

## Editorial

# The Importance of Peer Review and Guidelines for Becoming a Reviewer

**Dr Emily Choynowski**

Head of Research Development and Dissemination, Knowledge E, Dubai, UAE

**ORCID:**

Emily Choynowski: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6681-1709>

Peer review is a vitally important part of the academic ecosystem and is integral to the credibility and sustainability of all scholarly communications. The process by which independent and unbiased experts evaluate scholarly manuscripts to help determine whether they are suitable for publication, peer review not only ensures that only the best possible version of a manuscript is published but also helps to prevent the dissemination of bad science by identifying inadequate or faulty research. This Editorial will offer a brief overview of peer review – what it is, why it matters, and how to be a reviewer.

However, as the pressure on researchers to publish their work increases and the number of academic journals grows, so too do the pressures on editorial boards to find suitable peer reviewers. As competent reviewers with the requisite expertise, the available time, and the willingness to make a voluntary (without remuneration) contribution to the academic community are growing increasingly scarce, this integral cornerstone of the whole research edifice is now at risk.

We, therefore, urge all our readers to consider becoming peer reviewers. Serving as a peer reviewer will not only help to advance global scholarly research but also help with individual career development. There is an increasing drive toward public recognition of reviewers and their work, and peer review activities can now contribute to professional development and employment Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). In addition, reviewing can give advanced access to groundbreaking new research and offer valuable networking opportunities with leading journals in the field.

## How to Become a Reviewer

There are typically three reasons why people feel they are not suitable to review an article. First, they might lack the relevant expertise in the subject field. Second, they might not have time. Third, they might not feel equipped and confident in their ability

Corresponding Author: Dr  
Emily Choynowski; email:  
[e.choynowski@knowledgee.com](mailto:e.choynowski@knowledgee.com)

Received 5 June 2023  
Accepted 7 June 2023  
Published 30 June 2023

**Production and Hosting by  
Knowledge E**

© Dr Emily Choynowski. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Editor-in-Chief:  
Prof. Nazik Elmalaika Obaid  
Seid Ahmed Husain, MD,  
M.Sc, MHPE, PhD.

 **OPEN ACCESS**

to conduct a review. We cannot help with the first consideration; however, we hope to address the second two issues and encourage all our readers to consider becoming peer reviewers for journals within their field.

So, let us start with the question of timing. As researchers and medical professionals, we have countless demands upon our time, and it can often feel like there is nothing left for additional tasks. However, a peer review need not take up that much time (the average review is only 400–500 words and requires around 3–4 hr to produce). Moreover, reviewing activities can be scheduled to fit around existing commitments, and many editorial boards will give quite long lead times, of two months or more.

If a researcher wishes to become a reviewer, the first step is to identify suitable journals to review for (typically, these will be the journals the researcher already engages with, either as a reader or as a contributing author). Researchers should contact the editorial board, offering to be a reviewer and outline their areas of expertise and academic qualifications – to demonstrate their suitability for the role. In particular, we advise researchers to take a few minutes to consider what the editorial boards will look for, and shape their approach accordingly. In our view, editorial boards usually look for reviewers who are (1) experts in the field and have ideally published in this area; (2) unbiased with no conflicts of interest; (3) available and capable of delivering the review in a timely manner; and finally, (4) capable of being constructive rather than destructive, providing helpful feedback rather than negative criticism.

## Conducting a Review

When a reviewer receives an invitation to review, there are a few key questions to help determine whether or not they should accept the invitation. First, do they have the necessary subject knowledge? Second, do they have time to conduct the review and return the report within the requested timeframe? Third, do they understand the journal's scope and the editor's well enough to be able to evaluate a manuscript's suitability for that publication? The answer to all three of these questions should be "Yes." Finally, are there any conflicts of interest which might influence the review – if so, the reviewer should inform the editor, who will decide whether to proceed.

After accepting a review invitation, the reviewer will need to read the manuscript, evaluate its suitability for the journal, and write up a report. We usually suggest the reviewer reads the manuscript at least twice – first skimming it to look for significant issues and then conducting an in-depth examination.

Editors will have individual criteria and checklists, and reporting guidelines can vary by subject field and type of study. However, four essential questions should form the basis of any peer review: Does the manuscript make a clear and quantifiable contribution to the field?; Is the research properly conducted?; Are the findings correctly reported and analyzed; and Is the manuscript suitable for the journal?

Common issues which reviewers need to identify and address to prevent the publication of unsuitable manuscripts include studies similar or identical to something published already, poorly written or poorly structured manuscripts, missing content or content that does not conform to the journal's author guidelines, a lack of relevant and recent references for the topic of study, and a general lack of academic rigor.

When writing the review, the reviewer needs to provide constructive and unbiased criticism, avoid personal or offensive comments, and aim for concision. The review report should identify what contributions the manuscript makes to the field, confirm that the manuscript displays academic rigor (with evidence of efficient and effective research, appropriate citations, and proper analysis), and evaluate whether the study lies within the journal scope and is it appropriate for the target readership. Where applicable, the review report should highlight potential strengths and weaknesses and make relevant suggestions for improvement. Finally, the review report should offer a straightforward decision for the editor regarding whether to accept, return for revision, or reject.

We hope you have found this brief overview helpful and informative, and we hope you will all consider contributing to the progress of scholarly research within your subject fields in the future.