

Process for dealing with submitted comments

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1. Screening by publisher (Wiley)

Comments submitted through the Cochrane Library are received by Wiley editorial staff who will act within two days of receipt. Non-approved comments will be dealt with by Wiley and a response sent to the contributor. Approved comments will be sent to the Feedback Editor and Managing Editor of the relevant Cochrane Review Group (CRG).

2. Initial handling by the CRG editorial base and the Feedback Editor

The Feedback Editor assesses the comment and decides:

1. Is the comment valid (coherent, sensible, and relevant to the review)? If not, no further action is needed beyond informing the contributor of the decision.
2. Does the comment make a substantive comment on the content of the review or a minor comment?
 - a. Substantive comments (see action below).
 - b. Minor comment (see action below).

The Feedback Editor and the Managing Editor should agree the appropriate course of action and share this and the comment with the review authors.

The Feedback Editor should respond promptly to the comment contributor within two weeks of receipt, acknowledging receipt, thanking the contributor, and explaining how the comment will be dealt with and a timeline for action.

The review may or may not be amended or updated, or in extreme cases, withdrawn, in response to a comment.

If the comment does prompt a change to the review, the Managing Editor will make relevant changes as agreed with the review authors and the Feedback Editor. The contributor should be informed of the outcome.

3. Action: dealing with invalid comments

The Feedback Editor responds to the contributor informing them of the decision and giving a brief explanation.

4. Action: dealing with minor comments

Minor comments could include spelling or typographic errors, make very general statements, or may be requests about the review or its status. Minor comments are not normally published unless the comment (or its response) offers insight or interest to readers, or an opportunity to provide useful clarification.

The Feedback Editor responds to the contributor informing them of the action taken.

It may be appropriate to thank the contributor in the Acknowledgements section of the Review.

5. Action: dealing with substantive comments

It is important that substantive comments are published as soon as possible, unless the CRG has a compelling reason not to do so, or if the contributor does not wish the comment to be published. Examples of comments that might not be published are those where it becomes apparent that the contributor is clearly mistaken, or when the CRG has a reason to believe that the contributor has a significant, undeclared conflict of interest. The Feedback Editor should raise concerns about conflict of interest with the contributor. All substantive comments should be dealt with within three months.

A response from the review authors is sought and should be published promptly, either at the same time as the comment is published, or subsequently. Review authors' responses should be confined to comments about the review itself and should relate directly to the content of the comment.

The steps are:

- Comment published (as soon as possible after receipt) (see below).
- Response by review author published (or CRG response if author unavailable or unwilling).
- Review amended (if necessary) and comments cited or acknowledged (as appropriate).
- If the comment is to be dealt with in next update, this should be indicated in published response to the comment with a timeline on when the update is expected.

- Contributor informed of outcome.

6. Publishing comments

The timing of comment publication, review author's response, and review changes (if any), is up to the CRG and may depend on the status of the review or the nature of the comment. They can happen in sequence or simultaneously.

In some cases the comment may be edited or summarised (for example if the comment is particularly long with repetitious content) by the Feedback Editor, who will send the revised version to the comment contributor, informing them of the intention to publish the revised version. If the contributor had already consented to editing and publication of the comment, this is a courtesy and if the contributor does not respond within a specified time, the comment is published.

The comment is published in the 'Feedback' section of the review. The 'Contributors' section should include the name of the comment contributor and the name of those contributing to the response and their role in the CRG.

If the authors do not wish to respond or are unable to respond, the CRG should publish a response explaining that the author was unable to (or declined to) respond. The comment contributor should be informed.