



Reviewer guidelines and best practice

The peer reviewer is responsible for critically reading and evaluating a manuscript in their specialty field, and then providing respectful, constructive, and honest feedback to authors about their submission. It is appropriate for the Peer Reviewer to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the article, ways to improve the strength and quality of the work, and evaluate the relevance and originality of the manuscript.

Before Reviewing

Please consider the following:

- Does the article you are being asked to review match your expertise?

If you receive a manuscript that covers a topic that does not sufficiently match your area of expertise, please notify the editor as soon as possible. Please feel free to recommend alternate reviewer.

- Do you have time to review the paper?

Finished reviews of an article should be completed within two weeks. If you do not think you can complete the review within this time frame, please let the editor know and if possible, suggest an alternate reviewer. If you have

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agreed to review a paper but will no longer be able to finish the work before the deadline, please contact the editor as soon as possible.

- Are there any potential conflicts of interests?

While conflicts of interest will not disqualify you from reviewing the manuscript, it is important to disclose all conflicts of interest to the editors before reviewing. If you have any questions about potential conflicts of interests, please do not hesitate to contact the receiving editorial office.

The Review

When reviewing the article, please keep the following in mind:

Content Quality and Originality:

Is the article sufficiently novel and interesting to warrant publication? Does it add to the canon of knowledge? Does the article adhere to the journal's standards? Is the research question an important one? In order to determine its originality and appropriateness for the journal, it might be helpful to think of the research in terms of what percentile it is in? Is it in the top 25% of papers in this field? You might wish to do a quick literature search using tools such as Scopus to see if there are any reviews of the area.

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If the research has been covered previously, pass on references of those works to the editor.

Organization and Clarity

- Title: Does it clearly describe the article?
- Abstract: Does it reflect the content of the article?
- Introduction: Does it describe what the author hoped to achieve accurately, and clearly state the problem being investigated? Normally, the introduction should summarize relevant research to provide context, and explain what other authors' findings, if any, are being challenged or extended. It should describe the experiment, the hypothesis(es) and the general experimental design or method.
- Method: Does the author accurately explain how the data was collected? Is the design suitable for answering the question posed? Is there sufficient information present for you to replicate the research? Does the article identify the procedures followed? Are these ordered in a meaningful way? If the methods are new, are they explained in detail? Was the sampling appropriate? Have the equipment and materials been adequately described? Does the article make it clear what type of data was recorded; has the author been precise in describing measurements?
- Results: This is where the author/s should explain in words what he/she discovered in the research. It should be clearly laid out and in a logical sequence. You will need to consider if the appropriate analysis has been conducted. Are the statistics correct? If you are not comfortable with statistics, please advise the editor when you submit your report. Interpretation of results should not be included in this section.

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- Conclusion/Discussion: Are the claims in this section supported by the results, do they seem reasonable? Have the authors indicated how the results relate to expectations and to earlier research? Does the article support or contradict previous theories? Does the conclusion explain how the research has moved the body of scientific knowledge forward?
- Tables, Figures, Images: Are they appropriate? Do they properly show the data? Are they easy to interpret and understand?
- Scope - Is the article in line with the aims and scope of the journal?

Article Types Considered:

The Leading Edge (Perspectives)

- Unique perspective that both describes the experience, and relates the situation to a public health issue, health policy issue, etc

Delivery Science (Original Research)

- Original Data and Trials

- Submissions should present data that offers novel approaches to improving the systems, processes, and tools involved with delivering care.

Synthesis (Review Articles):

- Submissions should be a critical, systematic review of literature concerning issues that are relevant to the delivery of health care. Reviews should be focused on one topic Into Practice (case studies).

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- Submissions should describe situations where individuals were faced with a challenge in health care delivery. The article should describe the challenge faced, the options, the thought process behind the decision made, and the lessons learned.

Viewpoints

- First Person (Interviews)
- Book Reviews
- Technology Insight(Product Reviews)

Rejection after the First Reading:

Even if you are coming to the opinion that an article has serious flaws, make sure you read the whole paper. This is very important because you may find some really positive aspects that can be communicated to the author. This could help them with future submissions.

A full read-through will also make sure that any initial concerns are indeed correct and fair. After all, you need the context of the whole paper before deciding to reject. If you still intend to recommend rejection, see the section "When recommending rejection."

Before Starting the Second Read-Through:

Once the paper has passed your first read and you've decided the article is publishable in principle, one purpose of the second, detailed read-through

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is to help prepare the manuscript for publication. Of course, you may still decide to reject it following a second reading.

The benchmark for acceptance is whether the manuscript makes a useful contribution to the knowledge base or understanding of the subject matter. It need not be fully complete research - it may be an interim paper. After all research is an incomplete, on-going project by its nature. The detailed read-through should take no more than an hour for the moderately experienced reviewer.

"Offer clear suggestions for how the authors can address the concerns raised. In other words, if you're going to raise a problem, provide a solution."

Preparation

To save time and simplify the review:

- Don't rely solely upon inserting comments on the manuscript document - make separate notes.
- Try to group similar concerns or praise together.
- If using a review program to note directly onto the manuscript, still try grouping the concerns and praise in separate notes - it helps later.
- Note line numbers of text upon which your notes are based - this helps you find items again and also aids those reading your review.
- Keep images, graphs and data tables in clear view - either print them off or have them in view on a second computer monitor or window.
- Now that you have completed your preparations, you're ready to spend an hour or so reading carefully through the manuscript.



