

Information for Reviewers

Focus and Scope

Aim and Scope of the Journal

The Journal of Public Health in Developing Countries (JPHDC) is a non-profit, peer-reviewed, open-access, international, scientific journal that publishes articles in all areas of public health. The journal has a special focus on the social determinants of health, the environmental, behavioural, and occupational correlates of health and disease, and the impact of health policies, practices and interventions on the community. JPHDC also publishes occasional special editions that concentrate on specific topics or events regarding public health.

The authors from the developing countries are particularly encouraged and are welcomed to contribute in this journal

JPHDC publishes:

Original research, Reviews, Technical notes, Study protocols, as well as a broad range of informal material in the form of Editorials, Correspondence, Opinion, Book reviews, and Comments on prior papers in the JPHDC.

JPHDC Subject Areas

JPHDC particularly welcomes research in the following areas (the list is neither exhaustive, nor rank-ordered):

- General Public Health
- Epidemiology of Non-communicable and Communicable Diseases
- Disease Prevention
- Public Health Genetics and Genetic Epidemiology
- Community Health Improvement and Prevention Programmes
- Hospital and Community Infection Prevention and Control, and Health Surveillance
- Population Healthcare Needs Assessment
- Health Intelligence
- Healthcare Commissioning
- Quality of Healthcare
- Population Health Inequalities
- Health Service Evaluation
- Environmental, Chemical, and Occupational Hazards in the Community
- Health Screening
- Health Education and Promotion
- Health Behavioural Changes and Risky Health Behaviours

Introduction

Peer-review is intended to improve the accuracy, clarity, and completeness of published manuscripts and to help editors decide which manuscripts to publish. Peer-reviewers are experts in the manuscript's content area, research methods, or both. This guide is mostly about the principles for reviewers to use when called upon to assist us in maintaining high scientific standards for the JPHDC. Our primary emphasis is to help our reviewers to understand how to approach reviews for JPHDC. Other relevant information about the journal's scope and editorial policies can be found at 'About the JPHDC' and 'Journal Policies' sections of the website. We expect our esteemed reviewers to abide by the Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) available at:

http://publicationethics.org/files/Ethical_guidelines_for_peer_reviewers_0.pdf.

Submitted manuscripts are usually reviewed by two or more experts. JPHDC follows a double-blinded closed peer-review process where authors are blinded to reviewers' identities and vice versa. Peer-reviewers will be asked to recommend whether a manuscript should be accepted, revised or rejected. They should also alert the editors of any issues relating to author misconduct such as plagiarism and unethical behaviour.

Publication of research articles by JPHDC is dependent primarily on their validity and coherence, as judged by peer-reviewers and editors. The reviewers may also be asked whether the writing is comprehensible and how interesting they consider the article to be. Submitted manuscripts will be sent to peer-reviewers, unless they are out of scope or below the interest threshold of JPHDC, or if the presentation or written English is of an unacceptably low standard.

The decision about publication is entirely the Editor's responsibility. In most cases, the Editor will follow the will of the majority of the reviewers, but in some cases that might not happen. In such cases, the Editor will be expected to provide substantive reasons for not accepting the recommendations of the majority of the reviewers.



Review Guidelines

First and foremost, the goal of the review process is to improve the scientific quality of the submission. Reviewers will work with the author through a collaborative process to ensure scientific integrity. Constructive criticism is a necessary part of this collaborative effort and as such shall be offered and received in a professional manner.

The Editor's role includes that of being a moderator, in a literal way, of the discourse between reviewers and authors, and will enforce ethical standards of behaviour in the review and response process.

Reviewers are expected to return their reviews within **three weeks**, unless otherwise specified by the Editor. The reviewers may request an extension from the Editor, if needed.

A reviewer invitation is sent out by email from the JPHDC online system. The invitation includes information about the title and abstract of the manuscript. After agreeing to review the paper, the reviewer has access to the entire manuscript. We encourage reviewers to contact the editorial office (Editors@jphdc.org) at any time if they require additional information or assistance.

Points to Consider

Reviewers are asked to provide detailed, constructive comments that will help the editors make a decision on publication and the author(s) improve their manuscript. A key issue is whether the work has serious flaws that should preclude its publication, or whether there are additional experiments or data required to support the conclusions drawn. Where possible, reviewers should provide references to substantiate their comments.

