

Becoming a Peer Reviewer

Peer Review is the mechanism by which we assess and improve the quality of scientific research prior to publication. Reviewers assess validity, significance and originality, making recommendations to journal editors about article suitability.

Peer reviewing is an essential skill for AHP researchers, academics and senior practitioners, enhancing critical appraisal and feedback skills, and enabling them to 'give back' to their professional community.

This leaflet provides a handy 'top ten tips' to facilitate you to develop your peer reviewing skills.

Tip 1 – Encouraging reviewer invitations

To apply to become a reviewer send a CV and outline of your expertise to the journal editor.

- Receiving too few reviewer invitations? Try widening your expertise list.
- Receiving too many or inappropriate invitations? Try narrowing the classification list.

Tip 2 - Receiving a reviewer invitation

On receiving the invitation, check the title, keywords and abstract for an appropriate match to your subject or methodological expertise – don't make a decision based on title alone, as this may be misleading. Consider:

- Can you provide a good review?
- Do you have a conflict of interest?
- Can you do a review in the requested timeframe?

Tip 3 – Turnaround times

Reviewer response times are very important to both authors and the journal. If you need to decline an invitation, do so quickly so alternative reviewers can be invited; you may wish to recommend suitable colleagues. Request additional time for your review if needed – editors often prefer this to a reviewer declining or failing to submit.

Tip 4 - Originality check

Undertake a brief literature search.

Check for:

- Originality – does similar research exist? What is new?
- Plagiarism – deliberate representation of another’s work as one’s own.
- Duplication – similar article in different journals.
- ‘Salami slicing’ – data gathered in one research project separately reported in several less meaningful publications.

Tip 5 - Initial read through

Ensure some dedicated quiet time with no distractions. Approach the review with four initial questions:

- What do they have to say?
- Do they say it well?
- Does the manuscript have potential relevance beyond its context e.g. internationally?
- Is this journal readership the right audience?

Tip 6 - Detailed review

Review the manuscript section by section.

- Is there a sound project rationale emerging from the literature? Any key references missing?
- The methodology is fundamentally important – is it reproducible and valid?
- Is there a credible conclusion, based on the findings?
- Read abstract and title last – should summarise the research.

Tip 7 - English, grammar and punctuation

Don’t be seduced by a well written article as it may have little scientific substance. Equally, a poorly written manuscript may hide an important message. Where a manuscript needs a lot of work, provide examples of poor structure/spelling/grammar but do not feel you need to correct the entire manuscript.

Tip 8 – Constructive feedback

Both novice and experienced authors expect tactful and constructive feedback. Commence with feedback about the whole article, then move to any specific ‘line by line’ comments. You may be required to score the manuscript against defined criteria and submit a reviewer recommendation (accept, revise, reject). Most reviewer platforms also enable the reviewer to issue private comments to the editor.

Tip 9 – The outcome

Following your recommendation you will be notified of the editor’s decision and it is important to compare reviewers’ comments. Differing opinions are not always negative; the editor may have selected you for your alternative viewpoint e.g. researcher, practitioner, educator. Always accept the invitation to review the resubmission, as it is unfair on authors if they are assigned new reviewers.

Tip 10 – Reviewer recognition

Most publishing platforms offer reviewers an online record of completed reviews and many award certificates for reviewing activity. Remember to cite reviewing as an excellent form of CPD. Share your critical appraisal skills via journal clubs and offer colleagues the option of institutional peer review of manuscripts prior to publication.

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Acknowledgments

Content developed by the **cahpr** Greater Manchester hub