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Becoming a Reviewer

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Becoming a Reviewer

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Why should I become a reviewer?...

1. Because you will play a part in creating and maintaining the official record of the discipline
2. Because you will learn what constitutes a well-written manuscript
3. Because your suggestions will help both authors and editors

Ethical Responsibilities

- Inform the editor if you are asked to review a manuscript that is outside your area of expertise
- Inform the editor if you have a conflict of interest
- Treat the entire review process as confidential (destroy ms. after review)
- Do not use any manuscript content for your own purposes

Other Responsibilities

- Adhere to the timeline allotted for your review
- If you cannot complete the review within the allotted time, communicate with the editor about a need for extra time
- Provide a balanced review, including both strengths and weaknesses

The first step in the review...

Read the entire paper, as soon as possible, for an overall impression of the content.

Does the paper hold your interest?

Does the paper say anything new?

Does the content flow logically, from introduction to conclusion?

Look closely at citations

Pay attention to the references cited.

Since you know the field, does the author cite the major scholars?

Does the author cite unreliable sources, such as Wikipedia?

Is there inappropriate reliance on secondary sources rather than the original theorists or philosophers?

Evaluate comprehensiveness of the literature review

Does the author specify the
databases used in lit. search?

Does the author include meta-
analyses and systematic reviews
of the topic?

Does the author include the most
recent studies of the topic?

Evaluate synthesis of literature

- “The ability to synthesize rather than just summarize information distinguishes as good manuscript from a poor one” (Pierson, n.d., p.3)
- Does the literature review provide a solid, well-integrated foundation for the author’s proposed theory, research, or clinical intervention?

Evaluate for plagiarism

“Spotting plagiarism may be the most important role of a reviewer. In my experience, expert reviewers who are familiar with the literature in their field easily spot plagiarism” (Pierson, n.d., p. 3)

If you suspect plagiarism, locate the original material and notify the editor. The editor will follow up with the author.

Recent example of plagiarism:

- Plagiarism in an article by Jegen, published in 2008 in *Health Care for Women International*, was identified when the author of the original work read the Jegen article
- The article was retracted and has been removed from the journal's archive
- The author wrote a letter of apology

Evaluate protection of human subjects

There should be an explicit statement about the Institutional Review Board that granted approval for the study

There should be a clear explanation of how the study participants were recruited, if any incentives were provided, and if they signed a consent form or gave oral consent

Evaluating a Quantitative Article

1. Is the research theoretically driven?
2. Is the design clearly specified?
3. Is the data collection procedure clear? What % of those contacted agreed to be in the study?
4. Is the statistical analysis appropriate and clearly explained?
5. Are limitations acknowledged?

About Limitations:

Limitations should not be a perfunctory acknowledgment of the study's shortcomings. The author should speak honestly of problems or challenges (such as inability to recruit a larger sample or to achieve ethnic diversity) and then say how he/she tried to *minimize* the limitations.

Evaluating a Quantitative Article, continued:

It is crucial that appropriate measures were selected to operationalize the theoretical constructs

Examine not only the appropriateness of the measures but their reliability and validity for this particular group of people (e.g., adolescents? Elderly?)

Evaluating a Quantitative Article, continued:

In the Discussion section, did the author place the findings in the context of other studies?

Robinson says that it is “bibliographic negligence” when findings are not placed in context of existing evidence.

Evaluating a Quantitative Article, continued:

In the Discussion or Conclusion, did author “spin” the findings? (rhetoric inconsistent with the numeric data: e.g., “the treatment effect ***approached*** statistical significance” or “with a larger sample size, the treatment’s effectiveness could be conclusively demonstrated”)

Evaluating a Qualitative Article:

- Agree to review a qualitative paper only if you have expertise in the method (otherwise, decline)
- Assess whether the author makes the case for the qualitative design
- Is the research question clearly stated?
- Is the sample purposefully chosen? Sufficient in size?

Evaluating a Qualitative Article, continued:

- Does the author clearly explain the method of coding or thematizing?
- Does the author address saturation of the data?
- Does the author discuss steps to reduce bias, such as a reflexive statement or a bracketing interview?

Evaluating a Qualitative Article, continued:

- Is the data richly descriptive or rather “thin”? (e.g., are there sufficient quotations from interviews to support the researcher’s categories/themes?)
- Does the research offer fresh and/or deeper understanding of the process or phenomenon?

Reviewer No-No's:

1. Do not try to rewrite the text for the author
2. Do not spend excessive time in copy-editing (the publisher has copy-editors who do this)
3. Do not phrase your comments in a negative, disrespectful way, even if you believe the paper is not publishable

Examples of unhelpful help:

- “This article is confusing”
- “I think the author needs to start all over”
- “What are you trying to say here?”
- “Nice article, but needs some editing”
- “Needs better organization”
(examples from Pierson, n.d., p. 4)

A Reviewer Imperative:

- Make your recommendation clear (accept, minor revisions, major revisions, reject)
- Support this recommendation with rationale
- Assume that the author will be reading this recommendation unless advised otherwise

When doing your first review:

- Write the review independently, but do not upload to the system yet; send a copy via email to your “mentor” to obtain feedback and suggestions
- Submit the review to the journal’s manuscript management system, after incorporating your mentor’s feedback and suggestions
- Compare your review to others when you receive copies of them from the editor

For further information:

- Go to www.nurseauthoreditor.com, where you will find helpful articles and resources, including a copy of the publication by Pierson
- To access this publication, click on “for reviewers” and then click on “Guidebook for Manuscript Reviewers”