

## ***Journal of Bioethical Inquiry***

### **Information for Reviewers**

Thank you for accepting our invitation to review for the *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* (JBI). We greatly appreciate the time and support reviewers give to the peer review process.

We have collated the following resources to support and guide you in reviewing for us.

1. [Responding to Our Invitation to Review a Manuscript](#)
2. [Reviewing a Manuscript](#)
  - a. [Review Etiquette](#)
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#### **1. Responding to Our Invitation to Review a Manuscript**

In our invitation, we include the title of the paper, manuscript number, the paper's abstract and the timeline for completion of review. Before accepting our invitation to review a manuscript for the JBI, consider these questions:

- *Is the topic and methodology of the manuscript within your expertise?* Do you feel confident assessing this paper? If you feel a manuscript is clearly outside your expertise then it is best to quickly decline our invitation (and, if possible, assist us by suggesting an alternative reviewer). It is important to remember, however, that it is reasonable to accept an invitation to review a manuscript when you have expertise relevant to just one part of the manuscript – such as the topic being addressed by the author(s) or the methodology being used. In these instances, please indicate in your review which aspects of the study you assessed.
- *Do you have any potential conflicts of interest?* It is essential that reviewers can provide impartial reviews. In most cases interests that may potentially compete or conflict simply need to be disclosed so that they can be taken into consideration by the editors. There are, however, some circumstances in which you should decline the invitation to review. These may include if the author is a close colleague, co-author or collaborator; your student or researcher; your employer or line-manager; or someone with whom you have a close current or past personal relationship, such as a partner or family member.

- *Do you have time?* The JBI takes seriously its commitment to authors. This includes rigorous, efficient, and timely review of manuscripts. We would ask, therefore, that you complete your review as quickly as possible. If you are willing to complete the review but need more time to complete it please contact us to request an extension to the review deadline. If, however, you feel that you are unable to complete your review within the time requested, even with an extension, please decline the invitation to review. If you are delayed in completing your review, please contact us to let us know how long you may need.
- *Can you help us identify other reviewers?* We understand how busy you are with other commitments and that you may not be available to review a manuscript for us. We also appreciate that there are situations where you feel that it is appropriate to decline an invitation. Declining our invitation lets us know that we need to contact alternative reviewers and helps us keep the peer review process on track. If you decline our invitation, we would be grateful if you could provide suggestions for topic, disciplinary or methodology experts we might consider as alternative reviewers.

## 2. Reviewing a manuscript

The JBI asks reviewers to provide our editors with the information they need to make a decision on a manuscript constructively and fairly and guide authors on how they can strengthen their manuscript so that it might be acceptable for publication in the JBI or another journal.

### a. *Review Etiquette*

Scholarship is stimulating but difficult and it is challenging to have ones' ideas or work critiqued by others. For this reason, we would ask that in completing your review you consider the following:

- *Be respectful to the authors.* Be critical, constructive, fair, and respectful of disciplinary differences.
- *Be respectful of confidentiality.* The unpublished manuscript that you are reviewing is a privileged confidential communication so, once you have finished reviewing, please do not keep copies on your computer or in hard copy, use it for teaching, use it in your own research, or copy or distribute any part of it. We would also ask that you not invite others to review the manuscript for you or with you without first clearing this with the Editors.
- *Declare any relevant competing or conflicting interests.* As noted above, a conflict of interest does not necessarily exclude you from reviewing. It also does not imply any wrongdoing or moral impropriety. Indeed, some interests (such as those stemming from intellectual commitments and organisational and professional associations) are what make you an ideal reviewer! What matters is

that relevant interests are declared (even if you are not sure whether they constitute a conflict of interest); that efforts are made to avoid bias related to interests; and that the editor is aware of all relevant interests so that these can be taken into consideration when using your review.

