Pre-Publication Support Service Peer Reviewer Guidelines

PREPSS supports health researchers in improving their research articles for successful publication in their target peer-reviewed journal. Review by PREPSS does not guarantee publication in the author's target journal.

THE ROLE OF PEER REVIEW AT PREPSS

Your role as a PREPSS peer reviewer is to support authors in getting "in the door" at a peer reviewed journal (i.e. be accepted for peer review). We do not expect our peer reviewers to be content experts. Keep in mind that authors will receive another round of rigorous peer review at their target journal from a content expert. PREPSS policy prohibits peer reviewers from joining the author team on manuscripts they review.

IMPORTANT REVIEWER TIPS:

- Reviews must be submitted through PREPSS' Manuscript Manager platform. Reviews will no longer be accepted via email. See the Peer Reviewer Manuscript Manager Guide for step-by-step instructions on accepting your review invitation and submitting your review.
- Never paste or upload an author's manuscript into an AI platform (such as ChatGPT). Manuscripts may contain sensitive and/or identifiable information, including unpublished results.
- Please do not copy edit manuscripts (e.g. spelling, typos, writing edits). Authors will likely need to make substantial changes to their manuscript that render such edits irrelevant. Authors are encouraged to copy-edit their manuscripts at the end of the PREPSS process.
- Please write your review in our Peer Review Form. Do not make edits or add comments directly on the manuscript. Example reviews can be found on the PREPSS website.
- Please number your comments – this helps authors avoid missing important information and organize their response to reviewers.
- Please clearly relate your comments to the manuscript's line numbers or sections.
- Write your comments in simple language as most of our clients are secondary English speakers.
- Please be upbeat and frame your comments in a supportive tone.
- When submitting your review in Manuscript Manager, you will need to copy/paste your review into a text box. Formatting such as tables, screenshots, bold, underlined, or italicized text, etc. will not carry over. Please use only basic formatting, including numbered or bulleted lists.
- Keep the manuscripts confidential. They should not be discussed with others without express permission from the PREPSS Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Ella August.
- Please consider that the article is written for the author's target journal in terms of the background provided, etc. If you are unsure of the author's target journal, please ask.
- Please submit your review on time. If you need more time, contact the Editorial Office at prepssadmin@umich.edu.

NOTE: We will send a short evaluation of your experience as a peer reviewer after your review. Please feel free to email the PREPSS Editorial Office with questions or concerns at pressadmin@umich.edu.

Consider the below prompts for your peer review:

Please see Example Peer Reviews for ideas on how to structure your review.

Abstract

- Does the abstract justify and contextualize the research?
- Do the methods include key methodological approaches that help you understand how the study was done?
- Are the main message(s) of the paper presented? Do the results in the abstract match the results in the main body of the paper?
- Does the conclusions / discussion section say something meaningful beyond simply repeating the results or that more research is needed?

Introduction

- Does the introduction flow in a logical and easy to follow manner?
- Does the introduction answer "so what"-- that is, why readers should care about the research?
- Does the introduction describe what is already known about the topic? What is not known?
- Is the research question or aim clear and testable? Is it detailed enough?
- Are all statements that could be contested referenced? Are references complete and up to date?

Methods

- The following elements should be described in this section: the setting and participants, the study design and timing, recruitment and sampling, the data collection procedure or a description of the dataset if secondary data analysis is employed, lab procedures, analytic approach for each research objective, ethical approval.
- Each methodological approach should be justified and citations should support this justification where possible.
- Statistical methods should be appropriate to the study question(s)
- Enough detail should be provided in regards to study design, sampling, data collection, variable operationalization and analytical plan to permit replication.

Results

- Is each research aim addressed in the results?
- Do the Ns, estimates and other values presented in the results text match the abstract, methods, and tables and figures?
- Are the methods used to generate table results detailed in the methods?
- Is causal language used inappropriately given the study design?

Tables and Figures

- Is the message of each table and figure clear?
- Do table titles / figure legends appropriately describe the information being presented, including the who, what, when, and where of the data?
- Are tables and figures understandable without reading the text?
- Does the N in the table/figure match the N in the results text and methods?
- Are statistical comparisons and tests explained? For example, if p values are shown, is the corresponding statistical test described?

Discussion/Conclusion

- New results/data shouldn't be presented in this section
- Have the authors interpreted the results? Is the significance of the findings clear?
- Are main findings compared with other research, and discussed beyond whether the results agree or disagree?
- Are the findings situated within the broader context of scientific literature, and pathways or mechanisms that might give rise to, or explain results?
- Do limitations describe how they may have impacted results where possible and how they should impact interpretation of the data? Are strengths included?
- Are the conclusions supported by the study findings? Is causal language used appropriately?

References

- Are they up to date and complete?
- No need to review/ evaluate reference formatting/style.

Title

- The title should be informative, and should not overlap with the key words.
- All titles do not need to reflect all of the following variables, but consider whether the title reflects the independent and dependent variables, the population and setting, the study design, the timing, and even the main result?

Frequently Asked Questions about Peer Review

Do I need to review the author's cover letter?

No. We provide coaching to authors who would like support in writing their cover letter.

Do I need to check the manuscript against the author guidelines for the target journal (word count, number of figures, tables, title page, etc)?

No.

This manuscript does not fall within my area of expertise. Am I still qualified to provide peer review comments?

At PREPSS, we do our best to match reviewers with the content of each submitted manuscript. Unfortunately, we don't always have a perfect match. Please review the aspects of the manuscript that you feel comfortable commenting on, with the understanding that it will go through an additional layer of peer review at the peer-reviewed journal where it is submitted, including content review.

Will I have access to the other peer reviewer's comments to help me better understand what was asked of the author and so that I can learn from the other peer reviewer?

Yes, both reviewers for any given paper will have access to the other set of peer reviews.

Is it possible to collaborate with the other peer reviewer to create one joint peer review?

Yes, please be sure to let us know of your interest in collaborative peer review; we will note this in our records and assign you with another reviewer that has a similar preference.

Will you follow up to let me know if/when the article I reviewed was published in the author's target journal or someplace else?

We track all manuscripts and will send you an email when the paper you reviewed is published.

Will I be asked to re-review the manuscript?

Typically, peer reviewers work with authors in three rounds of review.

Can a copy editor go through the manuscript before it comes to me so that it's easier to read?

We save editing and proofreading for the very end of the PREPSS review process since major changes may be required in the early stages of review (such as removing entire paragraphs). We apologize for the added difficulty of reading papers that have not yet been edited.

Should I edit the manuscript for English language usage, grammar and proofreading?

Editing and proofreading is not part of the reviewer scope of activities. Please avoid proof reading or English language edits as the paper may require revisions which will render these edits unnecessary.

Do I need to submit separate comments to the editor?

No; separate comments to the editor are not necessary.

Will the editor contact me if there is an issue with my review?

Yes, the managing editor will contact you about issues such as the need to further clarify a comment or other questions.