

## Guidelines for Reviewers at Karger Publishers

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### 1. Karger's ethos- Connecting and Advancing Health Sciences

Karger Publishers is a worldwide publisher of scientific and medical content based in Basel, Switzerland. Connecting and advancing health sciences since 1890, Karger has been continuously evolving, keeping pace with the current developments and shifts in research and publishing. The publishing house is dedicated to serving the information needs of the scientific community, clinicians and patients with publications of high-quality content and services in health sciences. Karger's portfolio encompasses over 100 peer-reviewed journals run in close collaboration with around 5,000 editorial board members.

## 2. Who's who and overview of the peer review process

Our **Editorial Office** staff facilitate and coordinate all the steps involved in the peer review process to encourage timely manuscript handling. They are responsible for initial checks of manuscript formatting and adherence with our Editorial Policies.

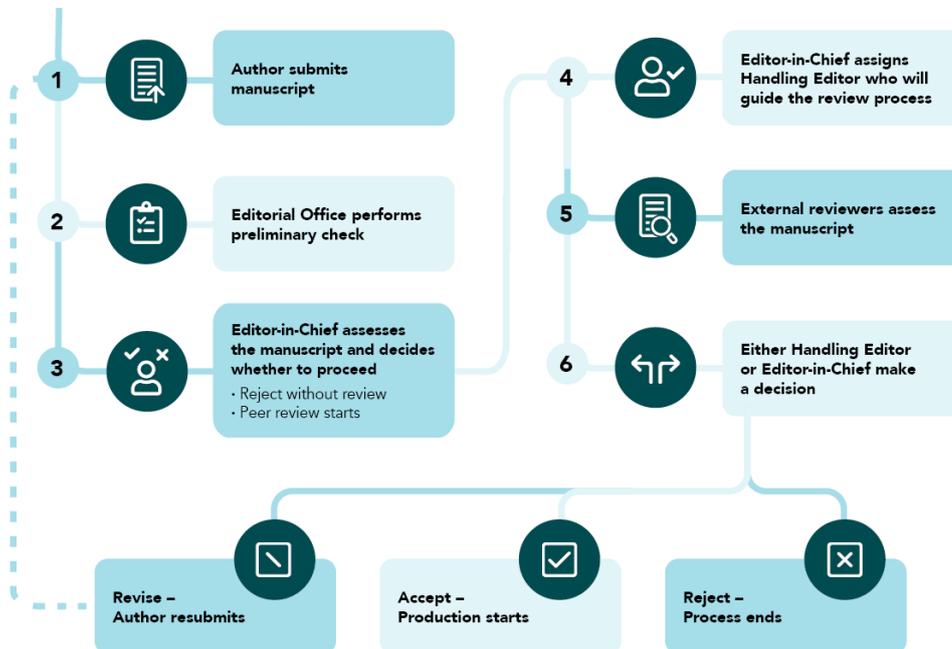
The **Editor-in-Chief**, in some journals in collaboration with, a **Managing Editor**, is typically responsible for the initial triage of the manuscripts submitted to the journal and for approving all final decisions. They take responsibility to either A) reject the manuscript before review if it is not suitable for the journal; B) continue the peer review process by appointing a suitable **Handling Editor**. The principal function of the Handling Editor is to guide manuscripts through the peer review process and recommend a decision to the Editor-in-Chief based on reviewer reports. The Editor-in-Chief (and/or Managing Editor) may occasionally handle the peer review process themselves. All decisions are generally approved by the Editor-in-Chief except for exceptional cases where the Editor-in-Chief must recuse themselves from the peer review process, e.g., the Editor-in-Chief is an author on the manuscript, or the authors are from the same institution (see journal guidelines for Peer review).

A thorough review report of a manuscript benefits both author and reader and serves several functions by:

- Assisting the editor in understanding the data reported in the manuscript, the significance of the findings and whether the manuscript will require significant or minor revisions.
- Determining if the topic of the manuscript is appropriate for the journal.
- Providing thoughtful criticism and specific recommendations for revision, thus improving the quality of the final version.
- Ensuring that the reported findings are appropriately interpreted.
- Ensuring that the manuscript presents a suitable degree of novelty.

Below is an overview of the steps involved in the peer review process:

## An Overview of the Peer Review Process



### 3. Accepting an invitation to review

After passing initial editorial checks, the decision is made whether to send the manuscript to review. Once appointed, the Handling Editor will invite reviewers based on their expertise and the subject matter of the manuscript.

