the 'author experience' in choosing a journal."

Audience questions raised the issues of confidentiality and security related to the use of online editing interfaces (both panelists confirmed that security is taken very seriously), and the session concluded with a lively discussion on the pros and cons of providing an author with the opportunity to review the tracked editing changes. One audience member noted this approach can be a "double-edged sword," with authors sometimes undoing all of the editing; the moderator offered a global perspective, pointing out that it can also be a valuable learning process for non-native speakers seeking to improve their writing skills.

All full list of all of the presentations from the 2019 CSE Annual Meeting, including session descriptions and most presentation slides, can be found online at https://www.councilscienceeditors.org/events/previous-annual-meetings