

Ethical Guidelines for Reviewers

Preamble:

Review of manuscript by peer-reviewers is not only an essential component of formal scholarly engagement, but is also a fundamental step in the publication process as it aids a journal editor in making editorial decisions. It also allows an author to improve the paper via editorial communications. Scholars when they accept to review the research paper have an ethical responsibility to complete this assignment professionally. The quality, credibility and reputation of a journal also depend on the peer review process. The peer review process depends on trust, and demands that professional involved supposed to fulfill his/her role ethically. These professionals are the momentum arm of this process, but they are may be performing this job without any formal training. As a consequence, they may be (especially young professors) unaware of their ethical obligations. The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan wants to set out 'Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers' so that all peer reviewers provide their valuable services in a standardized manner.

Suitability and Promptness Peer reviewers should:

- Inform the editor, if they do not have the subject expertise required to carry out the review and s/he should inform the editor immediately after receiving a request,
- Be responsible to act promptly and submit review report on time,
- Immediately inform the editor of any possible delays and suggest another date of submission a review report, and
- Not unnecessarily delaying the review process, either by prolonged delay in submission of their review or by requesting unnecessary additional data/information from the editor or author(s).

Standards of Objectivity

- Reviews should be objectively carried out with a consideration of high academic, scholarly and scientific standards,

- All judgments should be meticulously established and maintained in order to ensure the full comprehension of the reviewer's comments by the editors and the author(s),
- Both reviewers and author(s) in rebuttal should avoid unsupported assertions,
- Reviewer may justifiably criticize a manuscript but it would be inappropriate and impressive to resort to personal criticism on the author(s), and
- Reviewers should ensure that their decision is purely based on the quality of the research paper and not influenced, either positively or negatively, by any personal, financial, or other conflicting considerations or by intellectual biases.

Disclosure and Conflict of Interest

- A reviewer should not, for the purpose of his/her own research, use unpublished material disclosed in a submitted manuscript, without the approval of the editor,
- The data included in the research paper is required to be kept confidential and the reviewer shall not be allowed to use for his/her any personal study,
- Reviewer must declare any potentially conflicting interests (e.g. personal, financial, intellectual, professional, political or religious). In this situation, s/he will require to follow journal's policies on situations they consider to represent a conflict to reviewing,
- A reviewer should be honest to declare conflicts of interest, if, the research paper under reviews is the same to his/her presently conducted study,
- If the reviewer feels unqualified to separate his/her bias, s/he should immediately return the manuscript to the editor without review, and justify to him/her about this.

Confidentiality

- Reviewers should keep the research paper as confidential document and must not discuss its content in any platform except in cases where a professional advice is being sought with the authorization of the editor, and
- Reviewers are professionally and ethically bound not to disclose the details of the research paper prior to its publication without the prior approval of the editor.

Ethical Considerations

- If reviewer would suspect that the research paper is almost the same of someone else's work, s/he will ethically inform the editor and provide its citation as a reference,
- If reviewer would suspect the results in research paper to be untrue/unrealistic/fake, s/he will share it with the editor,
- If there has been an indication for violating the ethical norms in the treatment of human beings (e.g. children, female, poor people, disabled, elderly, etc), then this should be identified to the editor, and
- If the research paper based on any previous research study or is replica of an earlier work, or the work is plagiarized e.g. the author has not acknowledged/referenced others' work appropriately, then this should be brought in the editor's knowledge.

Originality

For evaluating originality, peer reviewers should consider the following elements:

- Does the research paper add to the existing knowledge?
- Do research questions and/or hypotheses are appropriate to the objective of the research work?

Structure

If the layout and format of the paper is not per prescribed one, the reviewers should discuss it with the editor or should include this observation in his/her review report. On the other side, if the research paper is exceptionally well, the reviewer may overlook the formatting issues. Other times, reviewers may suggest restructuring the paper before publication. The following elements should be carefully evaluated:

- If there is serious problem of language expression and reviewer gets an impression that the research paper does not fulfill the linguistic requirements and readers would face difficulties to read and comprehend the paper. Such situation would usually arise when the author's native language is not English. The reviewer should record this deficiency in his/her report and suggest the editor to make its proper editing.
- The data presented in the paper is original or reproduced from previously conducted or published work. The papers which reflect originality are more likely to be given preference for publication. The clarity of illustrations including photographs, models, charts, images and figures is essential to note. If there is duplication that should be reported in the review report. Similarly, descriptions provided in the 'results' section should correspond with the data presented in tables/figures, if not then it should be clearly listed in the review report.

- Critically review the statistical analysis of the data. Also check rational and appropriateness of the specific analysis.
- Reviewers should read the 'Methodology' section in detail and make sure that the author(s) has demonstrated the understanding of the procedures being used and presented in the manuscript.
- The relationship between 'Data, findings' and 'Discussion' requires evaluating thoroughly. Unnecessary conjecture or unfounded conclusions that are not based on the presented data are not acceptable.
- The organization of the research paper is appropriate or deviate from the standard or prescribed format?
- Does the author(s) follow the guidelines prescribed by the journal for preparation and submission of the manuscript?
- Is the research paper free from typographical errors?

Review Report

- Reviewer must explicitly write his/her observations in the section of 'comments' because author(s) will only see the comments reviewers have made,
- For writing a review report, the reviewers are requested to complete a prescribed form(s),
- It is helpful for both the editor and author(s) if the reviewer writes a brief summary in the first section of the review report. This summary should comprise of reviewer's final decision and inferences drawn from full review,
- Any personal comments on author(s) should be avoided and final remarks must be written in a courteous and positive manner,
- Indicating any deficiencies is important. For the understanding of editor and author(s), the reviewers should highlight these deficiencies in some detail with specificity. This will also justify the comments made by the reviewer,
- When reviewer makes a decision regarding research paper, it will clearly indicate as 'Reject', 'Accept without revision', or 'Need Revision' and either of the decisions should have justification of the same.
- The reviewers should indicate the revisions clearly and comprehensively, and show willingness to confirm the revisions submitted by the author (s), if editor wishes so, and
- The final decision about publishing a research paper (either accept or reject) will solely rest with the editor and it is not a reviewer's job to take part in this decision. The editor will surely consider reviewer's

comments and have a right to send the paper for another opinion or send back to the author(s) for its revisions before making the final decision