When you are deciding whether to accept a review invitation you should consider the following questions:

- Does the subject fall within my expertise?
- Do I have time to review this manuscript before the journal's deadline?
- Am I confident that I do not have a conflict of interest with respect to the manuscript?
- Do I agree with the journal's peer review policy?

If the answer is 'Yes' to all the above, you should consider accepting the review invitation.

If you answered 'No' to any of these questions, you should not at this stage accept the review invitation and contact the Handling Editor or Editorial Office if you are unsure or want to request if accommodations for your circumstance can be made.

Your **subject expertise** must overlap with all or a significant part of the manuscript to provide a constructive review. You may be asked to review a manuscript because you have expertise in the subject of the manuscript or because you have expertise in a particular subsection of the study. For example, the Handling Editor may want your expertise in statistical analysis or a particular method. If you are unsure whether you have the relevant expertise for the manuscript, you should contact the Handling Editor and ask if there is a particular aspect of the manuscript you need to focus your review on.

Writing a constructive review takes **time**. The deadline for returning the review report may overlap with a busy time in your own research meaning that you don't have time to write the report. If you believe you will be able to complete the review with a short extension, you should contact the Editorial Office and ask if this can be accommodated.

A **conflict of interest** (also known as Competing Interest) exists when your interpretation of data could be perceived as being influenced by non-scientific considerations, such as financial interests, collaboration with one of the authors, working in a rival group, or personal, political, and ideological beliefs. See the journal guidelines page for more information about Conflict of Interest. We ask that you declare any relationship that could be perceived as a competing interest with respect to any manuscript you are asked to review to the Handling Editor and the Editorial Office and consider whether it is appropriate for you to agree to act as a reviewer.

In Karger Publishers journals the **peer review policy** is either single- or double-blind. This means that you will or will not, respectively, know the identity of the authors. In both instances, the authors will not know your identity. If you do not agree with the model of peer review you are asked to participate in, you should consider declining the invitation.

Should you feel unable to accept the invitation for reason related to time or expertise, Karger and the Editors welcomes your kind suggestion of potential alternative reviewers.

#### **4. Criteria for evaluating a manuscript**

We expect a reviewer to give the Editor an informed and objective opinion on the validity and relevance of the manuscript. Broadly speaking, you will be expected to consider and address the following aspects when reading the manuscript and writing the review report:

- Is the manuscript broadly in scope for the journal?
- What are the main strengths and limitations of the manuscript?
- Is it scientifically sound, are the conclusions supported by information presented in the manuscript?
- Does it contribute to the field?
- Are the references cited sufficient and representative in establishing existing, relevant literature?

Most manuscripts are broken up into multiple sections that inform the reader about the contribution of the study to the field, the rationale for the study, how the study was executed and analyzed, what the findings were and what these findings mean for the field. The information contained in each section of the manuscript is standardized, to a certain extent. Manuscripts should adhere to appropriate reporting guidelines and community standards of data availability e.g. **ARRIVE** for research using animals, **CONSORT** or **TREND** for randomized and non-randomized clinical trials respectively, **PRISMA** for systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and **STROBE** for observational studies in epidemiology. Please see the [Equator network website](#) for other relevant reporting guidelines that may be a useful tool for your review report.

Not all manuscripts have each of the sections discussed below. The below information provides a guide for you to base your review report on. You should ensure that your review report answers as many of the below questions as are relevant to the manuscript. A good rule of thumb is to re-read your review after you've completed it asking yourself how you would feel if you were on the receiving end. A well-written review provides explicit and constructive criticism.

Manuscripts should be judged based on their content independently from where they originate. If the language quality prevents you or reviewers to properly assess the work done, a first round of major revisions may be requested to improve the language first, followed by another "standard" review step. In cases where you feel the manuscript would benefit from language editing, but it does not prevent you from assessing its content, you may recommend in your review report that authors improve the language during the revision stage. Information on suggested language editing services can be found on the [Author Resources](#) page.

Another factor one should consider when assessing a manuscript is whether one may have an unconscious (or implicit) bias with regards to the manuscript. Unconscious bias can influence peer review decisions when unquestioned assumptions lead to

potential/unintended prejudice in evaluating the quality of the study, particularly where this bias less related to soundness of the work presented in the manuscript. It is advisable to consider what unconscious biases one may have, how these may relate to the work in the manuscript and how this may be influencing a decision. More information and resources on Diversity and Inclusion in publishing can be found on the [COPE Website](#).

***i. Reviewing the introduction, discussion, and conclusion***

In the introduction section, authors should explain the current state of knowledge in the field, how their study fits into this and how it advances the current understanding. The introduction may introduce and justify the intervention or study design type.

