

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Summer 2025 Editor-In-Chief Message

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Dear JEM Readers,

It is my pleasure to be writing you this Summer 2025 Editor's message, now a little over 1 year into the job. It has been a wonderful learning experience as I have met many of you in this new role. In the past year, we have nearly doubled the number of Associate Editors, adding expertise in microbial ecology, evolutionary cell biology, and strengthening our expertise in genomics, phylogenetics, parasitology, and taxonomy. This growth is reflected in over 100,000 article views that we've had in 2025 alone and the excellent papers that have been submitted and published this year.

It has also been a year of exciting change for the Journal. Major shifts included a new submission and peer-review platform that has hopefully improved the author experience. We moved to a dynamic issue format, with articles published as soon as they are ready and bundled retrospectively into issues. This did mean the end of issue-specific cover images, and so in response we introduced "Issue Highlight" images. You'll still get a chance to be the face of the issue with a figure from your paper. Donna Huber (JEM Managing Editor) and I choose a striking image from one paper per issue, but you can also nominate an image. So please remember to do so when you submit!

The shift to dynamic issues also meant choosing a permanent cover image. As I explained in the ISOP Newsletter in February (<https://protistologists.org/message-from-the-journal-of-eukaryotic-microbiologys-editor-in-chief/>), the new cover was designed after a process involving brainstorming by the JEM Associate Editors in coordination with a group of young artistic protistologists. In the end, Dr. Anna Novák Vanclová created an original hand-drawn image for JEM. This picture is intended to capture the beauty of each individual protist, harkening back

to the tradition of illustration in protistology. When viewed as a thumbnail, the entire picture is meant to invoke the globe, representing the world of protists and importantly of protistologists. That is why we chose a human artist to design and create the cover by hand. That is why we did not choose a single or even composite image, and especially not an image created by AI.

To better reflect this world of protistologists, we have also improved the way that authors can list their names on articles. We recognized that, with Latin script only, the JEM authors and readership may not have the opportunity to be seen in the ways that they see themselves. Working with our publishers at Wiley, we made it possible for authors to additionally list their names in any language script of their choosing. We were quite intentional in designing the graphic to promote this initiative, with the word "Protist" written in nine different scripts. We balanced our selection geographically, selecting the most common countries from which we get articles and article views. However, we added one additional script to that graphic. I am based in Edmonton, Canada, and as such, The Journal of Eukaryotic Microbiology is now edited on Treaty 6, 7, and 8 Territory, the territory of the Nēhiyaw (Cree), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, Nakoda (Stoney), Dene, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Anishinaabe (Ojibway/Saulteaux) Peoples. In recognition of this, and to have the voices of this land meet the languages and voices of protistologists from many lands, we included in the graphic "ᑭᑭᑭ", "Protist" in the Cree script.

Perhaps the most important thing that I have come to appreciate this year is the striking richness and depth of our community. It is a strength of our discipline that lies in the individual and distinct perspectives that come from the lived experiences of each of you within the protistology community. I believe that

the central role of a society journal, such as JEM, is to provide a place for the authentic voices of the readership and the authorship. The power and value of such a journal come from hearing your words on the questions and topics that you have dedicated your time, effort, and passion to exploring.

This is why we have also spent time this year crafting author guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence at JEM, full details at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/15507408/homepage/forauthors.html>. These are compliant with the guidelines used by Wiley, but go somewhat further. There will be integrity checks for the use of AI, as there have always been for plagiarism, and we will ask authors to revise if manuscripts are detected as having insufficient “human oversight”. However, we are aware that the technologies for improving detection and for avoiding detection are in an ongoing arms race and that there will always be ways to get around the rules. The guidelines are not about restricting or policing the use of AI. They are intended to encourage the best use of new technology while preserving and promoting a culture of creativity and scholarship. We hope that the rationale for these guidelines resonates with you.

On the one hand, we absolutely recognize the time-saving utility of AI for mundane scripting tasks, and the exciting potential for AI-driven analysis of large-scale or noisy datasets, which would be otherwise impossible to perform. On the other hand, we will not accept the use of AI for figure generation, as a safeguard against scientific fraud, since the technology is already too advanced for fake images to be detected. All use of AI, in any capacity, must be declared in the Materials and Methods.

The most common and the most contentious application of AI is the use of Generative AI or Large Language Models (LLMs), for example ChatGPT. Consistent with the policies at Wiley, the use of LLMs for peer review at JEM is not permitted. This is partly because of the privacy breach that their use represents. Each reviewer has an ethical responsibility to preserve the privacy of the data that is being assessed: uploading those data and ideas violates the privacy and ownership of authors' intellectual property. But even if this weren't the case, the reviewers at JEM are carefully chosen for their hard-won expertise. Their insights are invaluable, and their efforts are highly valued by the editors. When properly managed to ensure professionalism, the process of respectful and constructive review by one's colleagues should build and strengthen our discipline. Those insights cannot, and will not, be replaced by an AI-generated consensus opinion.

For those same reasons, we will not allow LLMs for manuscript generation. We furthermore encourage considered use of AI tools for “improving the tone or readability” of the text, so that writers retain their individuality. After consulting with professional writers, journal editors, educators, and dozens of scientists over the past year, I have come to the opinion that yes there may be some types of writing where LLMs could be used to make the process more efficient; to just get the text out there. However, a scholarly article is not, and should not, be writing of this type. Because ideally, the point of a scientific article isn't just the text itself. It is a process and it is a conversation and these things should matter. In the act of writing the paper, knowledge and insight will be gained by the authors. It might be finding an unanticipated fact, buried in a cited article that changes how

an observation is interpreted, and that would be missed by just reading an AI summary. It can be the new perspective gained during the process of designing your figures. It may be the clarity of understanding and the strengthening of a collegial bond when respectfully debating a sentence with co-authors to resolve misunderstandings. These opportunities for organic and sometimes unexpected scientific enhancement of a paper are lost if the process is outsourced to an algorithm.

The value of a scientific article also lies in the unique information gained by the reader when engaging with the words of the particular author. Because each author's writing shares with the reader who they are. Our viewpoints on our topics have been shaped by the varied training that we have each received (teachers, non-core courses taken, the failed experiments, sampling trips, and proposals that never make it into the AI training sets). Your way of approaching your article will be informed by the unrecorded input from all of your senses (the smell of a culture, the sound of the sampling site, that silly TEM that didn't make it into the paper where the nucleus and two vacuoles made your cell look surprised and slightly scandalized). Your writing will reflect the deeply personal motivation and curiosity that you have for your question; and we, the readers, get to benefit from all of that.

If using generative AI to write your paper seems the only way to communicate your work due to a language barrier, please contact me and we can try to find another solution. As tools for ‘improving clarity or readability’ become more normative, we encourage you to do one final pass over the paper after using these tools to ensure human oversight and recapture the personality and message of you and your co-authors. Yes, we want articles that are understandable to readers within our field, with basic grammar rules followed and typos corrected. But as a Society journal, supporting and amplifying the distinct voices of protistologists is not a side benefit. It is a core value and the heart of our mission.

In the end, it has been a year of learning, change, and growth here at JEM. I look forward to engaging more with you in the coming months and to helping you share your discoveries and insights in the field of protistology.

Data Availability Statement

This Editor's message does not use data. It is an opinion piece only.