



# Peer Review for Professional Publications

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## ABSTRACT

The primary responsibility of peer review is to ensure high-quality professional publications. The purpose of this article is to outline the responsibilities for both the publication and the reviewer. This article also discusses the review process and some of the benefits of the peer review process.

**Key words:** journal review, manuscript review, peer review

**P**EER review has long been a standard for scientific publications in all disciplines. The primary goal of peer review is to ensure that high-quality articles are published. However, the benefits of peer review are not limited only to the publication. The profession and the individual reviewer also benefit. Reviewing manuscripts takes time and expertise and requires significant professional commitment. This article describes benefits of peer review and provides an overview of the process.

## BENEFITS OF PEER REVIEW

### For the Publication

Publications benefit from peer review in many ways. First, the review process helps ensure scientific rigor and well-written papers. It decreases the potential for personal bias in the selection of manuscripts for publication.

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And, it ensures professional relevance by validating that experts in the field agree that the manuscript is worthy of publication and dissemination.

### For the Reviewer

Reviewers, especially those who are relatively inexperienced authors, also benefit from peer review. The process of peer review can help the reviewer improve her or his own research and writing skills. And, the reviewer's knowledge base may be furthered by an in-depth review of the new material. Serving as a reviewer may also lead to an editorial board appointment and wider recognition of an individual's knowledge and expertise.

### For the Profession

The profession benefits from the review process because it promotes rigorous science and integrity in research and publishing. Publications are an important way of sharing information within a specialty and across disciplines. New information advances the profession, improves patient care and the healthcare system, and promotes cross-pollination of ideas and information.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF PEER REVIEWERS

The primary responsibility of the reviewer is to make a recommendation on the disposition of a manuscript. The recommendation may be to accept, accept with revision, or reject a manuscript. Manuscripts may be rejected because of poor writing, inadequate content, or research of questionable quality. They may also be rejected because the content is not appropriate for the target audience of the journal. In this case, if the manuscript is felt to be of good quality, the reviewer may recommend a more appropriate journal. Manuscripts may also be rejected because of ethical concerns such as plagiarism, duplicate publication, conflict of interest, or failure to protect study subjects.

### To the Publication/Profession

The responsibility of the reviewer to the profession is to maintain and improve the quality and scientific rigor of professional publications. This includes looking for generalizability of findings and contributions to the profession's body of knowledge. An additional consideration is the current interest in a topic. Interest will be higher for a newly emerging subject area about which little has been published; it is more difficult to justify publishing a manuscript if there has already been extensive information published on that subject for the target audience of the journal. In this instance, the reviewer should look for new information or other enhancements that make the manuscript worthy of publication.

### To the Author(s)

The reviewer must provide an unbiased opinion of the manuscript to the author (Alexander, 2005). If there is any concern that a conflict of interest exists, the reviewer should decline the review or contact the editor to discuss the situation prior to completing the review. All material reviewed should be held in the strictest confidence. A constructive review is honest and respectful, especially if the reviewer rejects the manuscript. Con-

cerns should be clearly articulated with concrete suggestions for improvement of content and/or structure. Reviewers need to keep in mind that their unedited comments may be sent directly to the author. These comments should be phrased accordingly using objective, noninflammatory terms. The reviewer should also provide encouragement and identify the strengths of the manuscript, not just the weaknesses. Reviewers should also address clinical relevance, make suggestions for additions or deletions of material, offer additional expert information on the topic, and critique the manuscript's style and structure (Foster, 2002).

## AGREEING TO REVIEW

Before agreeing to review a manuscript, there are several questions the reviewer should ask the editor (Table 1). If the journal uses double-blinded peer review, the integrity of that process must be maintained. A reviewer should never contact the author directly without first obtaining approval from the editor. Reviewers should not include any information that would identify them or their institution.

