

How and why to publish in PNAS

Work, finish, publish!” Faraday’s (1) advice to a young scientist is still good advice for all scientists today. But where should an author publish? Authors face the twin problems of obtaining the best exposure and fairest review of their work. PNAS has a big plus in these two areas; quality control is provided by the members and foreign associates of a national academy of unusual depth and breadth, and PNAS is the first choice of many of them for publishing their own best work. But PNAS is not just a house or U.S. journal; it is open to all scientists, and currently some 30% of its published articles come from abroad. Last year, authors from 70 countries published in PNAS (Table 1), and the editors of PNAS want to increase further the international input to the journal. I have been appointed Associate Editor with special responsibility in this area in Europe. The PNAS Editorial Board has always had a strong representation of foreign associates, and currently it has 16 international representatives (Table 2).

Through this editorial, I hope to clarify our review procedures for all authors, regardless of geography, and to demystify our process (see www.pnas.org/misc/iforcpolicies.shtml#submission for details). I will also provide a few tips on how to submit your paper optimally.

All papers published in PNAS are subject to peer review by referees, and final approval from a member of the Editorial Board is required. The normal procedure is to submit papers via Track II. The paper is first screened by a Board member who will decide whether the paper is likely to be in the top 10% of its field and is sound. The Board member has to reject on average two out of three papers at this stage. Believe me, this decision is painful because most papers sent to the journal are good and enjoyable to read; however, we have to redirect a high proportion to more specialized journals because of the page limit for PNAS articles and because we cannot exhaust our supply of editors and referees. So, the first tip is to make a strong and succinct case in your cover letter for the novelty and timeliness of your work.

The second tip is to recommend several members of the National Academy as appropriate editors for your work because Members are sometimes unavailable. The Editorial Board may

Table 1. PNAS authors’ country affiliations in 2004

Albania	Ireland	Romania
Algeria	Israel	Russia
Argentina	Italy	Scotland
Australia	Japan	Singapore
Austria	Kazakhstan	Slovenia
Bangladesh	Kenya	Somalia
Belgium	Korea	South Africa
Brazil	Kuwait	Spain
Canada	Lebanon	Swaziland
Chile	Malaysia	Sweden
China	Mexico	Switzerland
Colombia	Moldova	Syria
Croatia	Nepal	Taiwan
Czech Republic	The Netherlands	Tanzania
Denmark	New Zealand	Thailand
England	Norway	Tunisia
Finland	Oman	Turkey
France	Palau	United Arab Emirates
Germany	Panama	United States of America
Greece	Papua New Guinea	Uruguay
Hong Kong	Philippines	Vietnam
Hungary	Poland	Wales
India	Portugal	
Indonesia	Puerto Rico	

Table 2. Foreign Associates on the PNAS Editorial Board

Name	Affiliation	Country
Enrico Coen	John Innes Centre	England
Francisco de la Cruz	Centro Atomico Bariloche	Argentina
Alan Fersht	University of Cambridge	England
L. L. Iversen	University of Oxford	England
Ramon Latorre	Center for Scientific Studies	Chile
N. M. Le Douarin	Académie des Sciences de l’Institut de France	France
Tak Wah Mak	University of Toronto	Canada
Kiyoshi Mizuuchi	National Institutes of Health	Japan
Salvador Moncada	University of London	England
Shigetada Nakanishi	Kyoto University	Japan
Tomoko Ohta	National Institute of Genetics	Japan
Michael Sela	Weizmann Institute of Science	Israel
Obaid Siddiqi	Tata Institute for Fundamental Research	India
M. S. Swaminathan	Centre for Research on Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development	India
Hans Thoenen	Max Planck Institute of Neurobiology	Germany
Janet Thornton	European Bioinformatics Institute	England

elect to use your suggested editors or may choose another National Academy member as the member-editor. The member-editor may recommend rejection without review or choose referees. So the third tip is to recommend as many suitable referees as possible. About 50% of the papers allocated to editors are eventually published, subject to the approval of the initiating Board member.

Members are allowed to “communicate” up to two papers each per annum for nonmembers in their own sphere of expertise via Track I, for which the

member procures at least two reviews before submission to the editorial office. Since the introduction of Track II as the general route for submitted papers, many members will no longer communicate papers through Track I. Because the initial processing of communicated manuscripts is not handled by the editorial office, the review process for Track I papers can take much longer because tardy referees are not hassled by the vigilant PNAS staff. All Track I papers are subject to final approval by a Board

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member, who will reject or send back the paper for further review if it is not up to the PNAS standard.

Do not be afraid of sending us your best papers. Optimize the review process by taking advantage of the depth of our expertise and making your own suggestions. If you can satisfy the expert Board

member, specialist member-editor, and referees, congratulations as you will have made it to the top 15% of an already highly self-selected set of excellent papers! And your work will be highly visible as PNAS provides immediate free online access to developing countries (www.pnas.org/misc/faq.shtml#developing), a very

large number of subscribing institutions, and only a 6-month delay to all others. You also have the opportunity to purchase immediate access for nonsubscribers through the PNAS open access option.

Alan Fersht, *Associate Editor*

1. Gladstone, J. H. (1872) *Michael Faraday* (Harper & Brothers, New York).