As a reviewer, the Handling Editor is relying on your expertise to determine whether the introduction accurately positions the study in the field. Your review will help the editor determine whether there is a gap in knowledge being addressed by the study and if the rationale for the study is justified. The introduction should be comprehensive and succinct and, in your report, you may recommend the removal of any unnecessary detail to improve comprehension.

In the discussion and conclusion sections, the authors will discuss their findings in the context of the existing literature. They will interpret their findings, outline the limitations of the study or findings and draw conclusions. Your review will help the Handling Editor determine whether the conclusions are appropriate, whether the discussion is sufficiently balanced and whether literature both supporting and opposing the findings is considered. The conclusions drawn should be based on the results reported and should not include conjecture without justification. In your report, you should outline any unsubstantiated conclusions and may recommend the tampering of unsupported statements.

The manuscript should be factual and present well-supported evidence. Any personal opinions should be clearly stated as such. The manuscript should not include any defamatory or offensive language or remarks. In your review report., you should point out any sentences or passages that need revision in this respect.

**Questions to answer in your review report**

When writing your report please evaluate the following questions:

- How does the study relate to the current literature? What gap in knowledge is addressed in this study?

- How do the authors discuss their results related to current knowledge in the field? How does this manuscript advance our current understanding?
- Is the manuscript written in acceptable English? Does the poor language hinder the evaluation of the work?

## ***ii. Reviewing the methodology***

To draw conclusions from their study, the methods the authors use must be appropriate to the research question. As a reviewer, the Handling Editor is relying on you to provide feedback on whether the methodology is appropriate for the research question. If the methodology is inappropriate, you should inform the Handling Editor of this in your review report. If the methodology is potentially unethical you should inform the Handling Editor and the Editorial Office as soon as possible.

In the methods section, the authors should provide enough information about the procedures and protocols used that a reader would be able to repeat the study based on this information alone. Your responsibility is to inform the Handling Editor whether the methods are sufficiently detailed. If they are insufficient in detail, you should be specific in your review report about what must be clarified.

Depending on the study design, different information is required in the methods section. The Handling Editor will use the information you provide in your review report to determine whether the methodology is adequately described. A few examples may include; for clinical studies, a list of inclusion and exclusion criteria should be provided. For interventional studies, the randomization of participants into groups should be described. Whether or not participants and/or researchers were blinded to the groups during the study should be mentioned. A justification for the sample size and statistical analysis method should be mentioned.

You can cross-check the information in the manuscript's methods section with the reporting guidelines for that study type available through the [Equator network website](#). If you identify any missing information, you should ask the authors to provide this in your review report.

### **Questions to answer in your review report**

- Please comment on the appropriateness of the methodology used to answer the research questions.
- Please include a comment on the sampling, control groups, variables, assessment measures, techniques of analyzing the results, and statistical tests where appropriate.
- Does the manuscript adhere to appropriate reporting guidelines and community standards?

- Does the research reported meet all standards of ethics of experimentation and research integrity?

### ***iii. Reviewing the results, tables and figures***

Through the results, tables and figures, authors illustrate and summarize the findings of their study. This should be presented clearly and summaries in tables or figures should inform a reader about the underlying results. The Handling Editor uses the review report you provide to understand whether the results are understandably and completely presented. If any information is missing, such as the sample size information, scale bars or legends for figures, you should include this in your review report. If you find the information difficult to interpret or understand, you should suggest where the authors could improve the clarity of the figures or tables in your review report.

The results should be described objectively in the results section and flow logically according to the methods. As a reviewer, you should mention in your review report any revisions to the tone of the results section that may be required. If you find the results section difficult to follow, you should suggest a way for authors to restructure the section.

Authors use figures and tables to summarize large amounts of information. Depending on the study, some of this information may be included in the supplementary files. As a reviewer, you should evaluate whether the key results for the conclusions are included in the main manuscript. Authors may include representative images in their figures. As a reviewer you should evaluate whether the representative images accurately reflect the results described. If you believe that representative images should be added or improved, this should be included in your review report. If you feel that the representative images or data are not sufficient for you to evaluate the results or conclusions drawn, you may request that more detailed data (potentially all the raw data behind the figure/table where applicable) be provided in the supplementary information or made accessible in a public repository for example. Please see "[Section iv](#)" below for more information about the journal's data sharing policy.

Some studies may use photographs of participants to illustrate an aspect of the methods or results. Submitting a photograph of an individual for publication must be free of identifiable information, such as name or date of birth and should only be done with appropriate informed consent. This consent must be stated explicitly in the figure legend and/or the Statement of Ethics (see below) of the manuscript. If you have any

concerns about the ethical conduct of the study, you should inform the Handling Editor and the Editorial Office as soon as possible.

