Peer review has been the subject of passionate debate, ever since its introduction by Henry Oldenburg (in 1665) for the journal Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society. Oldenburg’s idea of a scientific journal was to provide a means of offering the authors of a scholarly work an early kind of protection of their intellectual property by registering, attributing, reviewing and publishing a written report of it, and by disseminating and archiving the latter (http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/263105/1/399we23.htm). Peer review was central to Oldenburg’s ideas about science publishing. It has stayed so until today. Peer review should ensure the quality of the work that is offered for publication to a journal by weeding out studies that have been poorly conceived, designed or executed and by selecting high-quality manuscripts that will be of the greatest interest to the readership; also, peer review should make sure that the results presented in these manuscripts have been interpreted correctly and all possible alternative interpretations considered (Hames, 2007). Although improving the quality and readability of a publication is a by-product of peer review, requesting additional experiments or enlargement of study groups is not. And that is the problem. There is growing opposition to reviewers always asking for ‘more’. Or, as Hidde Ploegh, from the Whitehead Labs of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, put it in Nature recently, ‘reviewers should abandon the attitude that screams: “Look, I’ve read it, I can be as critical as the next dude and ask for something that’s not yet in the manuscript”’, a reflexive approach to reviewing that has unfortunately become more or less standard (Ploegh, 2011). I agree with Ploegh that reviewers should assess the work ‘as submitted’, i.e. as it is in front of them, and not automatically ask for more labwork, or for more or different patients to be included. Apparently, this is what the authors themselves thought fit to be published, and this is what the journal should consider for publication. If this is not good enough, it should not be accepted.

For that reason, at Human Reproduction, we from now on will ask our associate editors to screen (even more) vigilantly all incoming manuscripts and weed out the poor ones. Only those that will pass this filter will be sent out for review. We have superb reviewers, but we should not overburden them. They will be encouraged to be decisive (in order not to end up in a second, third or even fourth revision sequence) by simply giving a Yes or No vote for the manuscript under assessment (‘judge as is’) (Robertson, 2011). They also will be invited to provide solid arguments for their vote, based on their personal answer to four simple questions: ‘Do I understand it?’, ‘Is it new?’, ‘Do I believe it?’ and ‘Do I care?’; thus addressing the quality, the originality, the validity and the importance of the paper under review (Wager et al., 2002; Hames, 2007). The associate editors will then balance the two or three reviewers’ reports and come to a final recommendation. If this recommendation should include the suggestion (in a minority of cases) to allow for a major revision of the manuscript, we will carefully consider it at our weekly editorial board meeting and decide whether to allow one (and only one) revision. After that I will use the editor’s privilege to take the final decision. We are all (as author, as reviewer, as editor) aware of the fact that multiple rounds of revisions often turn into a war of attrition and will rarely affect the overall conclusion of a study (Ploegh, 2011; Vosshall, 2012). And that is exactly what the French writer, critic, and philosopher Voltaire (1772) was hinting at in his enchanting poem ‘La Bégueule’: le mieux est l’ennemi du bien, the better is the enemy of the good.

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