VI. Manuscripts and the Peer-Review Process

A. Manuscripts Eligible for Submission to ASA Publications

All manuscripts submitted to ASA publications must be original works that have not been published elsewhere. In this age of electronic publications, editors occasionally have difficulty determining whether a manuscript that has appeared on a web site should or should not be viewed as being published previously. The following guidelines, provided in 1997 (and updated in 2011) by the ASA Committee on Publications, are intended to guide editors as they ponder the question of previous publication:

1. ASA authors may post working versions of their papers on their personal web sites and non-peer-reviewed repositories. Such postings are not considered by ASA as previous publication.
2. Authors that choose to post their working papers on their personal web sites are advised to protect their copyright by including a disclaimer on the paper itself. As ASA editors have an interest in protecting authors' copyright, they should advise authors of this practice whenever possible. ASA suggests that authors use the following disclaimer:

   Copyright 20__. Name of author. All rights reserved. This paper is for the reader's personal use only.

3. Articles that have appeared in a peer-reviewed "electronic collection" or as part of a peer-reviewed "paper series" on a web site are considered by ASA to have been published previously and may not be submitted to an ASA publication.
4. Once a submitted article has been accepted for publication, authors must, if possible, modify manuscripts or headers in non-peer-reviewed electronic collections (including their own personal web sites) to indicate that the paper is forthcoming in an ASA journal. Once the article is published, authors should modify manuscripts or headers to indicate that a revised version of the paper is now published, and should include a complete citation to the published paper.

B. Submission of Manuscripts

Brief instructions to authors regarding how to prepare their manuscripts for submission, where to send it, and so on, should appear in each issue of all ASA publications. Editors should refer to a recent issue of their publication for an example. A complete “Notice to Contributors,” which includes details of preparation, including examples of reference formats, is published once or twice a year, depending on the journal. (See Appendix I for a sample notice). Authors are asked to follow all directions carefully. Failure to do so is grounds for prompt return of the manuscript or a significant delay in the peer-review process.
Authors submitting manuscripts to ASA publications must not submit elsewhere while their manuscript is under review. The following ASA policy statement regarding the ethics of submitting a single paper to multiple journals at the same time should appear on the back side of the table of contents of each issue of all ASA journals. (See section 16 of the Code of Ethics, which applies to submitting manuscripts.)

“Submission of a manuscript to a professional journal clearly implies commitment to publish in that journal. The competition for journal space requires a great deal of time and effort on the part of editorial readers whose main compensation for this service is the opportunity to read papers prior to publication and the gratification associated with discharge of professional obligation. For these reasons, the American Sociological Association regards submission of a manuscript to another journal while that paper is under review by an ASA journal to be a violation of the ASA Code of Ethics.”

1. Processing Fee
   Authors are required to include a processing fee of $25 for each paper they submit for review; this fee is waived for student members of the ASA and does not apply to “Comments” or “Letters to the Editors.” Editors may choose to waive this fee for invited manuscripts; the fee is also waived for revised manuscripts. The fee is to be paid when the article is submitted electronically. This fee is not refundable.

2. Acknowledgment to Author
   The Committee on Publications policy requires that editors acknowledge the receipt of each manuscript. In addition, editors should notify an author of the status of the manuscript at about three months after receipt. If a decision has not been reached by this time, the editor must correspond with the author, describing the status of the manuscript in the review process so that the author has an opportunity to decide whether to continue in the review process. The manuscript-tracking software can be set up to remind the editor if a review deadline is approaching.

3. Protection of Unpublished Manuscripts
   An author is protected by copyright law against unauthorized use of her or his unpublished work; accordingly, an unpublished manuscript is considered a privileged (confidential) document. Editors and reviewers therefore may not circulate, quote, cite, or refer to the unpublished work, or use information in the work to advance their own work or instructional programs, unless they obtain specific written permission for this use from the author. For example, a reviewer may ask the editor to contact the author(s) giving permission for her or his name to be divulged to the author for the purpose of making contact. The author, of course, may accept or reject this opportunity, as a manuscript is the author’s private property until it has been accepted for publication and the author(s) has signed ASA’s copyright transfer agreement (see Appendix K).
C. COMMENTS AND REPLIES

When an editor receives a comment, unsolicited or solicited, on a recently published article, she or he is under no obligation to publish it. If an editor decides that a comment merits consideration, it is customarily sent through the normal peer review process. The editor may choose to include the author of the original article as a reviewer. If, after review, the editor believes that the comment should be published, he or she generally informs the author of the original article that a comment will be published. However, the editor is not obligated to do this. The editor may also choose to invite the author of the original article to prepare a reply to the comment.