#### **Questions to answer in your review report**

- Please comment on the clarity and objectivity of the presentation of the results. What improvements do you recommend?
- How do any figures and tables reflect the results reported in the text?
- Do any supplementary files support the results?

#### ***iv. Reviewing the abstract, title and other manuscript sections.***

##### **Abstract and title**

The title and abstract should inform a reader about the study's aim, main findings and conclusion. The conclusions or findings should not be overstated or exaggerated. The Handling Editor uses your review report to determine whether claims made in the title and abstract are supported by the findings of the study. As a reviewer, you should consider whether the title and abstract are informative and appropriate. If you believe that the study or conclusions are misrepresented in these sections, you should suggest where it could be improved in your review report.

##### **Funding statement**

In the Funding Statement, the authors should outline any sources of funding and state the role of these sources, if any, in the preparation of data or the manuscript. Karger endorses the [ICMJE recommendations](#) on the 'Disclosure of Financial and Non-Financial Relationships and Activities, and Conflicts of Interest'.

##### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

In the Conflict of Interest Statement, authors should disclose any financial, professional or personal relationships that could be perceived to influence the study. The existence of a relationship does not necessarily mean that a conflict is present. As a reviewer, you should consider whether any of the relationships in these sections may have influenced the data or manuscript. If you believe a relationship may have influenced the manuscript, in your review report you should ask the authors for more detail on how the potential conflict was managed. In rare cases, the content of the authors' Funding and Conflict of Interest Statements may bring to light a potential source of Conflict of Interest for you as a reviewer and should be considered carefully (see "[Section 3](#)" above).

##### **Author Contribution statement**

The Author Contribution Statement is where the role of each of the co-authors is explained. Individuals that contributed to the study but did not meet the criteria for authorship are included in the acknowledgment section. Karger recommends that

authors refer to the [ICMJE criteria for authorship](#). If you believe that these sections are insufficiently detailed, you should include this in your review report. If you have concerns about possible misconduct, you should inform the Handling Editor and the Editorial Office as soon as possible.

### **Statement of Ethics**

Research involving human subjects (including human material or human data, and low-risk studies such as questionnaire-based studies) must have generally been performed with the approval of an appropriate ethics committee and with appropriate participants' informed consent in compliance with the [Declaration of Helsinki](#). Any experimental research on animals must also have generally been performed with the approval of the authors' Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) or equivalent ethics committee and must follow internationally recognized guidelines. Details of ethical approval and participants' consent must be clearly stated in the manuscript. Please see the journal editorial guidelines for more detail. Manuscripts can be rejected if the research has not been carried out within an appropriate ethical framework. As a reviewer, you should note if any clarification is required to the Statement of Ethics. If you have concerns about whether the study was conducted ethically, you should raise this to the Handling Editor and the Editorial Office as soon as possible.

### **Data Availability Statement**

Karger publisher's data sharing policy strongly encourages authors to make all datasets on which the conclusions of the paper rely available to editors, reviewers and readers without unnecessary restriction, wherever possible. For manuscripts reporting original studies, authors must provide a Data Availability Statement and detail where the original data can be accessed. If it is not possible to make the data publicly available, it should be clearly stated in the manuscript. Please see the journal editorial guidelines for more detail on the journal's data sharing policy. As a reviewer, you should verify that any public data is available as the authors describe. If you encounter difficulty accessing the data underlying the study, you should ask the authors to improve the statement in your review report.

### **Questions to answer in your review report**

- Is the title appropriate and supported by the data?
- Is the abstract an accurate summary of the manuscript?
- If the manuscript presents the results of a clinical trial, is a trial registration number included?
- Is the Statement of Ethics appropriate?

- Are there disclosures in the Conflict of Interest or Funding Statements that you believe may have influenced the study or manuscript?
- Are the data publicly available? If not, is this justified in the Data Availability Statement?
- Is sufficient information provided for how to access the data?

## 5. Submitting your review report.

When you are ready to submit your review report in the journal submission and peer review system, a text box is provided on the online reviewer assessment form for your written comments to the authors that you will prepare off-line. The bulk of your review report should be included in this text box. Try to mimic the structure of the manuscript in your report. You should be as specific as possible and refer to a line, figure or table number where practical. Further experiments may be needed to support the claims in the manuscript. If additional data are requested, please state clearly in your report to the authors and Handling Editor which points are essential (vs. "would be good to have") for the study to stand. A manuscript may sometimes be improved if authors can discuss the limitations of their work/methods or highlight where further work is needed.

