



Public Health Bulletin of South Africa: the role and responsibilities of the reviewer

Editors and reviewers have important but different roles and responsibilities in the process of publishing public health bulletins. Reviewers are subject experts who provide critical evaluation of the submitted manuscripts. Editors have a broader overall responsibility for managing the publishing process, including editing, initial review, selection of reviewers and ensuring that the content of the reports align with the aims and scope of the bulletin.

For the Public Health Bulletin South Africa (PHBSA), peer review is a single-blind process in which the names of the reviewers are unknown to the authors, but the authors' names are known to the reviewers and editors. The purpose of the review process is to ensure, as far as possible, that the manuscript is relevant in terms of the PHBSA scope, that the work is technically accurate, that the methodology is robust, that data are appropriately presented, analysed and interpreted, that the discussion is reasonable, and that the conclusions are supported by the data and the recommendations are feasible and appropriate.

Key responsibilities of a reviewer:

1. To provide an independent evaluation of the manuscript's quality, paying particular attention to the robustness of the methodology, the presentation of the data and the accuracy of interpretation
2. To indicate whether the writing is clear and concise, and whether the content is relevant and of significance to public health
3. To provide a constructive and detailed critique of the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript
4. To provide recommendations for revisions and clarifications, or identify additional work required to improve the quality of the manuscript
5. To ensure that tables and figures are clear and facilitate a clear understanding of the data, and to provide recommendations for improvement if necessary
6. To provide feedback to the editor on whether the report should be accepted, accepted subject to amendments or is unsuitable for publication in the PHBSA. The editor will make the final decision regarding publication based on the reviewer recommendations
7. To ensure that reviewed manuscripts adhere to ethical standards for public health research/epidemiology and report any ethical concerns to the editor
8. Ensure that the article cites all relevant work by other authors

Reviewers should:

1. Refer to the PHBSA [Aims and scope](#), [Instructions to authors](#) and [Style guide](#)
2. Provide written, unbiased, constructive feedback and avoid personal comments or criticism
3. Provide reasons/justifications for their comments
4. Adhere to the timelines requested by the editor or notify the editor if unable to meet the deadline
5. Maintain the confidentiality of the review process
6. Inform the editor if there are any potential personal, professional or other conflicts of interest in reviewing the manuscript
7. Comply with any editor's instructions regarding the content and scope of the review
8. Accept the invitation to review only if they have adequate expertise to provide an authoritative assessment (it is not necessary to be expert in all aspects of the manuscript)
9. Not contact the author/s directly
10. Recommend re-wording a sentence or phrase for clarity. This is especially pertinent for long and/or ambiguous sentences. Note that correct spelling and grammar is primarily the responsibility of the authors and editorial team
11. Correct formatting of references is also primarily the function of the editorial team. However, the reviewer has a responsibility to ensure that references are appropriate and correctly cited, and to suggest additional key references where necessary

Reviewers may find it useful to use the "[Reviewer checklist](#)" to guide the review process. This checklist should NOT be submitted to the editor.

Following review, please draft a two-paragraph response to the Editor:

The first paragraph should give an overview of the information conveyed in the manuscript

- Focus on successful aspects of the manuscript so the author gets a sense of what they've done well
- **Second paragraph** should include:
 - A recommendation for publication in the PHBSA i.e. accept as is, accept subject to major and/or minor alterations, reject.
 - A section by section detailed critique of the manuscript including recommendations if indicated and justification for the comments. This will be submitted anonymously to the corresponding author by the editor.

If corrections/alterations/additions are indicated, the author/s will be given the opportunity to address them. The editor will then make a decision that may involve a request for an additional review of the revised version of the manuscript.

PHBSA would like to thank reviewers for their voluntary services by publishing a list of reviewers in the bulletin annually, subject to written permission from the reviewer.

References:

Council of Science Editors. Reviewers Roles and Responsibilities. Available at: Council of Science Editors <https://www.councilscienceeditors.org/2-3-reviewer-roles-and-responsibilities>

Additional Resources:

Reviewer checklist

Step by Step Guide to Reviewing a Manuscript | Wiley - <https://authorservices.wiley.com/Reviewers/journal-reviewers/how-to-perform-a-peer-review/step-by-step-guide-to-reviewing-a-manuscript.html>

Peer review: The nuts and bolts (senseaboutscience.org) - <https://senseaboutscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/peer-review-the-nuts-and-bolts.pdf>