

Reviewing a manuscript

Reviewing a manuscript serves two key purposes: to facilitate a decision on whether to publish and to provide constructive feedback to the author. In order to achieve these two goals you may have to read the manuscript carefully a number of times.

Getting started

To begin, read the entire manuscript once, quite quickly, in order to get a sense of what it is about. You might also glance at the references to gain an impression of the context the author is working from. Consider how easy it was to read and understand the text and bear this in mind on future readings in case you want to comment on the overall clarity. You may find it beneficial to leave further reading for a day or so while you assimilate the overall meaning of the manuscript.

You should make overall comment on presentation and style. You may recommend detailed specific typographic or grammatical changes where they are crucial to the meaning of the text. If the manuscript requires extensive work on syntax or punctuation you should report this in your review but either the copy editor will be responsible for making the appropriate changes or the manuscript will be returned for revision by the author. The Editorial Board is committed to providing advice and encouragement to writers whose first language is not English.

When you start the detailed review it will be easiest to work in sections (Title and Abstract, Introduction etc). Bear in mind that you will be submitting one report for the editor and one for the author.

Title and Abstract

Does the title reflect key variables (or issues) and the purpose of the study? Does the Abstract succinctly summarise context, purpose, method, findings and conclusions or recommendations?

Introduction

The introduction should set the scene both locally and more generally. The local context should include description of important variables (e.g. the school, the students, the location etc.). The general context should include reference to other studies of a similar nature, the theoretical context of the current study, how it fits with what is already known. It should also include the research question or problem formulation (depending on the nature of the study).

Method

The method section should include a description of how the study was conducted including details of the sample (how was it obtained? what are its significant characteristics?), data collection procedures (scores, scales, questionnaires, interviews etc), interventions (if applicable), methods of analysis (quantitative and/or qualitative) and statistical manipulations. The detail should be sufficient to guide a researcher who wanted to replicate the study.

The method should also include specific questions or hypotheses that underpinned the study and the analyses should address these directly.

Results, Discussion and Conclusions

The results (or findings) should be presented clearly in either tables or text (not both) and linked directly to the questions or issues of central concern. Questions and analyses that arose during or after the study should be distinguished from those that were planned at the outset.

The discussion should relate the results (or findings) to the questions posed and the overall context as described in the introduction. Are there any implications for theories referenced in the introduction? Are there unexpected findings? If there are, are they related back to existing theory and/or research? Do they give rise to new hypotheses or theoretical ideas? Are there limitations to the work that were identified in advance or were recognised during the research and analysis?

Are the conclusions or recommendations stated clearly and justified on the basis of the work reported?

Finally, are there statements related to ethical review (where appropriate) or potential conflicts of interest? If not, should there be?

Remember that your comments and critique will be read by authors who have a considerable investment in the manuscript, please be clear and constructive.

The Editorial Board is grateful for your participation in this important process of peer review and will keep you informed of the progress of the manuscript which you have reviewed. The final issue of each volume of the journal will contain the names of reviewers for that volume.

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