At the editor’s discretion, a reply may also be subject to the same editorial review and decision process. Once an editor decides to publish a comment, or a comment with a reply, he or she should assign a number of journal pages, with the pages shared by the critic and the original author. The reply may appear in the same issue as the comment or in a later issue. The exchange normally ends there.

If an editor invites a comment on an article with the intention that the comment will appear in the same issue as the article, under no circumstances may the author be allowed to revise the article after the comment has been written.

D. MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION RATE

The manuscript submission rate—the number of manuscripts submitted to an editorial office during a period of time (per month or per year)—determines the editor’s workload and may be used as a factor to propose a change in the annual page allocation. Monitoring the manuscript submission rate helps an editor to gauge whether she or he is accepting more papers, or accepting them at a faster rate, than can be published within a given number of pages.

An editor who receives more publishable papers than can be published within a journal’s page allocation in a year experiences a growing production queue (backlog). The editor may wish to control the backlog by accepting only the most important, major contributions (thus raising rejection rates) or by increasing the publication lag of the journal (thus having authors wait longer to see their articles in print). However, if journal space is being used efficiently and it becomes clear that the editor needs more pages for worthy articles, that the substantive area of a journal is growing, or that the production queue or publication lag is excessive, an editor may request an increase in the page allocation or propose to the Committee on Publications that a journal’s area of coverage be redefined.

In the opposite situation, an editor who experiences a decrease in manuscript submissions (or in the number of acceptable manuscripts) should examine possible reasons: shifts in the field, competing journals, and so on. If a difficulty in filling allocated pages continues, the editor should meet the production deadlines by making needed adjustments in issue sizes based on the number of pages actually expected to be printed during the rest of the year. Because budgets and printing and subscription rates are based on the original page allocation, the editor also should consult with the Executive Office about possible adjustments in page allocation and make a proposal to the Committee on Publications for a
temporary or permanent page allocation increase. These proposals are to be submitted for
discussion and vote at the Committee’s August meeting and will require approval from
ASA Council. In very rare cases, page increases will be approved at other times though this
is discouraged.

E. RECEIPT DATE

The official receipt date of a new manuscript is the date it is ready to enter the review
process. This means that all required parts of the manuscript are in hand; the manuscript
processing fee (if required) has been paid; and an electronic copy (if required) has also been
received. The editorial lag is calculated from this official receipt date. The receipt date for a
manuscript accepted with revisions is handled the same as a manuscript going out for
review.

For accepted manuscripts, the receipt date is the date on which the final version—the
one ready to go to the copy editor—is received.

F. EDITORIAL LAG

The editorial lag is the number of weeks between the official receipt date of a manuscript
in review and the date of the editorial decision. To minimize publication delays and the
time authors must wait for the editor’s decision, the editorial lag should be kept to no more
than three months (about 13 weeks). If a final editorial decision has not been made within
three months, editors should notify authors of the review status of their papers.

G. PRODUCTION LAG

The number of months between an accepted manuscript’s accept-decision date and its
appearance in print is called the production lag. Editors should try to maintain a production
lag of no more than 12 months. On the other hand, a lag that falls below eight months
should be monitored carefully so that issues continue to come out regularly. Controlling the
production lag is particularly important during the final year of an editor’s term because,
depending on what has been negotiated with the editor-elect, the outgoing editor will need
to publish most of the accepted manuscripts in the final volume.

H. REJECTION RATE

The rejection rate is the number of manuscripts rejected during a calendar year
expressed as a percentage of all manuscripts received (including both revised and
resubmitted manuscripts) and decisions made during that same year. The ASA does not
stipulate a specific rejection rate. However, editors should monitor this rate regularly and
note any consistent increases or decreases.