

ACL Peer Review Committee Report

Proposal: Sustainable Peer Reviewing Policy

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TL;DR

ACL Rolling Review (ARR) faces a reviewing crisis: submissions are growing far faster than reviewer capacity. 38% of the ~17K May 2026 submissions came from authors with no available publication record, and there are cases of outright spam, for which we so far had no established protocols.

The proposal: *cap reviewed submissions to available reviewer capacity.* Each submission must "pay" for itself by providing a qualified service contributor (reviewer or chair). Submissions without service capacity go into a lottery for whatever spare capacity remains. Service from qualified contributors counts towards the venue capacity, and a mentorship system will be built up for those not qualified yet. If a qualified service contributor is not available among the authors, non-author designated contributors can be nominated, but must vouch for the work (arXiv-endorsement style). Measures for system abuse will be implemented. For example, accounts that systematically submit or endorse low-quality work, and accounts that misuse the system in other ways, will be penalized or even banned. Additionally, per-author quotas are introduced, where authors are capped at 20 total submissions and 5 first-author (including shared first-author) submissions per cycle.

Offsetting measures: to keep things as inclusive as possible, reviewer qualification criteria are being broadened (already implemented in Aug 2026), with further proposals for a manual application path for those with equivalent experience, a mentor-matching program for newcomers, and a certification path to let experienced secondary reviewers become fully qualified.

Background: reviewing sustainability crisis

Starting in April 2024, ARR required that at least one author per submission contributed to the conference service as a reviewer or chair. This proved insufficient and difficult to implement fairly, in particular due to a large number of papers nominating the same qualified reviewer. Since May 2025, ARR implemented a different policy, requiring all qualified authors to serve as reviewers.

However, this too has proved unsustainable. In May 2026 (the ARR cycle associated with EMNLP and AACL), as many as 38% of over 17K submissions were authored exclusively by people with no available publication record. There are unfortunately also malicious spammer accounts (e.g. submitting 20+ single-author papers from the same author without prior publication records).

Given these numbers, it is an unfortunate fact that the *reviewing capacity is simply not growing at the same rate as the number of submissions*. If we do not act now, the next large review cycle will almost certainly put us in a situation where it is simply not possible to assign three reviewers to every paper, no matter how much we scramble to recruit at the last minute. Furthermore, much of this effort would be spent on submissions not yet ready for serious review, further undermining the trust in the scientific community. And many key tasks in the current process, such as search for emergency substitutes, fall disproportionately on the chairs, leading to burnout.

The goal of this proposal is to introduce a system that incentivizes higher quality submissions and guarantees there is reviewer capacity, while also remaining as inclusive as possible -- even if we cannot review every possible submission.

Proposal: capping submissions, optimizing task distribution

Facing this trade-off, we are making the hard decision **to cap the amount of submissions that will be reviewed based on the available service capacity and per-author quotas**. In practice, this means the following:

- **Designated Service Contributors.** A designated service contributor is someone, typically a selected author of the submission, who is qualified and willing to serve in the same cycle the paper is submitted to, as reviewer, AC, SAC, or a senior conference or ARR role in that cycle. Each submission must name one qualified person as its designated service contributor. A submission to ARR will be guaranteed to be assigned reviewers only if it contributes sufficient service capacity.
- **Designated service quotas.** To keep reviewing quality high, a qualified individual can serve as the designated service contributor for one submission or two submissions, *but not more*. Each designated submission carries a service load of 5 reviews or 8 meta-reviews (i.e., 10 reviews, 16 meta-reviews, or 5 reviews plus 8 meta-reviews for two submissions). Individuals in service roles above area chair (senior area chairs, program chairs, ARR editors/CTOs)

may count that service in lieu of the review load, and can likewise be designated for up to two submissions.