- *Be brave.* You have been invited to review this manuscript because of your expertise in the topic, discipline area and/or methodology – so please feel free to tell us what you think.
- *Be frank when making confidential comments to the Editor.* The review process allows you to make comments to the Editor that the author will not see. This may include your opinions about the ethical probity of the manuscript.
- *Be consistent.* It is important that the feedback that you give to the author aligns with that you give to the Editor. While there may be things that you wish to share with the Editors and not with authors, providing positive feedback to the authors while at the same time recommending to the Editor that the paper be rejected can be confusing for authors and place Editors in a difficult situation. Also, please try to be consistent when reviewing revisions. While it may be appropriate to change your mind about a manuscript on the basis of new information gleaned from a revision, it is unfair to move the goalposts if authors have responded in good faith to a previous critique.
- *Be humble.* Do not write a review describing the paper you would have written. This does not help the Editor assess the merits of this manuscript and does not help the authors improve *their* paper.

## **b. Review Checklist**

The following checklist may assist you with your review. (It is important to keep in mind, however, that the type, disciplinary background, and methodology of the manuscript will determine the types of questions that need to be considered when reviewing it.)

### *Topic*

- Is the topic important and does the paper make an important contribution to the literature – to what is known about the issue being addressed by the author(s)?

### *Title*

- Is the title informative?
- Does the title describe what the manuscript is about or catch the reader's attention?
- Would an international reader searching for publications about a particular issue understand it?

### *Abstract*

- Does the abstract provide a clear summary of the paper?

- Does the abstract align with the research findings?
- Is the abstract structured in a way that confirms with the article type?

## *Structure*

- Is the structure of the paper appropriate to the content, methodology and approach?

## *Introduction, background, and literature review*

- Is the background and literature review adequate and current and does it place the manuscript in the appropriate context?
- Does it tell the reader why this research needs to be done and why it is important?
- Is the research question, hypothesis or focus clearly stated?

## *Methods*

- Is the study well-designed and is the paper technically sound?
- Are the methods and analysis clear and appropriate to the type of research being done?
- Are the methods described in sufficient detail that the reader can make a judgement about their quality and enable the study to be replicated by other researchers? (In general, the methods should outline the study type, place and time of study, research population, data collection and recording, and data analysis.)

## *Ethics approval*

- Do the authors outline the ethical oversight and approval of the study?

## *Funding*

- Have the authors described the funding (if any) of the research and the involvement of the funder in the research and preparation of the manuscript?

## *Results*

- Are the results clearly structured?
- Are the tables and figures clear and necessary?
- Is the analysis of the data sound? (Is the data valuable but just inappropriately analysed, and therefore potentially able to be re-analysed?)

## *Discussion*

- Does the discussion summarise the implications of the results and identify the strengths, weaknesses, and potential limitations of the study?
- Are the conclusions valid?
- Are the claims fully supported by the data or arguments? If not, what further evidence is needed?
- Are the claims appropriately discussed in the context of previous literature?
- Does the discussion offer useful insights?
- Is the discussion clear, rigorous, relevant, and well-argued or does it contain major flaws, e.g., errors of reasoning, unsound arguments, unjustifiable

generalisations, or inappropriate claims of significance for empirical results that are not statistically significant?

## *References*

- Are the references appropriate, properly cited, authoritative and accessible?
- Have the authors failed to refer to important studies relevant to their work?

## *Other*

- Is the writing and presentation clear and concise?
- Does the text include jargon or technical terms that may not be understood by a reader from a discipline or background different to the author(s)?
- Is the text badly written and could it be improved by copy-editing?
- Does the study raise any ethical concerns?
- Does the availability of data adhere to the expected standards of your research community?
- Could the manuscript be revised to address any potential limitations?

### ***c. Preparing your report***

Reviews must be submitted by completing our structured report using our [submission system](#).

The following considerations may help you prepare your report and assist both the Editor and the authors.

