

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### Insights about the Manuscript Review Process

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The peer review process for manuscripts submitted to journals is a critical step in publishing in professional journals. This process is the primary quality assurance system for a discipline's body of literature (Dougherty et al. 2011). Editors and readers depend on the peer review process to ensure the quality, relevance, and readability of articles for the discipline. Feedback from the peer review process helps authors improve their work and assists journal editors to publish only the best articles for their targeted audience.

Most nursing journals use a blinded peer review process. A blinded review means that the reviewers do not know the names of the authors, and the names of the reviewers are never revealed to the authors. The blinding of the names is intended to remove any bias that may occur if identity of the parties is revealed. Other terms commonly used for the peer review process are "juried" or "refereed."

#### **Selection of Peer Reviewers**

There seems to be a misnomer that journal editors are mainly seeking reviewers who hold academic appointments. Such is not the case. Journal editors look for experts in the content area of the manuscript to serve as a reviewer. For most journal editors, this content expertise is the primary qualification they are seeking. For example, for a clinically focused article, an editor is looking for an expert in the clinical topic and that may mean that all of the reviewers are clinicians. Some journal editors may also expect peer reviewers to have publication experience. Others may require that the peer reviewer has published in the journal requesting the review.

Journal editors aim to have two to three reviews completed per manuscript but often struggle to find willing content experts to serve as a reviewer. Editors would welcome emails from content experts indicating their willingness to perform volunteer reviews for the journal. Although reviewers receive no financial compensation for their work, reviewing manuscripts is a marvelous way to improve one's writing skills.

#### **Time Allowance for the Review**

Most often the editor will ask the reviewer to return their review comments in about two to three weeks. This short timeframe ensures that the manuscript will move along in the publishing process in a timely way. Also, authors are anxious to learn the outcome of their work. Authors want to know in a short time frame if they will be proceeding with a revision or if the manuscript has been rejected.

When asked to perform a review of a paper, one should only accept the invitation if able to meet the deadline. If a reviewer accepts a review assignment, and then realizes the deadline to return the review cannot be met, the editor should be contacted immediately. The editor will determine if an extension can be granted or if a new reviewer needs to be contacted. Editors use electronic tracking systems for the manuscripts so a pattern of a later return of assignments by a reviewer will be very evident. In such a case, it is likely that the editor will no longer invite a chronically late reviewer in

the future.

### Format of the Review

There is no one consistent format used by journals for reviews. However, the information requested by editors is similar for all journals. The reviewer will be instructed how to access the review form usually through an electronic manuscript system. Often the review form contains a grid with a series of questions or statements about the manuscript. The reviewer is asked to respond to the questions or to rate the statements using a Likert type scale. Table 1 lists common topics and questions for the review of a non-research focused manuscript. Table 2 provides common topics and questions for the review of a research focused manuscript.

Table 1: Questions to Consider in a Review of a Non-Research Manuscript

Topic	Question to Consider
Title	Does the title match the contents of the manuscript? If not, what should be the title?
Topic	Will the topic be of interest to the readers of the journal? Is the topic timely?
Content	Does the content provide new or innovative ideas? Is the content accurate? Is the content covered in adequate depth and breadth? Is the content of interest to the journal's audience? Is the content applicable to a wide audience rather than specific to a unique setting? Is there important content that is missing? Is there content that should be eliminated? Is the content presented in a biased way? Does the content reflect current ideas and practices?
Quality and clarity of writing	Is the manuscript easy to read? Is the writing clear and succinct? Does the manuscript maintain your interest? Are terms defined when needed? Are complex ideas explained clearly? Is the writing style appropriate for the journal? Does the author avoid the use of jargon and slang? Is there excessive use of passive voice?
Organization	Are the ideas well organized with a logical flow of ideas? Are transitions between ideas smooth? Are appropriate headings used to help with the organization of the ideas? Are any changes needed to improve the organization of the manuscript?
References	Are references cited when needed? Are primary rather than secondary references used? Are references current? Is the reference style required by the journal used?

Tables	Are there adequate numbers of tables? Are the contents of the tables appropriate? Do the tables enhance the manuscript? Should any table be deleted? Should any tables be added?
Figures	Are there adequate numbers of figures? Are the contents of the figures appropriate? Do the figures enhance the manuscript? Should any figures be deleted? Should any figures be added?

Table 2: Questions to Consider in a Review of a Research Manuscript

Topic	Question to Consider
Literature Review	Is the literature review adequate? Does it provide a synopsis of what is known and what is not known about a topic?
Problem and Purpose	Is there a clear statement of the problem and purpose of the study?
Methods	Did the researcher use the appropriate research methods for the study? Was the sampling method appropriate and clearly described?
Statistical Analysis	Did the researchers use the appropriate statistical analysis for the data?
Conclusions	Do the data support the conclusions?
Discussion	Is the discussion adequate? Does the research relate the findings to previous work? If appropriate, are their adequate implications for practice?

In addition to completing a rating scale, the reviewer is often asked to make any additional comments about the manuscript. In this section, the editor is seeking specific remarks about the manuscript that the authors can implement to improve the manuscript. Vague comments such as "the manuscript is weak" are not helpful to the authors or the editor. Noting page number and paragraph, the reviewer should offer the author explicit suggestions for change. The reviewer does not need to be concerned with spelling or grammar since those types of corrections will be handled during the editing process. Instead, the reviewer should offer the authors definitive ideas to improve the manuscript. These ideas may include the suggestion to expand or eliminate a section or to rewrite or reorganize a portion of the manuscript for greater clarity. The job of the reviewer is not to actually make the corrections for the authors, but to provide the authors enough guidance so the suggestions for improvement can be made.

The reviewer form may also contain a section for confidential comments to the editor. There is no need to repeat information provided to the authors. Instead, this section can be used to let the editor know if there are any specific concerns about the paper such as a worry that a part of the manuscript

has been plagiarized or that the data reported in the manuscript have already been published elsewhere (Christenbery 2011).

The form may conclude with the reviewer's final recommendation for the manuscript. The choices are usually reject, revise, or accept. Rarely are articles accepted without revision. Some reviewer forms may ask if major revisions or minor revisions are indicated.

### **Tone of the Review**

The review should be written with a professional tone. Reviewers should never hide behind anonymity and offer harsh and condescending comments such as "These authors obviously have no idea what they are talking about" or "This is one of the worst papers I have ever read. Instead, the review should be written using a constructive tone that promotes the professional growth of the authors and helps the authors learn from the review (Harding 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Writing is hard work, and those brave authors who contribute to the body of literature of a discipline rely on the review process to ensure the quality, relevance, and readability of their work. Editors seek content experts for the review of a manuscript and expect the review to be honest, specific, and written in a professional tone. It is through the critique of volunteer reviewers that the publishing process results in articles suitable for the discipline.

### **References**

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