There are two basic components to the review of a scientific manuscript:

- (1) Scientific content, and
- (2) Quality of the presentation

Either or both of these can be grounds for rejection of the submission and both should be considered within the review.

A. Scientific Content

Although there can be no simple formula for what is acceptable scientific content, there are some basic principles that generally apply. The standards for a manuscript depend somewhat on the category of submission, but here are some general guidelines.

1. Is the question posed original, important and well defined?

- The research question posed by the authors should be easily identifiable and understood.

- It is useful to both the editors and authors if reviewers comment on the originality and importance of the study within the context of its field - what are the main claims of the paper and how significant are they?
- How does the paper stand out from others in its field?
- If the research question is unoriginal because related work has been published previously, please give references.
- Reviewers should ask themselves after reading the manuscript if they have learnt something new and if there is a clear conclusion from the study.

2. Are the data sound and well controlled?

- If you feel that inappropriate controls have been used please say so, indicating the reasons for your concerns, and suggesting alternative controls where appropriate.
- If you feel that further experimental/clinical evidence is required to substantiate the results, please provide details.

3. Is the interpretation (discussion and conclusion) well balanced and supported by the data?

- The interpretation should discuss the relevance of all the results in an unbiased manner.
- Are the interpretations overly positive or negative?
- Conclusions drawn from the study should be valid and result directly from the data shown, with reference to other relevant work as applicable.
- Have the authors provided references wherever necessary?

4. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to allow others to evaluate and/or replicate the work?

- Please remark on the suitability of the methods for the study, which should be clearly described and reproducible by peers in the field.
- If statistical analyses have been carried out, specify whether or not they need to be assessed specifically by an additional reviewer with statistical expertise.

5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the methods?

- Please comment on any improvements that could be made to the study design to enhance the quality of the results.
- If any additional experiments are required, please give details.
- If novel experimental techniques were used please pay special attention to their reliability and validity.

6. Speculation

- For the most part, speculation in a scientific manuscript is not acceptable.

- Speculation is defined as an unsubstantiated assertion or hypothesis.
- Very limited speculation is possible but it should be confined to the end of a manuscript, within a "discussion" of the paper's content or areas of future research, and it should be identified clearly as speculation.

7. Significance of results

- Whenever possible, authors are expected to analyze the statistical significance of their calculations.
- The use of statistical analysis to assess the confidence that can be placed on a calculation based on real data is essential to any scientific paper.
- Generally, failure to provide statistical analysis of results is not acceptable.
- Sample size is an important aspect of statistical confidence limits and small samples need to be identified as such.

8. Reproducibility

- It should be possible for anyone reading the manuscript to reproduce the results.
- The manuscript, therefore, should provide any and all information necessary for a reader to repeat any analysis contained therein.
- Any withholding of needed information is unacceptable.
- However, it is acceptable to use references to accomplish this.
- To the maximum extent possible consistent with a concise presentation, a manuscript should be self-contained.
- Extensive mathematical derivations can be moved to an Appendix.
- Large datasets and detailed software information need not be provided, although it is encouraged to make software and data available whenever possible, perhaps by the World Wide Web or in an unrefereed technical paper.

9. Relevance

- The only issue of the relevance of a paper that is appropriate for a reviewer to consider is whether or not the content of the presentation fit within the guidelines of what is acceptable content for the JPHDC.
- Otherwise, it is not up to the reviewer to assess the relevance of a manuscript for publication in JPHDC.

10. Originality

- If the manuscript simply reproduces the results of an already published work with no change and adds nothing else, this is probably not acceptable.
- In some cases, it is valuable to the community if a particular piece of work can be confirmed.
- In particular, if the analysis methods of an already published work are reproduced, but with a different

set of data, or an expanded data set, this is quite likely to be acceptable.

11. Comparisons with existing work

- To the maximum extent possible, comparisons within a manuscript with already published work should be as unambiguous as possible.
- If a comparison with previous work is made, the same definitions should be used, as well as the same data.
- If it is felt that the definitions and/or data of an existing work have problems, then a comparison with that existing work should be done both with the original definitions and/or data, as well as with the changed definitions and/or data.

12. Negative results

- We believe that negative results can be useful to the scientific community.
- Based on the reviews, the Editor decides whether to accept any manuscript reporting negative results for an experiment or analysis.

