

## *Guidelines for Peer Reviewers*

Peer reviewers should:

- only agree to review manuscripts for which they have the subject expertise required to carry out a proper assessment and which they can assess in a timely manner. Otherwise, they should decline to review;
- decline to review if they feel unable to provide a fair and unbiased review, or if they have been involved with any of the work in the manuscript or its reporting;
- respect the confidentiality of peer review and not reveal any details of a manuscript or its review, during or after the peer-review process, beyond those that are released by the journal. They should not use information obtained during the peer-review process for their own or any other person's or organization's advantage, or to disadvantage or discredit others;
- not allow their reviews to be influenced by the origins of a manuscript, by the nationality, religious or political beliefs, gender or other characteristics of the authors, or by commercial considerations; be objective and constructive in their reviews, refraining from being hostile or inflammatory and from making libellous or derogatory personal comments;
- declare any potentially conflicting or competing interests (personal, financial, intellectual, professional, or others), seeking advice from the journal if they are unsure whether something constitutes a relevant interest;
- inform the journal on situations they consider to represent a conflict of interests: they work at the same institution as any of the authors; they are or have been recent (e.g. within the past 3 years) mentors, mentees, close collaborators or joint grant holders; they have a close personal relationship with any of the authors;
- notify the journal immediately if they discover a conflicting interest that wasn't apparent when they agreed to the review, if they find they do not have the expertise to assess all aspects of the manuscript or discover anything else that might prevent them providing a fair and unbiased review; they shouldn't wait until submitting their review as this will unduly delay the review process;
- not involve anyone else in the review of a manuscript, including junior researchers they are mentoring without the need; if the third personas are still involved, they should observe the confidentiality conditions given above. The names of any individuals who have helped them with the review should be included with the returned review or accompanying letter so that they are associated with the manuscript in the journal's records; collective reviews (sharing the responsibility) are not allowed, the reviewer is personally responsible for the review;
- provide recommendations that may help the authors improve the manuscript; ensure their review is based on the merits of the work and not influenced, either positively or negatively, by any personal, financial, or other conflicting considerations or by intellectual biases;
- number the comments and recommendations to be answered; be specific in their criticisms, and provide evidence with appropriate references to substantiate general statements such as, 'this work has been done before', to help editors in their evaluation and decision and in fairness to the authors; make clear which suggested additional investigations are essential to support claims made in the manuscript under consideration and which will just strengthen or extend the work; editorial notes are allowed, they should be given in the electronic version of the paper and highlighted in the text;
- specify significant publications devoted to the paper subject; draw the journal's attention to any discovered similarity or coincidence between the considered manuscript and any other publication known to the reviewer;
- remember it is the authors' paper and not attempt to rewrite it to their own preferred style if it is basically sound and clear; suggestions for changes that improve clarity are, however, important;

- observe the journal instructions regarding the reviewer's form, unless there are sound reasons for not doing so;
- prepare confidential comments to the editor as a separate document with the required explanations if needed; the comments should not be a place for denigration or false accusation, done in the knowledge that the authors will not see these comments;
- not write the review so that it negatively affects any person; not make unfair negative comments or include unjustified criticisms of any competitors' work that is mentioned in the manuscript;
- not suggest that authors include citations to the reviewer's (or their associates') work merely to increase the reviewer's (or their associates') citation count or to enhance the visibility of their or their associates' work; suggestions must be based on valid scientific, methodical or editorial reasons to improve the manuscript;
- respond promptly if contacted by a journal about matters related to their review of a manuscript and provide the information required; contact the journal if anything relevant comes to light after they have submitted their review that might affect their original feedback and recommendations; try to accommodate requests from journals to review revisions or resubmissions of manuscripts they have reviewed;
- get back to the journal if anything is not clear and requesting any missing or incomplete items they need to carry out a full review, refrain from looking at the manuscript and associated material while awaiting instructions from a journal on issues that might cause the request to review to be rescinded.

If the review contains recommendations on revising or extending the manuscript, the Editorial board secretary forwards the review to the author and proposes to revise the manuscript accordingly or to reasonably reject these comments (partially or completely). The revised manuscript is forwarded to the reviewers to estimate how properly the author has considered the comments and recommendations or how reasonably he rejected them.

Positive reviews are not enough to publish the manuscript. The final decision on publication is taken at the meeting of the Editorial board and written in the meeting protocol.

For the manuscripts not recommended for publication by the reviewer, the decision is also taken by the Editorial board. The rejection letter and the negative review are forwarded to the author by email, fax or post.

In case of disagreement with the rejection of the manuscript, the author can contact the Editorial board in writing with an argued request to forward his manuscript to a different reviewer for additional review. The Editorial board forwards the manuscript for additional review or provides a motivated refusal.

Once the Editorial board decides to publish the manuscript, the Secretary informs the author about this decision and the publication terms.

Original reviews are stored in the journal for three years.