In addition to providing your detailed review report, you will be asked a series of multiple-choice questions in the submission and peer review system. These will help the Handling Editor to understand an overview of your opinion on the suitability of the manuscript for publication.

The following checkbox list is also provided:

- Accept
- Minor revision
- Major revision
- Reject

### Accept

Apart from minor copy-editing issues, the final manuscript is appropriate for publication exactly as it is. For many journals, the final review version or Author Accepted Manuscript is published online after acceptance without additional modifications.

### Major Revisions

The manuscript has the potential to be published but substantial revisions are needed first, e.g., authors might be required to perform additional experiments (including adding controls), to undertake additional or different analyses of the data, or a major re-write of the manuscript. We generally give authors 3 months to revise but extensions can be given.

### **Minor Revisions**

The manuscript is likely to be suitable for publication, but minor changes are required - these are very specific and likely to be done in less than one month. Authors might be requested to provide additional methodological details or clarify the approaches used. Minor language issues may need to be addressed in specific places to improve the clarity for instance of the description of the methodology.

### **Reject**

The manuscript is not appropriate for publication and revisions would not address this. This is appropriate in cases where there are concerns regarding the significance or soundness of the study that cannot be addressed, or when revisions would amount to an entirely new study (or take too long).

### **Where should my confidential comments to the Handling Editor go?**

During the submission of your review report, you may submit additional confidential comments to the Handling Editor. This may include some additional context to help the Handling Editor better understand your review report and make a decision. It may also include sensitive or identifying information that you do not wish to be sent to the authors.

Authors cannot see the confidential comments made by you to the Editor. However, if these comments contain important information relevant for the authors, such as context for the decision or recommendations to improve their manuscript, the Editor may paraphrase your confidential comments in the letter to the authors. Confidential comments to the Handling Editor should not be at odds with the comments made to the authors and we ask that you include any comments that may be informative for the authors to be included in the main report text.

While your confidential comment remains with the Editor and the Editorial Office, please note that, regardless of the Handling Editor's decision on the manuscript, your review report will be shared with the authors to help them improve their manuscript.

### What if there are ethical concerns?

If there are any serious concerns regarding the ethical framework of the research (lack of or inappropriate participant consent and/or ethical approval for the work) or possible research or author misconduct, please raise these to the Handling Editor and the Editorial Office as soon as possible. Karger is a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and aims to adhere to their **Core Practices** including on issues around publishing ethics such as plagiarism, fabrication/falsification and authorship disputes. If you wish to raise any concerns or would like additional information, please do not hesitate to contact the Research Integrity / Publication Ethics Manager at [publication.ethics@karger.com](mailto:publication.ethics@karger.com).

### What happens next?

If the Handling Editor recommends revisions on a manuscript, you may be contacted once the revised manuscript is resubmitted. At that stage, the Editor will decide whether the revisions are satisfactory, and the manuscript may be accepted without re-review or whether the manuscript needs re-review, and the original reviewers should be invited. You will be informed about the final decision on the manuscript by email.

You may be asked to review the revised version of the manuscript after the authors have had the opportunity to view and respond to your comments. If the revisions are not satisfactory, you should detail why the changes made are not sufficient and what authors need to do to address the unresolved concerns. An additional round of revisions may be requested. Please note that we generally do not encourage multiple rounds of revisions unless strictly necessary.

In rare cases, the original reviewers of a manuscript may be consulted again if the editorial decision is appealed by the authors as part of our appeal procedure.

## 6. Additional important information

The peer review process at Karger is **confidential**. You should not disclose information about the peer review process or manuscript to anyone not directly involved. The manuscript and any related information should not be shared with anyone.

The peer review process at Karger is **blind**. You may or may not know the identity of the authors depending on the journal's peer review policy. However, in all circumstances,

the authors will not know your identity. You should not contact the authors to discuss the manuscript outside of the submission and peer review system which will protect your anonymity. Should you need to share additional file with the editor and authors during peer review process, please ensure the document does not have electronic trace or signature identifiable to you.

The peer review process at Karger is **constructive**. You should not use offensive or derogatory language in your review report. Recommendations in your report should be made with appropriate justification. When recommending the citation of additional references, you should outline their importance and avoid requesting excessive citation of your own or any other author's work.

## 7. Concluding remarks

We are grateful for your contribution as a peer reviewer to connecting and advancing health sciences with us. Thank you for your time and expertise while acting as a reviewer for a Karger Publishers journals. In gratitude for your role in supporting the journal, Karger Publishers will issue a certificate of recognition to you. You can download this from your Manuscript Manager Reviewer dashboard. Further resources on peer review are available online through [Karger Courses](#).