13. When revisions are requested

- Reviewers may recommend revisions for any or all of the following reasons: data need to be added to support the authors' conclusions; better justification is needed for the arguments based on existing data; or the clarity and/or coherence of the paper needs to be improved.

14. Are there any ethical or competing interests issues you would like to raise?

- The study should adhere to ethical standards of scientific/medical research and the authors should declare that they have received ethics approval and/or patient consent for the study, where appropriate.
- Whilst we do not expect reviewers to delve into authors' competing interests, if you are aware of any issues that you do not think have been adequately addressed, please inform the editorial office.

15. Reviewers are reminded of the importance of timely reviews

- If reviewers encounter or foresee any problems meeting the deadline for a report, they should contact editors@jphdc.org.

16. Confidentiality

- Any manuscript sent for peer review is a confidential document and should remain so until it is formally published.

17. Are the included additional files (supplementary materials) appropriate?

- Online publishing enables the inclusion of additional files with published articles.
- Additional files of many types can be submitted, including tabular data and mini-websites.
- Reviewers are encouraged to comment on the appropriateness of the types of additional files, included with the manuscript, for publication with the final article.
- Additional files pertaining to original/raw data files that support the results reported in the manuscript can be included.
- It is not expected that reviewers should reanalyse all supporting data as part of their peer review, but the availability of supporting data enables more detailed investigation of particular aspects of the study if the reviewer or editor feels it is necessary.

B. Quality of Presentation

Again, there is no simple formula to follow for a successful presentation. The Editors are quite agreeable to accepting a variety of stylistic choices, permitting authors to express themselves in their own unique way. The JPHDC follows the guidelines as outlined in the Authors' Guide. Here are some basic recommendations for authors to follow and reviewers to consider.

1. Quality of figures

- Figures should be legible as well as easy to read and understand.
- Generally, figures provide supporting documentation and illustrate some important point within the paper.
- Thus, reviewers should pay close attention to the figures and offer specific suggestions for changing them, if need be, to help the authors improve the presentation.

2. Quality of the English language

- For non-native English speakers, and perhaps even for some native English speakers, the grammar, spelling, usage, and punctuation of the text are very important for an effective presentation.
- JPHDC Editor(s) will not put a paper into review if the English presentation is inadequate.
- Furthermore, if the reviewer feels the paper is not readable, the reviewer may reject such a paper on those grounds alone.

3. Organisation

- The quality of presentation includes the issue of how the paper is organised.
- To some extent, the organisation of the content is a style issue and the author is allowed to do whatever s/he wishes, provided the resulting content can be followed reasonably easily.
- However, it is appropriate for a reviewer to make recommendations for reorganising a paper's content in an effort to improve the presentation.

- Again, there is no magic formula for a proper organisation, but this is fair game for a reviewer.

4. Completeness

- An important issue is whether or not everything that needs to be in the manuscript is actually there.
- Of particular significance is that all the literature citations should be included in the reference list, and all the items in the reference list should actually be cited somewhere in the text.
- All figures and tables should have captions that describe their content sufficiently well that interpretation of their content is straightforward.
- Equations in the text need not all be numbered, but all equations cited in the text should have numbers.

C. Manuscript Length

- Although electronic publishing is inherently less concerned with space limitations than printed journals, the Editorial Board wishes to keep manuscripts within some bounds.
- Hence, any manuscript that exceeds 32 pages in length (title page, abstract, text of manuscript, and acknowledgments), double-spaced and using 12-point font, will need to receive special permission from the Editor.
- Thus, it is in the author's interest to avoid deadwood in the text, such as extensive description of the figures, using figures of dubious relevance to the material, or repeating the content of figure captions in the text, which are common problems with submitted manuscripts.
- Reviewers should be prepared to offer specific suggestions for shortening long manuscripts.
- When reviewers offer suggestions, it is common to ask for more supporting evidence and additional analysis. Please keep in mind that when the paper is at or near the length limit, asking for more material will put the author in the position of having to remove other content to stay within the length limit. Please be considerate of the author when asking for additional material and offer suggestions where the manuscript can be trimmed to make room for the requested content.

D. Unreviewed Content

- Sometimes, reviewers choose to not review some parts of the content, for any of a number of reasons.
- If, for any reason, a review does not consider some part of the manuscript's content, that should be specifically noted by the reviewer.
- Examples might include the details of a statistical analysis, or some aspect of the paper upon which the reviewer is not qualified to comment.
- There can be many good reasons for this, but it is important for the reviewer to inform the Editor about any such omission.

