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# Becoming a Peer Reviewer

## Becoming a Peer Reviewer

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Have you contemplated becoming a peer reviewer for a nursing journal? I can assure you that every editor's ears will perk up immediately if your answer is "yes," or even "maybe." Of course you will need to have certain qualifications to serve (which vary from journal to journal) and your expertise will need to match the focus of the journal. But the biggest challenge that journal editors face is securing well-qualified peer reviews—reviews that provide constructive feedback to help the authors develop their work, and feedback that provides sound guidance for the editor in making the decision related to publication.

Consider the issues involved in the process of peer review. It is a somewhat thankless task that requires considerable time and effort. To assure that peer reviewers have no significant conflict of interest that coerces bias in their review,

peer reviewers are unpaid volunteers who contribute their time and expertise. Here is a typical scenario—you have several deadlines that must be met (grant submissions, reports, student papers to read) and out of the blue an editor sends you a request to review a manuscript—which you know will take anywhere from 1 to 3 hours of your time. Often you simply must say “no,” but dedicated scholars who know how important this process is will accept the request and set aside time to do what needs to be done. The reason that you take this on is because you are part of a community of scholars who care about the integrity of our literature and recognize that if we are to have any confidence in the credibility of what is published in our professional journals, peer review is the time-honored way to provide assurance that our trust is well-placed.

Peer review is the spine that supports quality in scholarly publishing. Despite widespread recognition of limitations and pitfalls of peer review (it does not always work as it should), it remains recognized as the best process to maintain quality and validity of material published in scholarly journals. Given this, the challenge is to find ways to assure quality of peer review, and to educate all stakeholders about what peer review is, why it is important, and what quality peer review means.

There has never been a time when quality peer review has been more important than it is now. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of well-researched and peer reviewed publications to provide evidence for practice. Articles that have been rushed to publication have just as quickly been retracted.<sup>1</sup> In the climate of “fake news” claims that sow seeds of doubt about even the most reliable of sources and the integrity of science, now is the time to double-down on our dedication to this task. And scholars all over the world are doing just that.

So let’s return to the possibility of becoming a peer reviewer. You have the interest and are qualified to serve; what you need is a better understanding of what you are getting into so that when you make the commitment, you can sustain it over

the long haul. There are growing resources to help you understand the process, and ways to learn the best practices to assure that your time and energy is wisely invested in the service of quality in our publications. There are important resources that are available to demystify and explain the purposes and processes of peer review, and that set standards for best practices of peer review. Here are the main resources that are essential for new reviewers, and that experienced peer reviewers can draw on to advance their own understanding and practice:

- For the past five years, the 3rd week in September has been designated a global “Peer Review Week,” (<https://peerreviewweek.wordpress.com/>) organized by a group of leaders in the scholarly publishing industry. An excellent summary by Alice Meadows of what has transpired every year since the first Peer Review Week is available at the [Scholarly Kitchen](#).



[The peer review YouTube channel is an excellent overview of what peer review means and why it is important. And, they recently announced the theme and schedule for the 2020 peer review week!](#) Become very familiar with all of the resources that have accumulated over the past five years, and plan to tune in for this major event beginning September 21st, 2020!

- Read the 2019 Peer Review Week blog post on the Scholarly Kitchen titled [“How to Be a Good Peer Reviewer”](#) by Jasmine Wallace. This very readable post covers all of the dimensions involved in the peer review process and the guidelines that Jasmine Wallace lays out get right to the heart of what the commitment is when you become a peer reviewer.
- [Editage and Wolters-Kluwer have developed excellent peer review training courses that—as they say—help you become a great reviewer!](#) The basic course is a no-cost online series of 6 modules that takes about 3 hours to complete. This covers the essential basics that all peer reviewers need to know and integrate into

their own peer review practice. The advanced course, which requires a fee, includes the basic modules, plus information related to advanced methodologies and statistical techniques, tips to gain recognition for your service as a peer reviewer, practice reviews with feedback from the course faculty, and a certificate of completion.

- Find a mentor to get in-person guidance and practice with the process that will help you decide how to integrate this important service into your professional career. Some journals require “practice reviews” when you first agree to become a peer reviewer, providing feedback on your reviews to help you refine your skills before you become a regular peer reviewer for that journal. If you know colleagues who serve as a reviewer for a journal you read regularly, approach them to explore their experience and the possibility of learning what is involved in their experience. We have developed a peer-review mentoring program for *Advances in Nursing Science*. [Click this link to learn more about this program.](#) that you can review to see how we have set up this experience, and modify it to suit your own needs in developing a similar experience with reviewers for other journals. The *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing* (OJIN) has a BSN manuscript review panel, designed for baccalaureate prepared nurses to participate in and learn more about the peer review process. [Click here to learn more.](#)
- As a reader of this article, you are just one click away from one of the most valuable resources available for nurses: [The Nurse Author & Editor Resources for Reviewers](#). In addition, [you can click on the sidebar category “Peer Review”](#) to see links to all of the articles that have appeared in Nurse Author & Editor on this topic—as of this writing, there are 16.

So this is my invitation to you: seriously consider becoming a peer reviewer! Those of us involved in producing scholarly journals consider it an honor, and an obligation, to participate in both sides of the equation—writing *and* reviewing. We are authors who develop our work for publication, and we are peer reviewers who

participate in the process that assures our literature is well-founded, reliable, and valid. Authors benefit from good peer reviews immensely—even when the feedback is not what they want to receive. Even though your time and effort is “behind the scenes” in the traditional peer review process, it is vital to the development of our discipline. Your service is highly valued by editors who depend on your reviews to assure the quality of their journal, and by the authors who are able to integrate your insights and recommendations as they develop their work. Take the steps today to begin your peer review journey!

## REFERENCE

1. Rabin, R. C. (2020, June 15). The Pandemic Claims New Victims: Prestigious Medical Journals. *The New York Times*.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peggy L. Chinn, RN, PhD, DSc(Hon), FAAN is Editor-in-Chief of *Advances in Nursing Science*, author of a few books, and manager or co-manager of several websites/blogs, including INANE. She is co-author of *The Editor's Handbook*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., published in July, 2019. She is an Author-in-Residence for *Nurse Author & Editor*. You can reach Peggy directly at: [peggychinn@gmail.com](mailto:peggychinn@gmail.com)

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