

Guidelines for Peer and Public Reviewers

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality Evidence-based Practice Center program encourages peer and public reviewers to adhere to the COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers (http://publicationethics.org/files/Ethical_guidelines_for_peer_reviewers_0.pdf).

Selected guidelines to ensure constructive reviews are highlighted below.

Peer and public reviewers should:

- Be objective and constructive in their reviews and provide feedback that will help the authors to improve the draft report.
- Not make derogatory personal comments or unfounded accusations.
- Ensure that the review is based on the merits of the work and not influenced, either positively or negatively, by any personal, financial, or other conflicting considerations or by intellectual biases.
- Be specific in their criticisms, and provide evidence with appropriate references to substantiate general statements such as, ‘this work has been done before’, to help editors in their evaluation and decision and in fairness to the authors.
- Remember it is the authors’ paper and not attempt to rewrite it to their own preferred style if is basically sound and clear; suggestions for changes that improve clarity are, however, important.
- Make clear which suggested additional investigations are essential to support claims made in the manuscript under consideration and which will just strengthen or extend the work.
- Not suggest that authors include citations to the reviewer’s (or their associates’) work merely to increase the reviewer’s (or their associates’) citation count or to enhance the visibility of their or their associates’ work; suggestions must be based on valid academic or technological reasons.

Selected guidelines on timeliness and communication are highlighted below.

Peer reviewers should:

- Respond in a reasonable timeframe and without intentional delay.
- Ensure their comments and recommendations for the editor are consistent with their report for the authors; most feedback should be put in the report for the authors
- Contact review@epc-src.org if circumstances arise that will prevent them from submitting a timely review, providing an accurate estimate of the time they will need to do a review if still asked to do so.
- Notify review@epc-src.org if they discover either a conflicting interest that wasn’t apparent when they agreed to the review or anything that might prevent a fair and unbiased review.
- Not involve anyone else in the review of a manuscript, including junior researchers whom they are mentoring, without first obtaining permission from review@epc-src.org; the names of any individuals who have helped them with the review should be included with the returned review so that they are associated with the manuscript in the records and can also receive due credit for their efforts.