# ***Common*Health Peer Review Guidelines & Resources**

**Preamble**

Peer review is the process in which scientific experts evaluate the quality and significance of a manuscript submitted to a scientific journal – in this case *Common*Health – and make a recommendation to the Editor-in-Chief regarding publication. The Editor-in-Chief makes the final decision. Reviewers are selected by the Editor-in-Chief of the journal, not by the authors of the paper. Where available, authors may provide recommendations for reviewers who do not have a conflict of interest with their submission. Criteria for selection of peer reviewers include that they have relevant expertise and that they do not have a potential conflict of interest with the authors. In the context of *CommonHealth*, this means that reviewers cannot be in a direct student/mentor-relationship (e.g., a faculty member on the student’s dissertation committee) or have an active or recent (last 5 years) collaboration. ‘Collaboration’ in this context refers to scientific collaborations (not serving on a dissertation or administrative committee together), as defined by co-authorship or being listed on the same grant (funded or submitted). The purpose of these criteria is to minimize actual or perceived conflicts of interest and reduce bias in the review process, and enhance the credibility, quality, and rigor of the review and thereby the journal *CommonHealth*.

For *CommonHealth*, peer review is single-blind, meaning that authors do not know the identity of the reviewers, but reviewers know who the authors are. The purpose of blinding the authors to the reviewers’ identity is to facilitate a candid review. Typically, each manuscript will be reviewed by 2 or 3 reviewers (in addition to an Editor-in-Chief).

**Purpose of Peer Review**

The purpose of peer review is to determine whether a submitted manuscript meets standards of scientific quality and has sufficient merit and significance to be added to the literature. Thus, peer review is a ‘gate-keeping’ process to raise the quality and impact of the science and help elevate the level of trust a reader can have in the science. It is important to note that, although peer-reviewed articles represent a higher standard of evidence than non-peer-reviewed articles, this does *not* mean that peer-reviewed articles are necessarily of high quality; rather, it means that the article has at least been vetted by experts, but that the reader must nevertheless exercise critical thinking.

**General Guidance for Peer Review**

Below are some important points to keep in mind when conducting a peer review of an article. These points apply generally regardless of article type (e.g., empirical paper; theoretical viewpoint; review paper).

1. **Submitted articles are considered private and confidential**. Reviewers are NOT allowed to share or discuss the paper under review with anyone *except* the Editor-in-Chief, and are expected to take all appropriate measures to keep the manuscript confidential (e.g., to not leave a copy of the paper where others may see it).
2. The charge for a peer reviewer is to **evaluate the *scientific merit* of the manuscript**, NOT to copy-edit the manuscript. Although identifying grammatical and spelling errors may be helpful to the authors, this is not the task of the reviewer. The reviewer is invited to review because of their scientific knowledge and expertise, not because of their writing skills. Peer reviews should therefore be focused on the science.
3. **Disagreements are inevitable in science**. In fact, disagreements is what drives science forward – science is a competition of ideas. It is important that this essence of the scientific enterprise be maintained and honored. This means that it is not appropriate to recommend rejection of a paper based solely on the basis of a different theoretical orientation or perspective. Authors should be held to a standard of internal consistency (within their chosen theory or perspective), they should be able to explain their theory or perspective, and they should be able to address the degree to which their theory or perspective accounts for the data (theirs and extant). Recommending rejection just because a reviewer holds a different perspective is inappropriate.
4. **Clear, constructive reviews foster better science**. Reviews are supposed to identify both strengths and limitations, and should be constructive. They should be written in a way that will help the authors identify and understand the problems to be addressed – either in a revision or in future efforts. It is appropriate to provide suggestions for what needs to be addressed (e.g., what type of additional analysis might address the question; what other literature should be considered; what points should be acknowledged or addressed in the Discussion), but the role of the peer reviewer is NOT to rewrite the paper for the authors. It is often helpful to authors if reviewers clearly identify and distinguish major concerns and minor concerns, and structure their review accordingly.
5. **Tone is important**: Be respectful, and keep in mind that authors generally put considerable effort into conducting the research and writing the paper. This does not mean that reviewers should overlook, ignore, excuse, or minimize problems, but that these should be raised in a respectful and constructive manner.

**Specific Aspects to Evaluate in Peer Review**

The specific aspects to be evaluated in peer review will depend to some extent on the nature of the paper (e.g., empirical, review, viewpoint) but generally include

(a) the **soundness and clarity of the rationale** and logical argumentation and interpretation,

(b) the **quality of the data** on which the arguments are based,

(c) the **clarity and transparency of the methods**, and

(d) the **significance and contextualization** within a broader literature.

Below are examples of specific questions to ask when conducting a peer review of an empirical paper, organized by the standard sections (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion). These are *examples:* they may not all apply to all manuscripts, and there may be additional questions to consider, but they provide some guidance to help identify potential problems. When considering what content should be covered in a manuscript, reviewers may find it helpful to refer to reporting guidelines such as those from the Equator Network (https://www.equator-network.org/reporting-guidelines/).