E. Editorial Standards

- Reviewers are asked to bear the editorial standards of JPHDC in mind and alert the editors if authors have not fully adhered to them.
- JPHDC adheres to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and abide by the recommendations of the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) Publication Ethics Committee recommendations on peer reviewers, which are available at: <http://www.wame.org/resources/publication-ethics-policies-for-medical-journals#peer>.

Review Organisation

In addition to making a recommendation, reviewers are expected to provide detailed comments to the author, describing any shortcomings and recommending changes that would address those shortcomings. In general, there are two types of comments: **substantive** and **technical**, as described below. It is the reviewer's responsibility to divide the review content into separate sections for substantive and technical comments.

Substantive comments refer to a manuscript's scientific content, including the overall quality of the presentation.

Technical comments refer to minor issues, such as suggested rewording of sentences or phrases, identifying spelling errors, typographical errors, punctuation, grammar, and so on.

Reviewer Recommendations

Every review will include a recommendation to the Editor. The editor will then make a decision based on the reviewers' advice, from among several possibilities:

- Accept**, with or without editorial revisions
- Invite the authors to **revise their manuscript** to address specific concerns before a final decision is reached
- Reject, but indicate to the authors that **further work might justify a resubmission**
- Reject outright**, typically on grounds of insufficient conceptual advance or major technical and/or interpretational problems

In general, further work is needed if additional controls are required to support the claims or the interpretations are not supported by the data, if further analysis is required that may change the conclusions, or if the methods used are inadequate or statistical errors have been made.

Given that the first option is unlikely following an initial submission, reviewers probably will see the manuscript at least twice, unless they specifically request otherwise.

If a reviewer has a problem with the way an Editor has responded to his/her recommendations, the reviewer can submit a complaint to the Editor-in-Chief for review by following the conflict resolution procedures provided

below. The Editor-in-Chief will review all such disputes and render a decision as soon as possible after receiving them. Decisions of the Editor-in-Chief are final.

Acceptance Criteria for Journal Publication

Case	Reviewers Recommendation			Decision	Next Step
	1st Reviewer	2nd Reviewer	3rd Reviewer		
1	Accept	Accept		Accept	The Editor sends the manuscript for copyediting and formatting
2	Accept	Revisions (Minor)		Minor Revisions	The Editor contacts the authors for revising their manuscript in line with specific concerns before a final decision is reached
3	Accept	Revisions (Major)		Reject with possibility of resubmission	The Editor indicates to the authors that further work might justify a resubmission. Resubmission (if made) will go to the original reviewer
4	Revisions (Minor)	Revisions (Minor)	Will be involved as and when required	Minor Revisions	The Editor contacts the authors for revising their manuscript in line with specific concerns before a final decision is reached
5	Revisions (Minor)	Revisions (Major)		Reject with possibility of resubmission	The Editor indicates to the authors that further work might justify a resubmission. Resubmission (if made) will go to the original reviewer
6	Revisions (Major)	Revisions (Major)		Reject with possibility of resubmission	The Editor indicates to the authors that further work might justify a resubmission. Resubmission (if made) will go to the original reviewer
7	Reject outright	Recommendation of 2 nd reviewer not needed		Reject	Reject

Conflict Resolution

Reviewers perform a valuable service to JPHDC and the journal wishes to maintain a good relationship with its reviewers who voluntarily donate their efforts on behalf of the public health science. Therefore, we have established a procedure to resolve conflicts that might arise during the review process.

If for any reason, a reviewer has a problem and feels that it cannot be resolved by working with the Editor, we urge the reviewer to inform the Editor-in-Chief of the problem. Such notification should be done by email to Chief.Editor@jphdc.org. Problems will be reviewed, and a decision will be made, which will final. There is no further appeal procedure.

Depending on the circumstances, the decision can include: dismissal of the Editor in the case of major ethical violations, overriding the Editor's actions, admonition of the Editor for a minor problem, or sustaining the Editor's actions. All complaints will be considered, and the person lodging a complaint will be informed of the decision as soon as possible.

Statistics on Peer Review

JPHDC will periodically publish statistics describing the journal's review process, such as number of manuscripts submitted, percentage of submissions sent out for external peer review, acceptance rate, and average times from manuscript submission to rejection letter to authors and, for accepted manuscripts, time to publication.