- *Start with a brief summary of the manuscript* and your overall impression of the work, noting both its strengths and weaknesses.
- *Provide detailed comments on the manuscript.* (See [Review Checklist](#).)
- *Be clear and prioritise your concerns.* Your review will help the Editor make a decision about the manuscript and guide the author in revising it for publication. It is helpful, therefore, if the review is clearly worded and distinguishes between major issues that must be addressed for the paper to be considered for publication, more minor issues that are not as critical to the acceptability of the paper for publication, including where clarification or additional details are needed, and grammatical or typographical issues.
- *Be specific and give examples.* The more specific your feedback is, the better. Both authors and Editors find general statements, such as ‘not a significant contribution’, ‘under-theorised’ or ‘poorly analysed’ unhelpful as they are not sufficiently clear or explicit enough to guide decision-making or revision.
- *Explain your recommendations to the Editor and author(s) and offer specific and constructive suggestions for how the manuscript may be improved.* This will help the Editor better understand the basis of your decision and will help authors to understand the deficiencies in their manuscript and how it may be revised to enable publication (in the JBI or elsewhere).

- *Consider whether you wish to make separate comments to the Editor.* The JBI's online manuscript submission system allows you to make Confidential Comments to the Editor. While the JBI encourages an open and constructive peer review process you may wish to make confidential comments to the Editor regarding, for example, ethical concerns that you may have with the manuscript, the limitations of your review, or whether you feel the manuscript would benefit from copy-editing to assist English-language expression.
- *Take time for a final reflection.* Before you submit your report and recommendation, take a moment to read it through. Are you satisfied that you have been fair in your assessment and are you satisfied that your recommendation is the correct one? And if you were the author, how would you feel if you received this report? Would you find the review constructive, and would you feel that you had been treated respectfully and professionally?

### **3. Editorial decision**

Final decisions about publication are the province of the JBI's Editors, not reviewers. The Editor will always take account of your review along with the feedback of the other reviewer(s) and their own assessment of the manuscript before making a decision. Should the Editor wish to discuss issues raised in your review or in your confidential comments to them they may contact you for clarification.

When making a decision about a manuscript the Editor takes a number of factors into account including the reviewer's evaluations, their own assessment of the manuscript's merit, as well as the importance, originality, clarity, timeliness, and potential social and intellectual impact of the paper. Sometimes the Editor will make a decision about the manuscript that differs with your recommendation. This does not mean that your feedback was not taken into account, only that there were other factors that influenced the decision.

### **4. Revised manuscripts**

If the Editor's decision is to ask the authors to make major revisions and resubmit their manuscript for further evaluation, we may contact you again to assess the revised manuscript to ensure that you are satisfied with the revisions the authors have made in response to your concerns. If you have outstanding concerns in your review of the revised manuscript you can raise these in comments to the authors, but please keep in mind that your feedback should be consistent between the rounds of review. If you believe the paper is now acceptable for publication, you can recommend acceptance.

## 5. Additional Resources

### *Peer Review Training and Education*

You can find additional resources from Springer Nature on being a reviewer here:

- <https://www.springernature.com/gp/reviewers>
- <https://blogs.biomedcentral.com/bmcblog/tag/peer-review/>
- 'Focus on Peer Review' Nature Masterclass: <https://masterclasses.nature.com/focus-on-peer-review-online-course/16605550>

The following evaluation checklists for medical and life science journals are also available from Springer Nature:

- [Reviewer Guidance - Evaluation checklist for Medical journals](#)
- [Reviewer Guidance - Evaluation checklist for Life Sciences](#)

### *Reporting and Statistical Analysis guidelines*

The [EQUATOR Network](#) provides information about key reporting guidelines for different research methodologies including:

- Randomised controlled trials (RCTs): [CONSORT](#) guidelines
- Systematic reviews and meta-analyses: [PRISMA](#) guidelines and [MOOSE](#) guidelines
- Scoping reviews: [PRISMA](#) guidelines and [Joanna Briggs](#) guidelines
- Meta-narrative review: [RAMESES](#) publication standards
- Observational studies: [STROBE](#) guidelines and [MOOSE](#) guidelines
- Qualitative studies: [SRQR](#) recommendations and [COREQ](#) checklist
- Quality improvement studies: [SQUIRE](#) guidelines