

Guidelines for Reviewers

Thank you very much for agreeing to review a manuscript for *Health Psychology*®. Your review will be most helpful to us if you follow these guidelines.

Comments to the Editor

Your Comments to the Editor are confidential and will be read only by the editors; they will not be shared with the authors, at least not verbatim. In some cases, an editor may paraphrase or refer to your comments when communicating with the authors.

Please use the confidential Comments to the Editor box to explain your recommendation to accept, revise, or reject the manuscript; to discuss the severity of key weaknesses and whether they are potentially fixable; to identify other reasons why the paper should or should not be published; and/or to let the editors know about any confidential questions, concerns, or opinions that you may have about the manuscript. *Please do not copy and paste the same material into the Comments to the Editor and Comments to Authors boxes.*

Comments to Authors

Your Comments to Authors will be read both by the authors and by the editors. They should provide a critical but constructive review, in a considerate and impartial tone. They should not reveal your confidential recommendation to reject, revise, or accept the paper, or your opinion as to whether it should be published. The actual decision to reject, revise, or accept the paper will be made by the editors, not by the reviewers.

Some of the reviews that we receive are hard to read and hard for the authors to respond to. For example, some reviews provide a long, unstructured narrative or a long list of assorted issues, with no indication of which ones are the most important. *Both the authors and the editors are counting on you to highlight the most important issues, i.e., the main reasons why you think the paper should be rejected, revised, or accepted.* We therefore urge you to divide your Comments to Authors into the following three sections:

Key Strengths: Briefly describe the key strengths of the manuscript. Highlight points that make it interesting, informative, important, or novel.

Major Points: Identify the most important problems, weaknesses, errors, omissions, or limitations. *This section should focus primarily on deficiencies in the science, not in the writing.* Preferred format: numbered list with no more than about 5 – 10 items.

Minor Points: List any other problems, weaknesses, errors, omissions, or limitations that should be addressed; violations of APA Style; problems with grammar, quality of writing; etc. Preferred format: List with no more than about 10-20 items. Use the manuscript's section and subsection headings to structure your comments, and indicate the location(s) of the problems by page, paragraph, and/or line number.

When we invite authors to revise and resubmit a manuscript, we ask them to include a cover letter with point-by-point responses to the reviewers' major points and to any substantive or methodological issues that are listed as minor points. We ask them not to respond item-by-item to the reviewers' minor points concerning spelling, grammar, or APA Style, but to simply address them in the revised manuscript. Thus, when you read the cover letter for a revised manuscript, you will not see responses to minor points about how the report was written.

Reporting guidelines have been developed for many different kinds of studies, such as randomized controlled trials, meta-analyses, and pilot studies. Guidelines, checklists, and flowchart templates are available at www.equator-network.org. When applicable, we ask authors to follow relevant guidelines and to include completed checklists and flowcharts with their manuscript submissions. These materials can be very helpful for reviewers, so please refer to them when evaluating submissions that include them.

Recommendation

Your recommendation to reject, revise, or accept a manuscript should be based primarily on the key strengths and major weaknesses of the science, not of the writing, and it should be consistent with your comments. If you find any significant deficiencies, it is essential to consider whether they are *potentially fixable*. Some problems, such as major flaws in the design of a study, may be both serious and unfixable. These sorts of problems should lead you in the direction of recommending rejection.

Other major problems, such as the use of an inappropriate statistical test in the primary analysis, *might* be fixable if the authors are given a chance to revise and resubmit their manuscript. Major weaknesses or problems do not necessarily justify rejection if they are potentially fixable. If you cannot tell whether the major problems are fixable, you should consider recommending a major revision to give the authors a chance to address them.

Please make sure that the issues you identify as “major” truly are major weaknesses or problems. For example, an author’s failure to mention a certain theory, cite a certain paper, conduct a certain kind secondary analysis, or discuss certain limitations may be problematic, but they are not necessarily major deficiencies. Minor weaknesses or problems, by themselves, rarely provide a sufficient basis for rejection of a manuscript.

Null results, by themselves, also provide an insufficient basis for rejection of a manuscript. If a study addresses an important question or tests an interesting hypothesis, and if it is well designed and well executed, it can be informative even if the results are null. Automatic rejection of studies with null findings can lead to publication biases that skew entire lines of research toward excessively optimistic conclusions. In particular, a bias toward publishing trials only if their results are positive can make interventions seem more effective than they truly are. Null results may be one of the reasons why you are not very enthusiastic about a study, but it should probably not be the *only* or even the *main* reason why you recommend rejection.

Additional Resources

- **Instructional Video:** “How to Review a Manuscript” is an instructional video in the Science Career Series, produced by the APA Center for Learning and Career Development. It is available for viewing at http://www.apa.org/career-development/courses/manuscript/story_html5.html.
- **Primer:** For an excellent primer on how to review a manuscript, see:
 - Lovejoy TI, Revenson TA, & France CR (2001). Reviewing manuscripts for peer-review journals: A primer for novice and seasoned reviewers. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 42, 1-13. DOI: [10.1007/s12160-011-9269-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-011-9269-x).