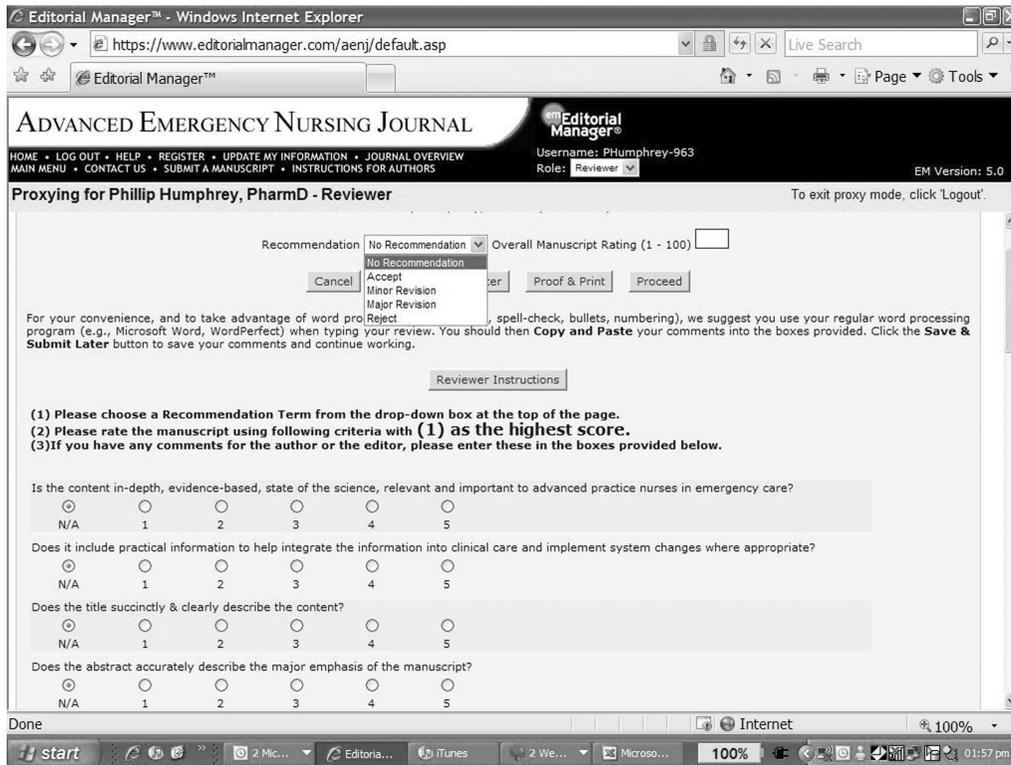
## REVIEW ELEMENTS AND PROCESS

Once the reviewer has agreed to review the manuscript, the reviewer needs to commit a solid block of time to perform the review. A suggested process is to begin by reading the manuscript through for the first time while considering the timeliness of the topic, the appropriateness for target audience, and the consistency with the purpose of the journal. Next, the reviewer should reread the article and make suggestions regarding content changes. Then the reviewer should make grammar, style, figure, table, and reference suggestions. Tables 2–7 identify the specific questions to be answered by the reviewer when reviewing various aspects of the manuscript.

Finally, the reviewer should make a recommendation to accept or reject the manuscript. Manuscripts are frequently accepted with the

