

My Manuscript Needs Revision: Now What?

Greetings GPNSS members! Hopefully by now you have read my previous editorial notes about the transformation of *The Prairie Naturalist (Journal)* during the past few years and the work the Editorial Staff continues to do to provide a quality publication venue for the *Journal's* membership and prospective authors. During my tenure as Editor-in-Chief (Editor), I have had the good fortune of working with many authors and a truly dedicated Editorial Staff. Most topics for editorials come to me relatively easily, though admittedly I found myself scratching my head when thinking about a topic for this editorial. After much pensive thought, I felt compelled to focus on a recurring issue that often causes substantial delay in the peer-review process. In the remainder of this editorial, my intention is to describe a scenario and offer some advice in the hope that it may prevent a similar problem from affecting you (or at least minimize your frustration) with future manuscripts prepared for consideration for publication in the *Journal*.

After completing the field component of your research project and subsequent analyses of your data, your manuscript is submitted and the initial review process identifies a number of significant flaws (Chamberlain 2009). Fortunately, these flaws can be adequately addressed and the Associate Editor recommends further consideration of your manuscript following major revisions. The referees and Associate Editor have provided you with a long list of content-related and editorial comments to consider (Chamberlain 2009). Sound familiar? We've all been in this situation, right? Typically following a call from the Associate Editor for a major revision, the subsequent product that results is a significant rewrite of the manuscript (Chamberlain 2009). It is not unusual for the body of the text to receive substantial editing, complete rewrites of one or more sections of the manuscript, or new/additional analyses included (Chamberlain 2009). At this point you may be thinking that in response to comments provided by the Editor, Associate Editor, and referees, your manuscript no longer resembles the original version you submitted. Following your diligence addressing the concerns of those who reviewed your manuscript, a common problem arises despite your best intentions (Chamberlain 2009).

When authors finally resubmit their manuscript, they typically include a cover letter that may read something like this...."Dear Associate Editor, My coauthors and I appreciate the helpful comments provided by you and the referees. We believe these comments have greatly improved our manuscript. Please do not hesitate to contact us if further revisions are necessary. We look forward to hearing from you regarding the status of our revised manuscript." Is the problem obvious to you? More importantly, how to avoid this problem should be just as (if not more) obvious to you.

The above scenario makes the Associate Editor's job unnecessarily difficult. At this point, the Associate Editor must spend an inordinate amount of time going through the original comments line by line to ensure that the authors have adequately addressed them (Chamberlain 2009). If specific comments have not been addressed, the Associate Editor is often left wondering why; this may prompt he or she to request an additional review from original referees to ensure that their concerns were adequately addressed (Chamberlain 2009). Additional reviews, of course, lengthens the peer-review process by weeks (and sometimes by months) and could likely have been avoided had the author(s) put forth the effort preparing a detailed cover letter, which should have articulated every change made in the manuscript (Chamberlain 2009). Similarly, authors should describe in detail when specific comments or suggestions for improvement are not addressed (Chamberlain 2009). In the absence of a detailed cover letter, the Editor or Associate Editor is easily frustrated and has little choice but to spend a substantial amount of time evaluating the revised manuscript to determine whether the authors have made the appropriate changes. Unfortunately, the end result of this scenario is that the peer-review process is further delayed (Chamberlain 2009).

At this point, you may be thinking about ways to avoid this scenario. The most obvious answer is to construct a detailed cover letter describing each of the changes that were made in the revised manuscript, but in reality we know that it is not that simple (Chamberlain 2009). Speaking from personal experience, authors often have compelling justification for not addressing substantive concerns raised by referees or the Associate Editor. In these instances, authors should provide a detailed cover letter describing exactly why issues identified as important by referees and the Associate Editor were not addressed (Chamberlain 2009). The onus of convincing the Associate Editor that not addressing particular comments or suggestions falls on the author(s). As a general rule of thumb, providing more detail and justification in your cover letter is preferable to less information (Chamberlain 2009). Similarly, when particular comments and suggestions requested by the Associate Editor and referees are addressed, explicitly state this in your cover letter (Chamberlain 2009). While tedious, it is well-advised for authors to address changes point by point, and clearly communicating to the Associate Editor how these comments were addressed; an effective way of accomplishing this is to refer the Associate Editor to specific line numbers in the manuscript (Chamberlain 2009). Alternatively and an increasingly popular format is to copy and paste specific comments directly into the cover letter (often bold or italicized font). Information about how these comments have been addressed then follows specific comments and comprises the text body of the cover letter.

I am certainly mindful that constructing a detailed cover letter is difficult and takes a lot of time. If, however, it means that the review process for your revised manuscript is more efficient, timely, and minimizes frustration on the part of the Editor and/or Associate Editor, I would argue that this is time well spent that will greatly improve the likelihood of acceptance of your manuscript for publication. Following the initial review process, journal Editors typically provide authors with sufficient time (months in most cases) to complete their revision, though authors rarely take the time they have been given to adequately prepare their revision and detailed cover letter. I would encourage authors to take their time and use the time they have been given to prepare their revision and an accompanying detailed cover letter. If the time provided by the Editor or Associate Editor seems inadequate, do not hesitate to contact them requesting a reasonable extension to complete your revision; rarely will a journal Editor or Associate Editor deny such a request, especially if the additional time will expedite the remainder of the peer-review process. Lastly, when in doubt about how to address a particular comment, authors should feel free to pick up the phone and call the Associate Editor or myself; most issues are easily and quickly resolved by phone (Chamberlain 2009). Resolving issues during phone

conversations can mean the difference between frustration on the part of authors, Editors, and Associate Editors, and an efficient revision process resulting in the timely publication of the author's work (Chamberlain 2009).

I would encourage our members to visit our new website (see link above) to gain access to our electronic version of the quarterly newsletter, open access research articles and notes, current membership forms, access to abstracts of all research articles published in the *Journal*, and information on our current editorial staff. I have received many positive comments on the transformation of our *Journal* over the past 3 years and remain excited about the future success of our Society. In closing, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions, comments, or concerns about the *Journal*. This is your *Journal*, and I welcome your thoughts about the future of it. Have a fun and safe summer field season everyone and enjoy this issue of the *Journal*!

LITERATURE CITED

Chamberlain, M. J. 2009. Doing your part during the revision process. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 73:815–816.

—**Christopher N. Jacques**
Editor-in-Chief