### Introduction

***General questions to ask about the Introduction are:***

What is the question?

Is this still an open question?

Do the authors explain why this is still an open question?

What are the alternative hypotheses?

Why is this important?

Do the authors make a good argument for this study?

***More specifically:***

## Review of literature

\* Is there a clear statement of the problem?

\* Is the literature cited pertinent and current?

\* Is the cited literature clearly related to the problem?

\* Is it clear why the question has not yet been adequately answered?

\* Is there pertinent literature that is not reviewed?

## Purpose and hypotheses

\* Is the purpose of the study clearly stated?

\* Does the problem and cited literature provide a rationale for the present study?

\* Are the research hypotheses clearly stated? Is there more than one hypothesis or only one?

\* Is it clear how the hypotheses follow from the theories?

\* Are the theories explained?

\* Are the predictions of the hypotheses clearly stated in terms of the study’s method/aim?

#### Methods

***General questions to ask about the Methods section are:***

What did the researchers do? When and to whom?

Are the methods (including design) appropriate to address the question?

What was manipulated?

What was measured?

What possible confounds are there, and are there appropriate controls for them?

Is this study replicable based on the information provided? If not, what information would be needed to make this study replicable?

***More specifically:***

## Participants

\* Who are the participants?

\* Are there multiple participants / groups (e.g., experimental, control)? Are these appropriate participants/groups to rule out confounding variables?

\* What are the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria?

\* Is the sample representative of the population?

\* How/from where were participants recruited?

\* Are data relevant to participant variables included (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status, extent of pathology, test scores, method of diagnosis)

\* Is there explicit acknowledgement that the study was conducted with appropriate approvals? (e.g., Institutional Review Board, Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee)

## Materials / Surveys

\* Are test stimuli clearly explained and/or listed?

\* Are the materials developed appropriately to allow examination of the variables under study?

\* Do the authors address reliability/validity of the materials?

\* Are there possible confounds?

## Task & Procedures

\* Is it clear how the study was conducted?

\* What was the participants’ task? What were the instructions to the participant to explain the task?

\* Does the task measure the targeted construct? (e.g., speech skills, memory, language comprehension, visuospatial skills, reasoning, health behaviors, etc.)

\* Are administration procedures clearly stated and appropriate for population and purpose?

\* Is equipment/test setting clearly described with adequate controls?

\* Are reinforcement/feedback procedures clearly described?

\* What was the duration of the study / sessions?

## Design

\* What experimental design is employed? (e.g., group study, case study, single-subject multiple baseline, cross-sectional, longitudinal, parallel group RCT, etc.)

\* What are the experimental conditions? Are they explained well?

\* How are participants assigned to conditions?

\* What are the independent variables?

\* Are they operationally defined?

\* What are the dependent variables?

\* Are they operationally defined? How are they measured?

\* How is experimental control demonstrated? (consider relevant possible threats to internal validity)

\* Is reliability of measurement considered and addressed appropriately?

\* Is fidelity of intervention addressed appropriately?

\* Is participant bias controlled? (e.g., blinding)

\* Is researcher bias controlled? (e.g., blinding)

## Data reduction/analysis

\* How are the data analyzed? What is compared or correlated with what?

\* If subjective judgment is involved, how is bias controlled or minimized? (e.g., judgment of behaviors by an analyst; social acceptability in self-report)

\* Are these methods clearly stated and appropriate (missing data? data transformation? statistics?)

\* Do the analyses clearly relate to the question and hypotheses?

# **Results**

***The main question to ask about the Method section is:***

What did the authors find?

***More specifically:***

\* Are the data presented clearly?

\* Are the findings statistically significant?

\* Is there adequate and appropriate use of tables and graphs to display complex results?

\* Are there any findings that you would expect or need but are not reported?

#### Discussion/conclusion

***The main questions to ask about the Discussion section are:***

What do the findings mean?

How do the findings relate to prior literature?

Is the purpose of the study met? (e.g., is the research question answered?)

Are there alternative interpretations? Are these appropriately discussed?

***More specifically:***

\* Do the authors provide a summary statement of the main findings? If so, does this summary adequately reflect the actual findings reported in the results?

\* Are the results (being) related to the hypotheses?

\* Is the discussion of the results consistent with the results?

\* Do the researchers discuss the relevance of the findings in terms of the previous research cited in the introduction section?

\* Are the theoretical implications of the findings discussed where appropriate?

\* Are clinical/practical implications of the findings discussed where appropriate?

\* Are alternative explanations discussed?

\* Are there obvious alternative explanations that are not discussed?

\* Are limitations of the study addressed?

\* Are there limitations that are not discussed?

\* Do the researchers draw appropriate conclusions based on the data presented (e.g. not too general, nor too limited, based on the data?)

\* Do the conclusions provide closure to the initial hypotheses? (i.e. are the questions answered?)

\* Is future research discussed?