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Peer Review Workshop

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## What do authors want from peer review?

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### Peer review: The author's opinions

**ALPSP. What Authors Want. The ALPSP research study on the motivations and concerns of contributors to learned journals. Clapham, Worthing, West Sussex, UK: Association of Learned and Scholarly Publishers, 1999, 33-36**

**Method:** Questionnaire survey of 10 970 authors who published in journals that were members of ALPSP. Response rate approx. 30%, sample composition: 40% North America, 40% Europe, 10% Australia and New Zealand, 10% Rest of world (India, South Africa, Latin America)

1. Main criticisms: blocks innovation, opens the way for plagiarism, biased or corrupt
2. Perceived by slightly more than half of the participants in the survey as an obstacle to achieving publishing objectives
3. Factors for concern: Delay by reviewer, Superficial reviews, Unnecessarily hostile reviews, Use of unqualified reviewers, Unscrupulous reviewers, Overall fairness of the peer review system, Delay by publisher

## **International Committee of Medical Journal Editors**

### **Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication (Oct 2005)**

www.icmje.org      Accessed 18 January 2006

#### **II.C. Peer Review**

Unbiased, independent, critical assessment is an intrinsic part of all scholarly work, including the scientific process. Peer review is the critical assessment of manuscripts submitted to journals by experts who are not part of the editorial staff. Peer review can therefore be viewed as an important extension of the scientific process. Although its actual value has been little studied, and is widely debated (4), peer review helps editors decide which manuscripts are suitable for their journals, and helps authors and editors in their efforts to improve the quality of reporting. A peer-reviewed journal is one that submits most of its published research articles for outside review. The number and kind of manuscripts sent for review, the number of reviewers, the reviewing procedures, and the use made of the reviewers' opinions may vary. **In the interests of transparency, each journal should publicly disclose its policies in its instructions to authors.**

#### ***II.E.2. Authors and Reviewers***

Manuscripts must be reviewed with **due respect for authors' confidentiality**. In submitting their manuscripts for review, authors entrust editors with the results of their scientific work and creative effort, on which their reputation and career may depend. Authors' rights may be violated by disclosure of the confidential details of the review of their manuscript. [...]

Editors must not disclose information about manuscripts (including their receipt, content, status in the reviewing process, criticism by reviewers, or ultimate fate) to anyone other than the authors and reviewers. This includes requests to use the materials for legal proceedings.

Editors must make clear to their reviewers that manuscripts sent for review are privileged communications and are the private property of the authors. Therefore, reviewers and members of the editorial staff must respect the authors' rights by not publicly discussing the authors' work or appropriating their ideas before the manuscript is published. [...]

Reviewer comments should not be published or otherwise made public without permission of the reviewer, author, and editor.

## Council of Science Editors

### Editorial Policy Statements

#### Approved by the CSE Board of Directors

[http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/services/draft\\_approved.cfm#Authors](http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/services/draft_approved.cfm#Authors).

Accessed 18 January 2005

#### *Editors' Responsibilities to Authors*

Editors are responsible for:

- Treating authors with fairness, courtesy, objectivity, and honesty.
- Rendering timely decisions and responses to authors' queries.
- Protecting the integrity and privileged nature of every author's work.
- Setting and monitoring a policy on conflict of interest for authors, editors and reviewers.
- Describing a process for author appeals.
- Describing a process for responding to allegations of misconduct by authors.
- Providing guides for preparing and submitting manuscripts.
- **Selecting appropriate and knowledgeable peers** to review each paper sent out for review, and guiding the peer review process.
- **Providing standards for peer reviewers**, including maintaining confidentiality of manuscripts, setting appropriate deadlines, and supplying references to document their criticisms of the paper's shortcomings.
- **Monitoring and ensuring the fairness**, timeliness, thoroughness, and civility of peer review editorial processes.

