

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PEER REVIEWERS

The integrity of the publication process and the quick dissemination of research relies on timely, high-quality reviews. Your efforts in reviewing papers and book proposals are a crucial service to the academic community. Ensuring the utmost integrity and transparency when you review has a real impact on the quality of work in your field, and how quickly research reaches its audience. Thank you for considering your ethical responsibilities, and remember that you can always rely on *Adv Clin Exp Med* editors for advice and support on any ethical matter.

The editorial office of *Adv Clin Exp Med* respects authors', editors' and reviewers' professional integrity and freedom of expression and does not intend to interfere in their professional opinions on reviewed papers. We emphasize the importance of section editors and reviewers in taking leadership or assuming the position of opinion leader in their field by encouraging peer researchers to improve their manuscripts to cutting-edge levels and directing them to future research.

1. Each peer reviewers needs to have an account in Editorial System. Reviews should be provided only via the Editorial System using a dedicated form. All fields in the review form should be filled in (excluding those nor relevant – e.g., the field pertaining graphical abstract when there is no graphical abstract attached to the paper).
2. Deadlines for peer reviewers are: 3 days for accepting or rejecting an invitation and 14 days for performing a peer review.
3. A review report (that is, the “comment for authors”) should consist of at least 6 main points, and more than 365 words. It should point out the shortcomings of the paper point by point, not only in general terms. Please list suggestions that could help strengthen the work in a revision.
4. Respond to the invitation as soon as you can (even if it is to decline) — a delay in your decision slows down the review process and means more waiting for the author. Contact the journal if circumstances arise that will prevent them from submitting a timely review.
5. If you decline the invitation, it would be helpful if you could provide suggestions for alternative reviewers.
6. Only agree to review manuscripts for which they have the subject expertise required to carry out a proper assessment and which they can assess in a timely manner.
7. Read the manuscript, ancillary material (e.g. supplementary data files) and journal instructions thoroughly, getting back to the journal if anything is not clear and requesting any missing or incomplete items they need to carry out a full review.
8. Provide one of 4 possible recommendations: accept, minor revision, reconsider after major revision, or reject.

Below, more detailed issues questions are listed as a suggestion what should be assessed in a peer-reviewed paper. This is not a checklist and we do not expect reviewers to answer all of them.

- Please summarize what you consider to be the outstanding features of the work.
- Does the manuscript have flaws which should prohibit its publication? If so, please provide details.
- Examine the importance of the research question addressed in the manuscript (e.g., are objectives and justification clearly stated?).
- Assess the originality (contribution, addition of knowledge to scientific literature or field) of the manuscript.

- Clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of the method described in the manuscript. Comment on the validity of the approach, quality of the data and quality of presentation. Please note that we expect our reviewers to review all data, including any extended data and supplementary information. Is the reporting of data and methodology sufficiently detailed and transparent to enable reproducing the results?
- Make specific useful comments on the writing of the manuscript (e.g., writing, organization, figures, etc.).
- Offer specific comments on the author's interpretation of the results and conclusions drawn from the results. Do you find that the conclusions and data interpretation are robust, valid and reliable?
- Comment on the author's representation of the most relevant recent advances in the field; specifically, determine whether the references are relevant to the topic and cover both historical literature and more recent developments.
- Inflammatory material: Does the manuscript contain any language that is inappropriate or potentially libelous?
- Clarity and context: Is the abstract clear, accessible? Are abstract, introduction and conclusions appropriate?
- Report all situations when authors of a given paper employ excessive (in your opinion) self-citations of their own papers or of papers all published in *Adv Clin Exp Med* – excessive self-citing within one journal or a small group of journals is also deemed suspicious (e.g., in Scopus or Web of Science). The editorial office of *Adv Clin Exp Med* deems more than 15% of self-citations as excessive self-citing of a given author or journal.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PEER REVIEWERS

Peer reviewers should:

