



Publication Integrity and Ethics

PIE (π)

P.I.E. Guidelines for Reviewers



Practice Guidelines



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Introduction

The inclusion of high moral standards in a published document is central to its integrity; this includes the implementation of rigorous standards of research and writing. The peer review system is a vital element of the publication sector whether for scientific papers or journals. As an ethical and central part of this process, maintaining high and relevant scholastic levels of review from peer group professionals is of critical importance. Many reviewers approach their role without prior instruction or guidelines and they are frequently unaware of the obligations imposed on them. PIE Guidelines for Reviewers establishes the fundamental principles and standards which all reviewers should follow in the course of any review strategy.

All parties concerned must be willing to give unequivocal comment without prevarication or deliberate ambiguity. This requires a level of trust and individual responsibility. Online social media channels offer a line of indirect peer review but professional reviewers are required when a level of expertise to refine key points in a text is necessary.

The main purpose of the Guidelines is to define and promote the best practice in the ethics of the publishing sector and offer assistance where required. In providing clarification to researchers and other personnel, it aims to prevent conflicts of interest. Reference to the Guidelines can help avoid misconduct amongst authors, editors, peer reviewers or others involved in the publishing sector. The document may act as a reference tool for journalists and editors, and offer constructive guidance to their reviewers. For student training institutions, it can provide an invaluable educational resource for learning.

Adherence to code of ethics

1 Principles of fair practice

1.1 In order to observe correct ethical conduct in both the employment of their expertise and the purpose of their review, peer-reviewers should make honest and objective comment.

1.2 An invitation to review text must only be accepted if the reviewer is confident they possess the skills and expertise to conduct a competent assessment. They must declare if they are unable to undertake the review from the outset. If they are able to assess a part of the manuscript only, the reviewer should outline clearly the area for which they possess the relevant knowledge.

1.3 The reviewer must be confident they can complete the exercise within an agreed time frame. Should they feel an extension of the time is necessary, they must inform the editor immediately.

1.4 To complete a reliable and professional analysis, the reviewer will need to devote enough time to the exercise for their conclusions to be acceptable and regarded as an authentic study. They should not intentionally prolong the review process, whether by delay in submission or making unnecessary requests for further information. A peer reviewer must respond within a reasonable time-frame to a request to perform a review and without intentional delay.

1.5 Feedback and the way this is to be presented should follow editorial instructions to help authors make improvements, unless a reason not to do so has been previously ascertained. Constructive criticism should be accompanied by evidence and references where appropriate. To aid professional evaluation and fairness to authors, comments of a general nature should be substantiated. Due respect and sensitivity must be afforded to authors for whom English is a second language.

2 Considerations for review

2.1 The reviewer should define the problem or question which the author raises in the article and its relative significance.

2.2 If there are no statements or thesis, the reviewer should define if the questions raised by the author are interesting? If so, what is the reviewer reaction to the question or the problem raised by the author?

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2.3 If a more interesting approach can be suggested by the reviewer, this is acceptable; or they may question if the issue has been properly discussed.

2.4 How does the author present the arguments and are the points raised logical or contain personal feelings, statements or facts?

2.5 The article should have an engaging introduction that clearly defines the important terms in order for the reader to understand what the text is about. There should be a logical structure with vivid, clear language. If this is not apparent, the reviewer must recommend corrections or indicate that the author should rewrite the article.

2.6 The science and methodology of the article should be sound with all main points and conclusions relevant to the matter discussed or questioned by the author.

2.7 The author should give sufficient arguments for each point. Is the reviewer convinced by those arguments?

2.8 Paragraphs should be clearly developed, connecting with enough discussion and evidence to support the ideas. Sentences should be grammatically correct.

2.9 If the article is based on previous research, how is this research referenced? Are these references accurate and all the important works properly mentioned?

2.10 Are there any ethical concerns in correlation with the article reviewed and is the text original or copied? Citations should be properly quoted and referenced.

2.11 Consider if there are any suspicions regarding the conclusions of the author.

3 Confidentiality

3.1 Details of the review, or of the manuscript under review, should not be revealed to third parties unless with prior agreement.

3.2 The privacy of the author must be respected and if the reviewer wishes to seek an opinion from another peer professional, permission from the editor should be sought. Whereby it is the written policy of the editor or publication not to reveal the identity of the reviewer, whether to the author of a text or any other individual, the reviewer will take the necessary steps to protect their privacy and comply with editorial regulations. Direct contact to the author is not permitted without proper authentication.

3.3 A reviewer should not involve others in the review of the manuscript, including junior researchers they are mentoring, without prior permission from the journal. The names of anyone who has had input to the review should be included in order to accurately maintain records and award credits.

3.4 The editor must be notified immediately if concerns of an ethical nature arise, irregularities identified or plagiarism is suspected; these may be construed as misconduct during research, writing or submission. Reviewers should not disclose their concerns to others or attempt personal investigation unless requested.