- **Per-author quotas.** Orthogonally, we are also introducing upper caps on the maximum number of submissions that can come from the same author, to (a) encourage the submission of fewer but higher-quality papers, and (b) uphold the level of intellectual contribution and joint responsibility for the submission expected by [ACL publication ethics policy](#) (PEC). Similarly to the [ICLR 2027 policy](#), there is now a cap of **a maximum of 20 (re-)submissions per author**, even when sufficient service capacity is provided. Additionally, ARR introduces a cap of **a maximum of 5 (re-)submissions as a first author or joint* first author** (* joint, shared or co-first authors are treated as synonyms in this document).
- **Non-qualified researchers as secondary reviewers.** Non-qualified researchers cannot serve as designated contributors, but can serve as 'secondary' reviewers if they are mentored by a senior researcher, who is qualified to review, and is considered as the 'primary' reviewer. The senior researcher is responsible for the final review quality for the non-qualified reviewers they oversee. They can mentor up to two non-qualified reviewers this way each cycle, and should assign each non-qualified reviewer no more than 5 reviews. In these cases, the non-qualified reviewers will be clearly marked as secondary reviewers in OpenReview, and visible as such to the ACs and up.
- **Exemptions and requiring all authors to review are going away.** Previously, all qualified authors had to review for the ARR cycle, and ARR allowed authors to ask for exemptions to reciprocal reviewing due to foreseeable circumstances (e.g. medical issues, PC-level commitments at other venues, etc.). This proved impossible to implement fairly. Under the new policy, the situation has changed: submitters are responsible for ensuring that the designated service contributor is both able and willing to serve in the given cycle. As a consequence, the requirement that all qualified authors have to review is lifted.
- **Emergency substitutions are the duty of the designated service contributors.** If a designated service contributor has a last-minute emergency and is unable to complete their review or chair assignments, it is their responsibility to **notify** the authors of the submission(s), for which they are designated service contributors, as well as the relevant chairs (via the emergency declaration form), *on time. In cooperation with the authors of the submission(s) for which they serve as designated service contributor*, they must also **ensure that there is a qualified and willing replacement** (to be specified in the emergency declaration form, together with a short description of the relevant expertise of the replacement). **If the assignments are not completed by a replacement recruited by the contributor having the emergency, any paper listing that person either as author or as a designated service contributor will be automatically desk rejected.** This policy replaces the harsher negative incentives announced in the [May 2025 reciprocal reviewing](#) policy. For volunteer reviewers/chairs in ARR providing additional reviewing

capacity (i.e., those not contributed by authors), emergencies will be handled as usual by the chairs after an emergency declaration is submitted.

- **Disqualification from service:** poor service practices of author-designated or volunteer service contributors (e.g. rudeness, clear lack of basic expertise, clear violations of AI use guidelines, or other system abuse under the [ACL publication ethics policy](#)) can be penalized by disqualification from service, which means that such researchers will not be allowed to serve as designated service contributors for their own or other people's submissions to ARR. Hence, their submissions will either have to be covered by another qualified contributor or be subject to the lottery (see below). The editors have the discretion to apply this penalty on a case-by-case basis (based on issue reports of authors confirmed by the chairs or simply chair reports). The disqualification determined in collaboration with the ACL PEC can range from 2 months to 5 years, based on the severity of the case. The same penalty applies to volunteer service contributors who fail to show up without filing an emergency declaration.
- **Enforcing limits:** The authors of submissions where the designated service contributor is above the maximum capacity will be notified and given 24 hours to either a) find another contributor who is not over-committed, or b) withdraw some submissions. The over-submitting authors will likewise be given time to decide which papers to withdraw. If the problems are not fixed during this period, a random subset of papers with over-submitting authors or over-committed service contributors will be placed in the lottery, so that the maximum is within the allowed limit.
- **Lottery:** The lottery covers (a) submissions with no designated service contributor and (b) submissions moved there under the enforcement provisions above. A subset is randomly selected for review based on the available review and meta-review capacity. The submissions that were not selected by the lottery are desk rejected. ARR reserves the right to weight the lottery based on trends in submission data, so that no individual or group of authors can increase their odds of selection — for example, by submitting in bulk.
- **Complete OpenReview profile.** The OpenReview profiles of designated service contributors (both authors and non-authors) must contain the necessary information to confirm their qualifications (including DBLP, ORCID, ACL Anthology links). Additionally, all authors will now be required to create OpenReview accounts and provide their metadata, to facilitate disambiguation and anti-spam measures (see below).