On Presentation and Style:

Your review should ultimately help the author improve their article. So be polite, honest and clear. You should also try to be objective and constructive, not subjective and destructive.

You should also:

- Write clearly and so you can be understood by people whose first language is not English
- Avoid complex or unusual words, especially ones that would even confuse native speakers
- Number your points and refer to page and line numbers in the manuscript when making specific comments
- If you have been asked to only comment on specific parts or aspects of the manuscript, you should indicate clearly which these are
- Treat the author's work the way you would like your own to be treated

The Recommendation:

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Most journals give reviewers the option to provide some confidential comments to editors. Often this is where editors will want reviewers to state their recommendation - see the next section - but otherwise this area is best reserved for communicating malpractice such as suspected plagiarism, fraud, unattributed work, unethical procedures, duplicate publication, bias or other conflicts of interest.

Reviewers should check the preferences of individual journals as to where they want review decisions to be stated. In particular, bear in mind that some journals will not want the recommendation included in any comments to authors, as this can cause editors difficulty later - see Section 11 for more advice about working with editors.

You will normally be asked to indicate your recommendation (e.g. accept, reject, revise and resubmit, etc.) from a fixed-choice list and then to enter your comments into a separate text box.

Recommending Acceptance:

If you're recommending acceptance, give details outlining why, and if there are any areas that could be improved. Don't just give a short, cursory remark such as 'great, accept'. See Improving the Manuscript

Recommending Revision:

Where improvements are needed, a recommendation for major or minor revision is typical. You may also choose to state whether you opt in or out of the post-revision review too. If recommending revision, state specific changes you feel need to be made. The author can then reply to each point in turn.

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Some journals offer the option to recommend rejection with the possibility of resubmission – this is most relevant where substantial, major revision is necessary.

What can reviewers do to help? "Be clear in their comments to the author (or editor) which points are absolutely critical if the paper is given an opportunity for revision."

Recommending Rejection:

If recommending rejection or major revision, state this clearly in your review (and see the next section, 'When recommending rejection').

When Recommending Rejection:

Where manuscripts have serious flaws you should not spend any time polishing the review you've drafted or give detailed advice on presentation.

Editors say, "If a reviewer suggests a rejection, but her/his comments are not detailed or helpful, it does not help the editor in making a decision."

In your recommendations for the author, you should:

- Give constructive feedback describing ways that they could improve the research
- Keep the focus on the research and not the author. This is an extremely important part of your job as a reviewer

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- Avoid making critical confidential comments to the editor while being polite and encouraging to the author - the latter may not understand why their manuscript has been rejected. Also, they won't get feedback on how to improve their research and it could trigger an appeal.
- Remember to give constructive criticism even if recommending rejection. This helps developing researchers improve their work and explains to the editor why you felt the manuscript should not be published.
- "When the comments seem really positive, but the recommendation is rejection...it puts the editor in a tough position of having to reject a paper when the comments make it sound like a great paper."

Sample comments:

Please note that these are just examples of how you might provide feedback on an author's work. Your review should, of course, always be tailored to the paper in question and the specific requirements of the journal and the editor.

Positive comments:

- The manuscript is well-written in an engaging and lively style.
- The level is appropriate to our readership.
- The subject is very important. It is currently something of a "hot topic," and it is one to which the author(s) have made significant contributions.
- This manuscript ticks all the boxes we normally have in mind for an X paper, and I have no hesitation in recommending that it be accepted for publication after a few typos and other minor details have been attended to.

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- Given the complexity involved, the author has produced a number of positive and welcome outcomes including the literature review which offers a useful overview of current research and policy and the resulting bibliography which provides a very useful resource for current practitioners.
- This is a well-written article that does identify an important gap.

Make a recommendation:

Once you've read the paper and have assessed its quality, you need to make a recommendation to the editor regarding publication. The specific decision types used by a journal will vary but the key decisions are:

Accept – if the paper is suitable for publication in its current form.

Minor revision – if the paper will be ready for publication after light revisions. Please list the revisions you would recommend the author makes.

Major revision – if the paper would benefit from substantial changes such as expanded data analysis, widening of the literature review, or rewriting sections of the text.

Reject – if the paper is not suitable for publication with this journal or if the revisions that would need to be undertaken are too fundamental for the submission to continue being considered in its current form.

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Final Comments:

- All submissions are confidential and please do not discuss any aspect of the submissions with a third party.
- If you would like to discuss the article with a colleague, please ask the editor first.
- Please do not contact the author directly.

Ethical Issues:

- Plagiarism: If you suspect that an article is a substantial copy of another work, please let the editor know, citing the previous work in as much detail as possible

- Fraud: It is very difficult to detect the determined fraudster, but if you suspect the results in an article to be untrue, discuss it with the editor

- Other ethical concerns: For medical research, has confidentiality been maintained? Has there been a violation of the accepted norms in the ethical treatment of animal or human subjects? If so, then these should also be identified to the editor.

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Next Steps:

Please complete the “Reviewer’s Comments” form by the due date to the receiving editorial office. Your recommendation regarding an article will be strongly considered when the editors make the final decision, and your thorough, honest feedback will be much appreciated.

When writing comments, please indicate the section of comments intended for only the editors and the section of comments that can be returned to the author(s). Please never hesitate to contact the receiving editorial office with any questions or concerns you may have.

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