nature

What happens after acceptance and before publication

After an Article or Letter is accepted for publication, it is processed by subeditors (sometimes called copyeditors), production and art editors before it is published. This document describes what happens during this process. In so doing, it identifies common factors that can delay processing of manuscripts. If an author can anticipate these factors before sending the final accepted version of the manuscript, time will be saved and the likelihood of errors reduced.

Titles and first paragraphs

Subeditors will change these substantially if they are not in *Nature* style. They clear changes with the author, but it saves time if the author has already written the first paragraph so that someone from another field of science would understand it, including sentences of introduction, background to the field, main result, significance of result to the field, general context of the new result (see the information sheet 'How to construct a *Nature* summary paragraph').

Format and layout of artwork

Problems with artwork can occur and can hold up manuscripts while they are dealt with, particularly if the person who prepared the figures and can deal with format queries (often not the corresponding author) is not readily available. Authors can help by ensuring that artwork is in correct style and format at final submission (see the information sheet 'Guide to preparing final artwork'), and that the appropriate contact person for artwork queries is identified.

Manuscripts with unusual material, such as roll-fold figures, are prepared well in advance of the proposed publication date, as they can take extra time to process. Authors can help by providing us (at acceptance) with the contact details of their art department (or other appropriate contact) so we can work with them on production and presentation.

Why we subedit a paper

Nature and the Nature research journals copyedit (subedit) scientific research papers for the following reasons:

- To make the paper more comprehensible to those not in the immediate field.
- To ensure that scientific terms and concepts are accurate.
- To make the paper read well, and in correct English.
- To improve the clarity of papers whose authors are not native English writers or who are not able with language.
- To ensure indexing and web searches using terms, nomenclature and citations in the paper are maximally effective.
- To enhance readers' experience and perception of the journal.
- To provide the best possible publishing service to authors among all scientific journals.
- To give the journal a cohesiveness, as applying house style gives readers a sense of familiarity in knowing how to expect papers to be presented, and hence aids understanding of papers in unfamiliar disciplines.
- To increase the 'indirect' readership of downloads of the paper from external databases and search engines by rewriting the abstract to a more accessible form.
- To increase the reach of the paper by making the it more accessible and readable (more people will read it, cite it, more journalists will be interested in covering it in the media, and so on).

How we subedit a paper

First we check that we have the correct version to be worked on, and that figures, Extended Data figures and Tables, Supplementary Information and relevant forms, declarations, and accession numbers are present. Then, the text is edited to house style, ensuring grammatical correctness, accessibility and clarity, and that acronyms/abbreviations are minimized. Passive voice is edited to active voice if used excessively. Simplicity is introduced where necessary, for example convoluted sentences are simplified and multiple adjectives deconstructed. References are edited into style and the order checked.

Checks are made that discrete items of Supplementary Information (for example, videos) are mentioned at appropriate points in the main text of the paper. Checks are made that each figure legend (print-only figures and Extended Data figures) begins with a short title, that part labels (a, b, etc.) correspond to the figure, and that figures and tables (print-only tables and Extended Data tables) are mentioned in the text. Print-only figures (but not Extended Data figures) are edited to ensure they are clear, in style, that any keys are present and that information is not repeated.

After this process, the edited Word document (without figures) is sent to the author for response to queries and for validation. The corresponding (or other identified) author coordinates the response from all co-authors, and sends us one agreed version. After receipt of author response, the subeditor inputs the changes and sends the file to the typesetter.

Artwork

Production quality (high-resolution) artwork is required at acceptance (note that prior to acceptance we require lower-resolution, smaller files, ideally incorporated with the manuscript text in a single PDF or Word file that can be easily sent to referees). Art editors work on the electronic artwork (print figures only; Extended Data figures are not edited in-house) according to the mark-up from the subeditors and any author advice. Print-quality figures are sent to the typesetter to be combined with the text, and together sent to the author as a PDF.

Proofs

The corresponding author returns the PDF to *Nature* after coordinating with co-authors. Authors can help by requesting only essential changes (for example, typos). Authors might think their figures are too small and request they are enlarged. This involves negotiation (it is sometimes not possible for reasons of space and/or layout), which introduces delay. After the corresponding author and *Nature* have agreed all changes, a subeditor reads the whole proof again and cycles with the typesetter until finally correct.

If the author wants to make a change after returning the proof, a 'note added in proof' is possible if the change is important and if the proof has not been signed-off, but significant changes have to be agreed with the handling editor so inevitably cause delays.

Extended Data figure legends and table footnotes are subedited to house style and for consistency with the main text and figures; however, the images comprising the figures and tables are not edited by *Nature*'s art department. Extended Data figures and tables are included at the end of the proof for checking; the author may resupply these items once when returning proof corrections if there are inconsistencies in presentation between the Extended Data figures and tables and the *Nature*-edited print-only figures and tables.

Supplementary Information is not subedited and proofs are not sent out for checking, so authors should ensure that it is clearly written, succinctly presented and that the style of terms conforms with the rest of the paper. During processing for online publication, standard house formatting will be applied but the contents will be unchanged.

Scheduling for publication

Manuscripts are not scheduled for publication until the author returns the proof. *Nature* papers are often published in advance of print as part of an advance online publication process. Papers are then published in a print issue when space is available (the two versions of the paper are identical). In addition, *Nature* publishes some papers each week via an accelerated article preview workflow. For these papers, we publish the accepted manuscript online as a PDF, without subediting of text, figures or tables, but with some preliminary formatting (papers are clearly indicated by a watermark on each page of the online PDF). For all manuscripts, authors are informed of the publication date as soon as the paper is scheduled.

After scheduling, the issue is collated and checked. The pages are 'signed off' one week before the issue is published, and no changes are possible after that time. (Any essential changes will be published in a subsequent issue as a correction.) Corresponding authors are sent a complimentary copy of the printed issue of *Nature* containing their paper about 2–3 weeks after publication.