Measures to broaden the reviewer pool

This proposal will, unfortunately, restrict access to the ACL review process, and potentially exclude new researchers that cannot provide reviewing along with their submission. We hope that the community would step up with volunteer service to meet the reviewing burden for the new researchers. We are also taking a number of steps

to alleviate this significant downside, including growing the reviewer pool to provide as much total capacity as possible while maintaining quality, and introducing new mechanisms to train and approve new reviewers over time. In particular, this includes:

1) Changes to reviewer qualifications. To increase the amount of submissions that can be reviewed, and to be more inclusive for work coming from other communities, we recommend broadening the [2025 ARR reviewer qualifications criteria](#) as follows:

- Those who have obtained their PhDs and/or have senior academic positions (postdoc/faculty), automatically qualify if they have at least 2 publications in major ACL events, Findings of the ACL, or major ML venues.
- Doctoral students (but not bachelor and master students), as well as industry researchers with at least a Masters degree, automatically qualify if they have at least 2 publications in major ACL events or Findings or major ML venues and a total of ≥ 3 publications in total.
- Those who do not automatically qualify by these criteria can serve as secondary reviewers, mentored by a qualified primary reviewer (see (4) below), but cannot be designated service contributors by themselves.

Venues considered 'major ACL' are: ACL, CL, COLING, CoNLL, EACL, EMNLP, HLT, IJCNLP / AACL, LREC, NAACL, TACL, *SEM. Venues considered 'major ML' are: AAAI, COLM, CVPR, ECCV, FAccT, ICCV, ICLR, ICML, IJCAI, JAIR, JMLR, NeurIPS, TMLR, TPAMI. Venues considered major may be expanded over time and additional qualification criteria may be added over time as appropriate.

These changes entail that some reviews will be performed by colleagues who primarily work in other fields. To account for that, we recommend implementing a system for marking such reviewers clearly to area chairs, and to consider this factor in paper-reviewer assignments.

2) Manual application process. Those who feel they have substantially equivalent experience, but do not qualify under the automatic qualification requirements above, may apply with documentation of their expertise and review experience for case-by-case consideration (e.g. with records from other venues where they served). In particular, those who have been sufficiently mentored as secondary reviewers at major ACL venues (see (4) below) may be accepted as reviewers, even if they do not meet the strict publication thresholds, on a case-by-case basis. Since this process is manual, the applications are not guaranteed to be reviewed quickly, and should be sent as early as possible before the deadline.

3) Facilitating search for potential supervisors. To be more welcoming to the work of new contributors who do not have connections to the field and are overall new to research, ACL could send out a call for volunteer mentors who would be open to such collaborations. The would-be contributors could then reach out to the potential mentor, and benefit from supervision by more experienced researchers. This process is expected to be akin to the regular student supervision, where the senior researcher both makes a sufficient intellectual contribution to the work to qualify for co-authorship, and shares responsibility for it. Note that this could be open not only to senior

researchers, but also doctoral students with a sufficient publication record. In many institutions they are formally qualified to supervise bachelor or even master theses independently.

4) Mentoring secondary reviewers. ARR could develop a reviewer certification system, based on a combination of knowledge of ARR review criteria and secondary reviewer record. Doctoral students who do not yet have a sufficient publication record themselves, may be considered qualified if they pass a test of knowledge of ARR review criteria (to be developed), have successfully served as secondary reviewers for at least 10 submissions across at least 2 review cycles (with no 'irresponsible reviewer' flags from area chairs, active engagement during the author rebuttal, no evidence of using AI to generate reviews, etc.), and are highly recommended by the primary reviewers who mentored them.

