

Instruction for Reviewers

Editorial workflow

The entire editorial process is performed via an online manuscript tracking system. Once a submitted manuscript is checked by the editorial office for its appropriateness to undergo a normal peer review process, the editor-in-chief may directly appoint the reviewers or may appoint an editor to handle the overall review process. However, the editor-in-chief (or appointed editor) may decide to reject the manuscript without undergoing a peer review process if the submitted manuscript is not up to the standards or is beyond the scope of the journal.

Peer review policy and reviewer selection

The editor-in-chief or appointed editor may assign a minimum of 2 reviewers for the peer review process. The journal adheres to a single-blind review process, meaning that the authors' identities are opened to the reviewers, but the reviewers' identities are kept confidential. Such policy arises from the trust that all assigned reviewers shall follow high ethical norms to provide unbiased reviews despite knowing the authors' identities, and that they shall decline to review if any potential conflict of interest may arise or if they are unable to provide an unbiased review.

Selection of reviewers is based on many factors, including expertise, reputation, specific recommendations and our previous experience with reviewers. Reviewers who are chronically late, unprofessional, too harsh or too lenient are avoided. Reviewers with known conflicts of interest with any of the authors from a submitted manuscript are also avoided, although it is not possible for the editorial board to be aware of all the potential conflicts of interest that may exist between participating reviewers and submitting authors. Therefore assigned reviewers are also encouraged to notify immediately to the editor about any potential conflicts of interest, with subsequent decline for review.

Reviewer ethics and responsibilities

All assigned reviewers are expected to follow the following ethics and responsibilities during the review process:

1. Confidentiality

The review process is strictly confidential and all reviewers are expected to maintain confidentiality about the manuscript they are reviewing. This not only includes the contents of the manuscript,

but also the disclosure of their identities to the authors or to other colleagues. It is therefore inappropriate to share or discuss the contents of a manuscript with others before publication, unless permission is obtained from the editors. The editor may approve the consultation of a third person if he/she has the necessary expertise to significantly improve the quality of review, is ready to maintain confidentiality and has not been excluded by the editor for review previously. Reviewers should not use the knowledge or idea obtained from the manuscript for any purpose (scientific, personal or financial) unrelated to the review process before the manuscript is published.

2. Integrity

Reviewer's comments and conclusions should be objective, free from any personal or professional biases. The contents should be considered based on the facts that are being presented and comments should be based solely on the paper's originality, quality and scientific merits. Reviewers should report for ethical concerns regarding plagiarism, fraud, duplicate publication or unethical study execution to the editor, with specific supporting evidence for their concerns.

3. Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of interest that may arise for reviewers may include one of the following:

- Have recent or ongoing collaborations with any of the authors
- Have commented on drafts of the manuscript
- Are in direct competition with any of the authors
- Have a history of dispute with any of the authors
- Have a financial interest in the outcome

An assigned reviewer may contact the editor if unsure about a potential conflict of interest, in which case the editor may decide whether it is appropriate for the reviewer to review the manuscript.

4. Timeliness

Reviewers are responsible for providing a review in a timely fashion, based on the journal's policy for review. This includes 1) deciding to review the manuscript and 2) completing the review within the requested time frame. Every effort should be made for the timely publication of submitted manuscripts.

Review process

An assigned reviewer must notify the editor whether to accept or decline the review of the manuscript within a period of 72 hours. Acceptance for review must be based on whether the reviewer is able to review the manuscript within the allocated time frame (usually 2 weeks), has sufficient knowledge of the topic to provide a competent review and does not have any potential conflict of interest that may influence the review process. Once a manuscript is accepted for review, reviewers are expected to finish the review process within 2 weeks, unless the editor allows for an extension in selected cases.

Reviewers should review the manuscript and provide a decision based on the originality, scientific evidence and significance of the study to the specific field. Reviewers are requested to provide one of the following final decisions, with specific comments to support their decision:

- Rejection: Reject the manuscript due to significant flaws or scientific noninterest
- Major Revisions: The manuscript is of potential interest but needs major changes for it to be considered for publication
- Minor Revisions: The manuscript is of potential interest and can be considered for publication after minor changes.
- Accept: Accept the manuscript as it is without any further alterations

The final decision of the manuscript is reserved to the editor, based on the individual decisions of the reviewers and the supporting comments. The supporting comments are very important when the decisions of the reviewers are not in accordance, since the editor shall make a decision based on the significance of these comments.

Reviewers may be asked to review a manuscript for a second time if the manuscript is revised and resubmitted by the authors. This may apply for manuscripts with the decision of "Major revisions" or "Rejection", or after resubmission of withdrawn manuscripts.

Writing the reviewer report

The primary purpose of a reviewer report is to provide information for the editor to reach a decision, based on the scientific merits of the manuscript. The reviewer should provide written, unbiased feedback about the manuscript's originality, scientific accuracy and relevance to the journal's scope. The reviewer should also assess the composition of the manuscript in terms of clarity, conciseness and methodological detail. The comments should acknowledge the positive aspects of the manuscript, and any negative aspects should be presented with constructive opinions on how to strengthen the manuscript. The rationale for the opinions should be stated, with relevant citations of previous reports for observations or arguments, and personal opinions

or criticisms should be avoided. Reviewers should respect the intellectual independence of authors and all comments should be courteous; offensive remarks are not acceptable.

The ideal report should be divided into 3 sections. It is strongly recommended that a paragraph be allocated for each of the sections:

- The first section should summarize the major findings of the study and the overall impressions as well as major shortcomings.
- The second section should describe the major weak points and comments on how to improve the contents of the manuscript (comments should be specifically numbered to facilitate discussion between the reviewer and the author).
- The third section should describe minor points that can be easily modified and does not significantly affect the contents or the decision of the manuscript.

Finally, the reviewer comments should not include any comments addressed to the editor. Any statements regarding the acceptability of the paper should be avoided in the reviewer report addressed to the author. Comments directed to the editor, including recommendations for acceptance/rejection of the manuscript, should be typed separately on the appropriate review form (online).