## **Annals of Internal Medicine**

### **An Instructional Guide for Peer Reviewers of Biomedical Manuscripts**

<http://www3.us.elsevierhealth.com/extractor/graphics/em-acep/index.html>

Accessed 18 January 2006

#### Sample review form

Please rate the following measures of desirability for publication in *Annals* as: NA (not applicable) or 1 (lowest) to 5 (best).

#### Measures

- \_\_\_\_\_ Originality of concept **Subjective**
- \_\_\_\_\_ Abstract accurately reflects all essential aspects of study (including all major results and limitations) **Objective**
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quality of the study methodology and design **Objective**
- \_\_\_\_\_ Conclusions supported by results **Objective/Subjective**
- \_\_\_\_\_ Limitations are addressed **Objective/Subjective**
- \_\_\_\_\_ Composition is clear, organized, and complete **Subjective**
- \_\_\_\_\_ Scientific importance of the results **Subjective**
- \_\_\_\_\_ Overall desirability for publication in *Annals* **Subjective**

## **Journal of Gambling Issues 2005 (March); 13:**

[http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue13/jgi\\_13\\_intro.html](http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue13/jgi_13_intro.html)

Accessed 18 January 2006

### **editorial**

## **The peer review process at the *Journal of Gambling Issues***

You may have noticed a coda at the end of a paper, "This article was peer reviewed," and wondered, "What does that really mean?" [...]

In this nuts-and-bolts editorial essay on how peer review works at the *Journal of Gambling Issues (JGI)*, we hope to offer insight for those who wonder how we carry out scholarly publication. This essay will combine descriptions of ethics (the morality of what should happen) with reality-based pragmatics (what really happens) in peer review.

[...]

**Responding to criticisms.** Comments from reviewers are not directives. We tell authors:

A reviewer's comments are not orders that have to be carried out. To the contrary, for each critique that a reviewer has made, an author has three options:

- i) to discuss/debate/refute a reviewer's comment(s), or
- ii) to rewrite the text in response to a comment(s), or –
- iii) a combination of these, so that an author both discusses/debates/refutes a reviewer's comment(s) and rewrites to accommodate some comments by a reviewer.

In many of the articles that you see in print, there are several points that are just as the author intended because she debated and defended her approach as written. As editor, we sometimes very much give the author the benefit of the doubt.

# JOURNAL OF GAMBLING ISSUES

A publication of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

## Guide for reviewers

Manuscript code #:            Title:

Reviewer: # Name: -- [this will be deleted in the version sent to the author]

Date sent out: /2005            Date due back: /2005            Date returned: /2005

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**FOR THE REVIEWER: Please contact the editor ASAP if you feel that you must decline reviewing this paper for any reason (conflict of interest, time pressures), so that we have time to obtain another reviewer by deadline.**

Recommendation: (please indicate one with an "X")--

1. Accept this paper either as it is, or subject to minor revisions.  
 2. Invite the author(s) to submit a revised version for further review.  
 3. Reject.

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(Please place an "X" beside whichever answer you endorse.)

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Evaluation:	Does not Apply	Not acceptable	Barely acceptable	Acceptable	Good
1. Overall design or conception .....	0	1	2	3	4
2. Sample size .....	0	1	2	3	4
3. Representativeness of sample .....	0	1	2	3	4
4. Measurement methodology .....	0	1	2	3	4
5. Statistical analysis .....	0	1	2	3	4
6. (If qualitative research) Rigour in methodology .....	0	1	2	3	4
7. Appropriate literature utilized .....	0	1	2	3	4
8. Accuracy of literature presentation .....	0	1	2	3	4
9. Importance of findings .....	0	1	2	3	4
10. Findings are well-communicated .....	0	1	2	3	4
11. Persuasive argument .....	0	1	2	3	4
12. Appropriate topic for the <i>JGI</i> .....	0	1	2	3	4

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COMMENTS FOR THE EDITOR: Please send any confidential comments to the editor in a separate e-mail.