**Table 1.** Issues to consider before agreeing to review a manuscript

Issue	Considerations
<p>Do you have any conflicts of interest or biases? Conflicts of interest are defined as having a personal, professional, or financial relationship or competition with the author or authors, or a strongly negative or positive attitude about the topic or the author (Benos, Kirk, &amp; Hall, 2003; Griffin-Sobel, 2004; Seals &amp; Tanaka, 2000)</p>	<p>Disclose any biases and conflicts of interest <i>before</i> you begin your review of the manuscript.</p>
<p>Have you ever been a reviewer before and do you understand the responsibilities of a reviewer (Benos et al., 2003)?</p>	<p>If not, ask for a tutorial or orientation. Ask for an example of a well-done review. If you have never reviewed before, ask for feedback on your review after the final publication decision is made.</p>
<p>Are you familiar with the journal (Alexander, 2005)?</p>	<p>Read other articles in the journal before reviewing the manuscript; this ensures that you are familiar with typical manuscripts for the journal's audience.</p>
<p>How long will it take to review the manuscript? How much time will you have to complete the assigned manuscript (Griffin-Sobel, 2004)?</p>	<p>The number of hours to read the manuscript will depend on the type of manuscript, the length of the manuscript, whether you are asked to provide a detailed review, and/or complete a review form. Most journals ask for a 2-3-week turnaround time on reviews.</p>
<p>How is the review process managed? Is there a specific form/electronic format to guide the process (Alexander, 2005; Benos et al., 2003; Seals &amp; Tanaka, 2000)?</p>	<p>Review options include hard copy, electronic, and online systems. Many journals use online review systems that require Internet access and completion of an online form (see Figure 1).</p>
<p>Do you need additional assistance with the review (Benos et al., 2003)?</p>	<p>Inform the editor immediately if you feel you need additional reviewers for statistics, current clinical practices, legal, or policy issues. If you would like to collaborate with another reviewer or recommend an additional reviewer for the manuscript, contact the editor first, before sharing it with anyone else.</p>
<p>Will you receive any remuneration/acknowledgment for your review of this manuscript?</p>	<p>Most peer-reviewed journals do not provide monetary remuneration. Some methods of recognition include the name of the reviewer listed annually in the journal's publication or complimentary access to online literature databases (e.g., OVID) with or without access to full-text articles. Other journals provide a complimentary copy of the issue of the journal in which the reviewed manuscript is published. Some journals provide a free yearly subscription to the journal.</p>



**Figure 1.** A portion of the *Advanced Emergency Nursing Journal's* online peer review tool for nonresearch manuscripts.

caveat that revisions can be made. In this case, the reviewer will usually be asked to identify whether minor or major revisions are necessary. When manuscripts are rejected, the reviewer may be asked to suggest whether the journal should agree to review the manuscript

again after a significant rewrite or whether the article should be rejected without the option of revision and future review unless it is submitted as a new manuscript. If the manuscript is rejected, the reviewer may suggest that it be referred to another, more appropriate journal. The manuscript, illustrations, and tables should be destroyed upon

**Table 2.** General questions

- Is the manuscript consistent with the purpose and directed to the target audience of the journal?
- Does the title succinctly and clearly describe the content?
- Does the abstract accurately describe the major emphasis of the manuscript?
- Is the purpose of the paper clear in the introduction or introductory paragraph?
- Is there an appropriate summary or concluding paragraph?

**Table 3.** Content

- Is the information correct, comprehensive, and current?
- Is it theoretically sound and evidence-based when appropriate?
- Is the content adequately supported by data/references?
- Is there sound argument for and defense of any original ideas?

**Table 4.** Grammar and style

- Is the overall grammar, writing style, and presentation of content suitable?
- Is the manuscript organized logically?
- Does the author include headings and subheadings that provide a visual outline?
- Is the manuscript of an appropriate length (too short or too long)?

**Table 5.** Figures and tables

- Do the tables and figures supplement/complement the text?
- Are tables and figures clear and easily interpreted?
- Are the figure and table legends appropriate?
- Should additional tables or figures be included?
- Should any of the figures or tables be deleted?

completing the review or, if a revision is anticipated, kept in confidence until the revision/review process is complete.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to describe the purposes and benefits of peer review and describe the process. Peer review demonstrates a commitment to the profession and an opportunity to contribute to the knowledge base. Interested individuals should contact journals in their areas of interest to volunteer their services

## REFERENCES

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**Table 6.** Ethics and scholarly integrity

- Is there any evidence of plagiarism or duplicate publication? Be sure to check previous publications by the author to ensure that there is significant difference in this manuscript versus previous manuscript(s). Also, information from previous references used, should have a citation to the previous reference.
- For research papers, is adequate protection of human or animal subjects described in the manuscript (i.e., institutional review board approval)?
- Does the author disclose any conflicts of interest that you feel may have influenced the content?
- Do you have any reason to question the legitimacy data or findings in the manuscript?
- Do you have any other ethical concerns about the manuscript?

**Table 7.** References

- Are the references appropriate and current?
- Do the references represent both sides of any controversies?
- Are they accurate (correct name, title, and journal information cited) and valid (did the referenced article actually say what it is ascribed to have said?)

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