Note that (1) has been implemented in the ARR August 2026 cycle based on feedback at ACL'26. (2-4) are proposals for new measures.

Measures to address system abuse and their consequences

The policy involves two distinct gatekeeping mechanisms targeting different forms of abuse: (a) identity-level — all authors and designated service contributors must be real people with real credentials and unique profiles, which targets fake and manipulated accounts; and (b) submission-level — each submission must be endorsed by a qualified service contributor, which targets work not ready for serious review. These are separate requirements; satisfying one does not satisfy the other.

Identity-level measures. All authors of a submission must be real people with complete, accurate, and unique OpenReview profiles, and an actual publication record where it exists. Designated service contributors (author or non-author) must additionally have a verifiable publication record confirming their qualifications. Accounts operated by or on behalf of automated systems (e.g., LLM agents) do not qualify as designated service contributors, regardless of publication record. ARR will provide an extra grace period for completing the profiles after the submission deadline. The authors and non-author service contributors will be held accountable for misrepresenting their identity or qualifications. Misuse will be reported and have severe consequences including bans.

Submission-level measures. Designated service contributors, whether they are authors of the submission or not, must confirm both that they are willing to serve for this submission, and that the submission is at **the expected quality level: ready for consideration for acceptance at a top-tier conference.**

Moreover, the area chairs will have the option to flag submissions early where the overall level is clearly too low for consideration for a top-tier conference, and the amount of necessary feedback exceeds what can be reasonably provided in peer review. Where their concerns are confirmed by a senior area chair or a program chair,

such submissions will be desk rejected without appeal and may not be resubmitted. Such cases will be recorded for statistical analysis (see below).

System abuse. Weak submissions do not necessarily violate publication ethics, but systematic abuse will be investigated. To identify such cases, statistics will be collected over ARR cycles (and possibly in collaboration with other *ACL venues and co-located events including workshops), so as to identify accounts that consistently submit or endorse too many low-quality submissions, compared to the average record.

The 'spam' cases (systematic submissions that are clearly too low in quality and/or clearly violate generative AI use policy) will be referred to the Publication Ethics Committee (PEC). While the case is being considered, ARR has discretion to unilaterally desk reject any submissions from spammers for up to 2 review cycles.

Repeated endorsement of submissions from fake accounts, and any malicious manipulation of profiles, affiliations or publication history in OpenReview profiles (e.g., to circumvent the author caps, misrepresent their identity or qualifications) are considered system abuse. These policy violations are subject to PEC sanctions — including but not limited to submission bans of up to 5 years and retraction — depending on the severity of the violation.

Alternative proposals

Journal-style pre-screening based on content. A proposal that was suggested at the ACL'26 business meeting and extensively discussed would be to reduce the volume of reviewed submissions by having the senior chairs aggressively desk reject many submissions based on light screening for content (journal style). Depending on how such screening was done, this approach could incentivize clearer research questions, more principled methodology and other good scientific principles. However, the committee agrees that this would be much harder to implement at the conference scale, would further increase the ARR cycle timeline, and would leave the desk-rejected authors frustrated for being desk rejected with little or no feedback. That said, since there is a growing number of submissions that are clearly not ready for serious review, we do recommend a limited version of this idea: the early flagging mechanism described under 'Submission-level measures' above.

Decrease the number of reviews per paper. Another proposal suggested at ACL'26 was to reduce the number of reviews received by each paper to match the available reviewing capacity. This would mean that papers might get two or even one review, instead of the standard three. However, the committee believes this would decrease the quality of the review process by making it even more sensitive to outlier reviews.

Submission fees. The committee also considered introducing submission fees, but decided against it, as it would not fully guarantee enough reviewers and would disproportionately affect the researchers in the developing countries.