4 Conflicts of interest

4.1 A conflict of interest may not preclude the peer reviewer from studied assessment. In the case of any potential or suspected competing interest, a full and honest disclosure of the details must be submitted and declared to the publisher before the review can be conducted.

4.2 A conflict may be of personal, financial, intellectual, political, religious, professional or otherwise, in nature. This applies regardless if they are uncertain whether an aspect constitutes a relevant self-interest. The efficacy of the review must be unhindered by self-serving influence.

4.3 A pre-requisite of the peer reviewer will be that they do not deliberately extrapolate negative conclusions from the text. The journal must be responsible for making its own judgment regarding the position of the reviewer.

4.4 Whereby the review is double-blind, with identities of author and reviewer concealed, the reviewer must notify the journal if they suspect the identity of the author and it raises any potential conflict of interest.

4.5 The reviewer must agree to follow the designated policy of the journal and notify them beforehand if they work at the same institution as the author, or envisage working there in the future. If, within the past 3 years, they have acted in the position of mentor, mentee, a close collaborator or joint grant holder or have a close personal relationship with an author, this may constitute a breach of policy.

5 Outside influence

5.1 Any information obtained during the assessment may not be used for the reviewer's advantage. This rule applies to giving information to another person or organisation in written, visual or audio format.

5.2 A reviewer is not permitted to use information obtained during review in order to discredit or disadvantage another person. Nor must the reviewer be influenced by the origins of the manuscript or allow themselves to be influenced by the nationality, religious or political beliefs, gender, disability or other characteristics of the author, or by commercial considerations.

5.3 A peer reviewer must offer objective, constructive comments and refrain from giving hostile, derogatory, accusatory comment likely to provoke a severely deleterious effect, or libel, whether the author views the comments or not. The review should not reflect negatively on another individual or make unjustified comment of a work mentioned by a competitor.

6 Recognition of status

6.1 Editors and journals must be supplied with comment that is based on the peer reviewer's professional area of expertise and represents an accurate reflection of this.

6.2 If a reviewer gives a false impersonation of another person or suggests the work has been conducted by another person, this will be considered serious misconduct.

6.3 It must be clarified and indicated from the outset if a reviewer should address specific elements of a manuscript.

6.4 Reviewers must not attempt to rewrite a manuscript to reflect their own style, especially if the work is in sound condition. Signatory to a review must be determined by the journal.

7 Expectations

7.1 A manuscript which a reviewer has previously assessed for another publication may have changed between the two submissions. It is imperative a fresh assessment is conducted to reflect different criteria for evaluation and acceptance of another journal.

7.2 Suggestions for the instigation of an alternative reviewer must not be influenced by personal considerations or with any intention that analysis of the manuscript should benefit from a specific outcome, whether positive or negative.

7.3 If a reviewer cannot commit to providing unbiased comment with fair judgment of the strengths and weaknesses of the work, they should decline to review.

7.4 An offer to review a manuscript must be declined if a reviewer has been involved with aspects of the work, such as reporting, research or writing.

7.5 A manuscript which has been passed to a reviewer for professional comment may be of similar nature or written content to one currently under analysis by the same reviewer or under consideration for publication at another publishing house. In this instance an offer to review must be declined.

7.6 Whereupon the journal's peer-review is not in accordance with the reviewer's accepted strategy, this may affect their review of the document or invalidate it.

7.7 A reviewer should not view a manuscript or any material associated with it whilst awaiting news from an editor that may rescind the request to review.

7.8 Prior to the review process, a reviewer must agree to undertake sufficient study of the manuscript and any supporting material such as data files, instructions, statements of policy and ethics. If any matter is not clear or an item is incomplete, a reviewer must notify the publisher before beginning the review.

7.9 Suggestions for additional investigations to support claims made in the manuscript must be separated from those intended to strengthen or extend the work.

7.10 Recommendations for change should be reported consistently to editors and authors, based on valid academic or technological reasons, not merely to enhance visibility of the review or include citations or references to the reviewer's work.

7.11 If the reviewer is the editor of the manuscript, they must be transparent and not submit the work under the pretext it is from an unknown reviewer.

8 Post review

Reviewers should continue to keep details of the manuscript and its review confidential. If the reviewer is contacted by a journal regarding details of the review, they should respond immediately and submit any information requested. Whereupon a reviewer discovers additional relevant matter post-review that may affect their recommendations, the journal should be contacted immediately. If other reviews are provided by the journal, these should be read by the reviewer in order to increase understanding of the topic. If a journal requests that a reviewer assesses revisions or resubmissions of manuscripts they have reviewed, this should be accepted.

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While every effort has been made to make these guidelines accurate and comprehensive, research integrity and publication ethics are extensive disciplines and these guidelines make no claim to be exhaustive, nor should they be taken as legal advice.