Description

Peer review remains the linchpin of scholarly publishing, yet the system's "black-box" reputation is increasingly at odds with the transparency goals of open science. Recent publisher pilots and policy shifts including large-scale tests of *transparent peer review* and a move by flagship journals to publish peer?review histories mean that journals, institutions, and researchers must decide whether and how to adopt more open review models. This article explains what transparent (or open) peer review is, why the shift matters, what the evidence says, how different transparent models work in practice, and practical steps journals and researchers can take if they decide to move toward greater transparency.

What is transparent (open) peer review?

Open peer review is an umbrella term covering multiple practices that alter traditional anonymous review.

- **Traditional review models**
  - Single?blind: reviewers know author identity; reviewers anonymous to readers.
  - Double?blind: reviewers and authors are mutually anonymized.
  - Reports and decision letters stay confidential.
- **Transparent / open models**
  - Open reports: review reports, editor decisions, and author responses are published with the article (reviewer identity may remain anonymous).
  - Open identities: reviewers' names are disclosed to authors and/or readers.
  - Open participation / post?publication review: the community contributes reviews or comments on preprints or published versions.

Why consider a move to transparent review?

- **Accountability and trust:** Publishing review reports and responses makes editorial choices and reviewer critiques visible to readers, which can increase trust in editorial decisions and help readers assess the robustness of claims. Recent publisher pilots frame transparency as a way to "open the black box" of evaluation.
- **Reviewer recognition and credit:** When review reports are citable (for example with DOIs) and traceable to ORCID or reviewer?recognition platforms, review work becomes visible scholarly

contribution. Publishers that assign DOIs to peer?review components do so to enable credit.
- **Training and reproducibility:** Published review histories serve as educational resources for early?career researchers and can document methodological or reporting gaps that were addressed during revision. Some journals and platforms (e.g., BMC, Nature portfolio titles) publish these files to support reproducibility and learning.

What does the evidence say?

- **Growing but mixed evidence base:** Systematic reviews and scoping updates show an expanding evidence base but persistent uncertainties about some outcomes (review quality, reviewer behavior, acceptance rates). A study indicates that evidence is incomplete and results vary by the specific open practice studied.
- **Stakeholder attitudes:** Surveys show relatively strong support for publishing *reports* compared with revealing reviewer identities; many authors and editors see open reports as useful context.
- **Real?world pilots:** Publisher pilots provide early operational data. For example, in Wiley's Transparent Peer Review pilot with Publons/ScholarOne, 83% of authors in the Clinical Genetics pilot opted to publish the peer?review history for accepted papers, while only ~19% of reviewers chose to sign their reports. These findings indicate author willingness to disclose review histories but reviewer reluctance to reveal identity in many fields.
- **Policy shifts at leading journals:** In 2025, Nature transitioned from an opt?in approach to a policy in which peer?review reports and author responses accompany newly published research articles (reviewer identities remain anonymous unless reviewers elect otherwise).
- **Caveats from trials:** Randomized trials and experiments (BMJ, Nature trials of public comment) show mixed effects: some report no major change in review *quality* but increases in reviewer declination rates, and low participation in early public?comment trials suggests incentives and discipline norms matter.

How to implement transparent review: practical options and steps

For journals and publishers

- Start with a pilot and clear choice architecture: offer authors the option to *opt in* or *opt out* (or test automatic opt?in with opt?out), and monitor uptake, reviewer declination rates, and editorial workload. Wiley and other publishers used phased pilots to refine workflows.
- Preserve reviewer choice where possible: allow reviewers to remain anonymous or to sign reports voluntarily; consider disciplinary norms (some fields are more comfortable with signed review).
- Assign DOIs and integrate recognition: provide persistent identifiers for review reports and support reviewer recognition through ORCID and reviewer?credit services.
- Create metadata and archiving workflows: make review content machine?readable to enable secondary research and to support altmetrics and assessment. Projects aiming to annotate reviews for reuse highlight this need.
- Train editors and reviewers: provide guidance on tone, constructive criticism, and confidentiality, and on handling sensitive material (e.g., clinical data, dual?use content).

For institutions and funders

- Update assessment frameworks: recognize peer?review activity (signed or anonymized) and incorporation of review reports in promotion and grant evaluations where appropriate.
- Support reviewer training and incentives: consider small honoraria, formal recognition, or reviewer?development programs to broaden reviewer pools (the Publons Global State of Peer Review documents reviewer workload and geographic disparities).

Practical tips for authors and reviewers

Authors

- When you opt into publishing the peer?review file, prepare a concise author response and keep revision records clear – these materials become part of the public record and can demonstrate rigor.
- If concerned about misinterpretation, use your response to clarify how critiques were addressed, and note remaining limitations transparently.

Reviewers

- If you sign reviews, focus on constructive, evidence?based critique. Signed reviews can build reputation but may raise concerns for early?career researchers; consider disclosing via a public reviewer profile (ORCID) rather than attaching name directly to the report if you want partial anonymity.
- If remaining anonymous while your report is published, ensure your report does not contain identifying or defamatory material and that conflicts of interest are declared.

Common pitfalls and how to avoid them

- **Low reviewer participation:** plan for higher decline rates when identity disclosure is mandatory; mitigate by giving reviewers the option to remain anonymous and by recognizing review work formally.
- **Token transparency:** publishing reports without curation or standards can confuse readers. Develop guidelines for what review files should include and how they will be linked to the article.
- **Inequitable impacts:** junior researchers and reviewers from under?represented regions may be disproportionately affected by identity disclosure; include safeguards and monitor differential.

When to adopt transparent review

- Does your research community value openness and educational benefit? If so, an opt?in or opt?out open?reports model may work.
- Are there legal or ethical constraints (patient data, sensitive security issues)? If yes, restrict the scope of what becomes public.
- Do you have editorial capacity to moderate published reports and redact sensitive content? If not, build that capacity before launching.

What to measure during and after a pilot

- Author opt?in rate, reviewer sign?up rate, reviewer decline rate, turnaround time, editorial workload and reader engagement metrics (downloads, citations of review files).
- Qualitative feedback from authors, reviewers, and readers; track any cases of abuse or harassment and have remediation paths.

Examples and case studies

- Wiley's Transparent Peer Review pilot (Clinical Genetics and other journals) reported high author opt?in (?83% in an early phase) but relatively low rates of reviewers signing names (~19%), illustrating a common pattern of author willingness to publish review histories and reviewer reluctance to disclose identity.
- Nature moved from optional to broader mandatory publication of peer?review files for newly published research articles in 2025, reflecting a major publisher-level policy shift toward open reports.
- BMC titles and Copernicus journals have long published review histories and provide models for integrating review files with articles in a consistent, searchable way.

Final note

Transparent peer review is not an all?or?nothing switch. The practical path for most journals and research communities is iterative: pilot an open?reports option, collect quantitative and qualitative evidence, protect vulnerable participants, and scale practices that demonstrably improve trust, training, and reproducibility. The recent publisher pilots and policy changes make now a good moment to evaluate whether transparent review aligns with your community's norms and objectives and to design a model that balances openness with fairness and safety.

If you are preparing to pilot transparent review or to publish peer?review files alongside articles, consider Enago's manuscript?editing and bespoke publishing workflow solutions to refine author responses, clarify revision statements, and ensure published review histories are well?structured and readable.

Category

1. Articles
2. Reporting Research

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