- respect the confidentiality of peer review and not reveal any details of a manuscript or its review, during or after the peer-review process, beyond those that are released by the journal;
- not use information obtained during the peer-review process for their own or any other person's or organization's advantage, or to disadvantage or discredit others;
- declare all potential conflicting interests, seeking advice from the journal if they are unsure whether something constitutes a relevant interest; A conflict of interest is anything that affects or has the potential to affect the ability to review the paper or book proposal solely on the basis of academic merit. Examples of conflicts of interest include (but are not limited to):
 - Working at the same institution as any of the authors (or will be joining that institution or are applying for a job there); they are or have been recent (e.g., within the past 3 years) mentors, mentees, close collaborators or joint grant holders; they have a close personal relationship with any of the authors.
 - Finding that a manuscript or book proposal that you have been asked to review is very similar to one you have in preparation or under consideration with a journal or publisher.
 - Having a direct or indirect financial or non-financial interest in the result of the review (for example if the paper contradicts something you have a well-known public stance on).
- not allow their reviews to be influenced by the origins of a manuscript, by the nationality, religious or political beliefs, gender or other characteristics of the authors, or by commercial considerations;
- review afresh any manuscript they have previously reviewed for another journal as it may have changed between the 2 submissions and the journals' criteria for evaluation and acceptance may be different.

- notify the journal immediately and seek advice if they discover either a conflicting interest that wasn't apparent when they agreed to the review or anything that might prevent them providing a fair and unbiased review; if a reviewer suspects the identity of the author(s), they should notify the journal if this knowledge raises any potential conflict of interest;
- be specific in their criticisms, and provide evidence with appropriate references to substantiate general statements such as, 'this work has been done before', to help editors in their evaluation and decision and in fairness to the authors.
- be objective and constructive in their reviews, refraining from being hostile or inflammatory and from making libelous or derogatory personal comments, or unfounded accusations; confidential comments to the editor should not be a place for denigration or false accusation, done in the knowledge that the authors will not see these comments;
- remember it is the authors' paper and not attempt to rewrite it to their own preferred style if it is basically sound and clear; suggestions for changes that improve clarity are, however, important; do not focus on typos and grammar. If the manuscript needs significant editing for language and writing quality, just mention this in your comments.
- make clear which suggested additional investigations are essential to support claims made in the manuscript under consideration and which will just strengthen or extend the work;
- notify the journal as soon as possible if they find they do not have the expertise to assess all aspects of the manuscript; they shouldn't wait until submitting their review as this will unduly delay the review process.
- not involve anyone else in the review of a manuscript, including junior researchers they are mentoring, without first obtaining permission from the section editor of *Adv Clin Exp Med*; the names of any individuals who have helped them with the review should be included with the returned review so that they are associated with the manuscript in the journal's records and can also receive due credit for their efforts; while we encourage the mentorship of new reviewers by involving them in the review process, it is crucial to get the permission of the editor before sharing the details of any review activity with a colleague, or asking someone else to complete the review on your behalf;
- notify the journal immediately if they come across any irregularities, have concerns about ethical aspects of the work, are aware of substantial similarity between the manuscript and a concurrent submission to another journal or a published article, or suspect that misconduct may have occurred during either the research or the writing and submission of the manuscript; reviewers should, however, keep their concerns confidential and not personally investigate further unless the journal asks for further information or advice.
- not intentionally prolong the review process, either by delaying the submission of their review or by requesting unnecessary additional information from the journal or author. If you are unable to complete a review in the timeframe requested, please declare this to the editor as soon as it becomes apparent, even if you have accepted the invitation to review. This ensures that the editorial team can make alternative arrangements where necessary, and communicate any delays to the author(s) of the work.

Following the peer-review of an article, the reviewers should:

- continue to keep details of the manuscript and its review confidential.
- respond promptly if contacted by a journal about matters related to their review of a manuscript and provide the information required.
- contact the journal if anything relevant comes to light after they have submitted their review that might affect their original feedback and recommendations.