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The manuscript selection process at SCIENCE  

The aim of my talk is to make the review process at SCIENCE more transparent and to help people to decide at an early stage during the preparation of a manuscript if it is appropriate to submit their paper to us. People unfamiliar with the system often do not appreciate how much has happened behind the scenes while the manuscript was under consideration and how much energy we devote to assure that the decision was as fair and unbiased as possible.

Over the years SCIENCE has developed a two stage system of manuscript review. At the first stage manuscripts are evaluated by our Board of Reviewing Editors. The Board Members are carefully selected eminent scientists in their field who help us assessing the large number of manuscripts that are submitted on a daily basis. They screen manuscripts if they are appropriate for SCIENCE. They do not write traditional in-depth reviews but rather evaluate if the research is novel, original, and of interest to the wider scientific community. The majority of submissions are usually turned away at this stage. The second stage, the in-depth peer review, is comparable to the process in most other high quality scientific journals. However, to ensure that we only proceed with the very best papers in a scientific field we invest a lot of time researching who are the researchers best qualified to review a manuscript. In addition to their scientific credentials they should also be as unbiased as possible and should use no other criteria than the quality, accuracy, and clarity of the data.

To guarantee a speedy turnover of manuscripts we ask our referees if they can return their review within 2 weeks. If this is not possible we try to find someone else instead. After the referee reports have been returned we send them for cross review, where the other reviewers can comment on the evaluation provided by their colleagues. We constantly try to improve this system and look for ways how we can serve the scientific community even better in the future.