COMMENTS FOR THE AUTHORS: Please read the following page of *Guidance for reviewers* before you write your comments to the authors on a separate page.

# Guidance for reviewers

**Important notes:** A good review makes it clear to the author and the editor what positive and negative aspects a paper may have, especially in the context of other allied work in the field. It offers constructive criticism to the author so that s/he knows what would improve the paper.

## **When commenting to the author(s):**

1. A reviewer of the second version of a paper should not raise new criticism based on the first version: the first review should have covered all concerns. (To later raise new criticism about the first draft could result in an endless cycle of critique and response.)
2. Please do not tell the author whether you feel that the paper should be published or not. Your review should provide guidance, noting limitations of the research and ways it can be improved. The editor will give the reasons for rejection or acceptance when he corresponds with the authors.
3. A good rule of thumb is to write your comments as if addressing someone you know. Constructive criticism, courtesy, and respect are important. Adverse comments relating to the authors themselves are inappropriate.
4. Please number your comments. When inviting a resubmission we will ask authors to address each numbered comment, and to indicate where they do so.
5. Please check that the manuscript title and number are correctly entered on the top of each page of comments.

The review section titles offered here are offered only as a guide. They are not required. We recognize that many reviewers have their own preferred approaches for offering guidance.

1. General remarks. Here you might note the major positive and negative aspects of a paper.
2. Evaluation of findings. Please draw attention to problems with the design of the study, faulty findings or unfounded conclusions. Examples include: incorrect statistical analysis, overgeneralization from the sample or measures, inadequate control(s), measurement error or bias, illogical argument, dubious assumptions, unwarranted assignment of causality, and failure to rule out plausible alternative explanations.
3. Comments on the text. Problems with the text can include poor use of English, vague or incorrect terminology, faulty representation of relevant research literature, illogical argumentation, failure to discuss alternative explanations of the findings, or limitations. Concerning English usage, please note that, once accepted, all papers receive studious copyediting for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and issues of style. Therefore a reviewer need not comment on these areas unless she strongly wishes to do so.
4. Other comments. Here you may wish to make other comments not covered above.

Thank you for aiding the peer review process at the *Journal of Gambling Issues*!

## **Speaking virtually the same language: coding and decoding messages between authors and editors**

**Shashok K. European Science Editing 1994(Sept); 53: 5-8**

### **Quality and usefulness of feedback provided by reviewers and editors:**

Reviewers' comments are not helpful to authors if they are too vague and do not identify the exact problem. Editors, as the link between reviewers and authors, should be aware that

1. some problems need better scientific thinking by the authors,
2. other problems need better writing or editing but do not reflect a problem with the scientific thinking, and
3. some problems need more careful reading or better thinking by the reviewer, but no change in the manuscript.

### **Examples of unhelpful comments:**

1. *"I found this manuscript to be vague and poorly focused."*  
Where? What pages, what paragraphs?
2. *"This reviewer found it difficult to comprehend the reasons for the study."*  
What type of problem is the reviewer trying to identify?
  - 2.1. A problem with the **science**, the methods, or a mismatch between the manuscript and the journal's aims and scope? –or–
  - 2.2. An unclear justification of the objectives? Does the problem lie in the **writing and editing**?
3. *"The relationship between the authors' statements on page 7 lines 4 to 6 with the previous paragraph was unclear to this referee."*  
To the writer, the relationship is probably perfectly clear. But what about future readers? Does the reviewers' comment reflect the reviewer's individual reaction, or is it likely to predict confusion by most of the journal's readers too?

"Unfortunately, there are also hands-off editors who rely too heavily on referees' recommendations, and write ambiguously worded letters that leave too much to the authors' imagination. Aside from creating false expectations, this type of editorial communication reflects the need for a stronger definition of the roles and responsibilities of the journal's editor and referees."

***Thank-you very much for your attention*** 