

International Journal of PSYCHOTHERAPY

The “Double Blind” Peer-Review Process

This process is where the name(s) of the author(s) is/are hidden from the reviewers and the reviewers’ names are hidden from the author: therefore both the reviewer and the author remain anonymous from each other. This is now the standard method of reviewing academic articles and is, by far, the most rigorous method.

Advantages – The author’s anonymity prevents any bias from the reviewer based on, for example, an author's country of origin, personal knowledge of their work, or previous controversies about their work. Articles written by 'prestigious' or renowned authors are also considered purely on the basis of the content of the article, rather than on the author's reputation.

Disadvantages – It is uncertain whether a paper can ever truly be 'blind' – especially in specialty areas. Reviewers can often identify the author through the paper's style, the subject matter, or the author’s propensity for self-citation. Reviewers may use their anonymity as justification for being unnecessarily critical or harsh when commenting on the author's work.

The “process” of ‘double-blind’ peer- previewing is quite complicated; there is a risk of ‘time lines’ (from submission to publication) becoming extended. The process (usually) involves having an Editorial Assistant or a “Manuscript Central” type process, which can alienate authors and depersonalise the process.

Criticisms of this Method

There are some criticisms of this method, as opposed to the Single Blind peer-review process (which is less complicated) and other reviewing processes. Some people feel that an “Open Revue” process - where the reviewer and author are known to each other – is better. They claim that this is the best way: to prevent the risks of malicious comments; to stop plagiarism; to prevent reviewers from getting off on their own 'agenda' by abusing the anonymity; and to encourage open, honest reviewing. Others argue the opposite view. They see the Open Review as a less honest process in which politeness or fear of retribution may cause a reviewer to withhold, or tone down their honest critiques. Independent studies tend to support this criticism.

Requirements

The IJP’s “Information and Guidelines for Authors” requirements **must** be complied with. Authors are ‘required’ to submit a 1st or ‘front’ page of their manuscript that contains their name, address and contact details; professional affiliations and memberships, and any other biographical details. The subsequent pages should have no other “identifiers”. The rest of the manuscript – i.e. the article itself – should just have the title, the abstract, keywords and references in it.

Authors should try to reduce the amount of self-citation and self-referential material, and any statements in the article that might identify them. Reviewers may ‘criticise’ their way of writing, in this respect.

From the Journal’s perspective, we will really try to adhere to the shortest possible timeline, which is important to us. It can also affect our professional standing and impact factor. Significant delays can annoy authors and they may take their articles elsewhere.

Various Stages of the Process

Submission: The (main) author (absolutely) **must** check the Journal’s “Information and Guidelines for Authors” ([here](#)) and basically comply with these **before** the article is submitted. Articles may be rejected immediately if this stage has obviously not been done. On submission, the author should receive an almost immediate e-mail acknowledgement from the Editor. There should also be indications as to the “time line” before any decision.

Editorial 1st Check: The Journal Editor initially “screens” or checks the article for its ... Suitability, Content, Language (Good English), Length, etc. In this part of the process, the Editor essentially decides whether this article “fits in” within the basic parameters of the Journal? Is it appropriate? Original? Good enough? Is the topic interesting, or is it “old hat”? Is the academic rigour sufficient? Is the quality of English “good enough”? Is it professional, respectful, etc? Does it fit in with all the Journal’s ethos and criteria? Is the research interesting and of a sufficient quality? If about a method: is this method ‘particular’ to the author, or is this method used much more widely? If it is a case history, is what it shows/claims actually interesting, relevant, etc. to the Journal’s readers? In any situations of doubt, the Editor will consult with the other Editors.

If the answer to any of the above questions is essentially “No”, then the article will probably be returned to the author – with stated reasons – and also any recommendations. The author should be informed as and when and if the article could be re-submitted after any ‘necessary’ changes have been made: otherwise the rejection is final. This correspondence is recorded and is available to the Editorial Board, for monitoring or in case of any appeal/complaint. **Time Line:** This (ideally) should happen within two weeks of the original submission.

The Peer Review Process

Peer Review Process: Stage 1: If the article is acceptable, then it is sent to the Assistant Editor, who is responsible for the peer-review process. Here, all main identifiers (1st page) will have been removed and the article is renamed and this “Anon” version is saved. The text is then checked carefully to ensure that all self-references and other identifiers are removed, or “Xxxx”-ed out. If there is any suspicion of plagiarism, a check may well be made at this point, using standard anti-plagiarism ‘tools’.

Time Line: About one week should be allowed for this stage of the process – for the Assistant Editor to find a reviewer.

Peer Review Process: Stage 2: The article will be “posted” for review and **two** different reviewers (or referees) will be sought. Members of the Editorial Board, the International Advisory Board, the EAP member organisation representatives (from different countries & different modalities), and also previously published IJP authors, form the “core” set of the IJP reviewers/referees.

We also welcome new reviewers from different modalities, parallel professions, similar disciplines, and from counsellors, psychotherapists, psychologists in training, etc. – please contact the Assistant Editor [here](#), if you are interested. Please send in some details about yourself. Please also see the ‘ethos’ for reviewers (below).

The anonymised version(s) of the article will be sent to each of the 2 selected reviewers. A response will be asked from each reviewer within a maximum of 1 month, preferably within 2 weeks. The reviewer/referees(s) will be contacted, if or as-and-when this deadline is exceeded.

Whilst the primary purpose of the “review” is to help the editors with their decision-making process, the “role” of the peer-reviewer / referee is essentially to help the author(s) to improve their manuscripts to the point at which it becomes acceptable for publication, rather than to decide whether the article should be published (which is the Editor’s job), but the reviewer will also be asked for their opinion about publication. This is – after all – a “peer-review” process.

There are usually “Guidelines for Reviewers / Referees”, which should be consulted and followed by the reviewers (or referees) and they should fill in a standard “Referees’ Form” which will have been sent to them.

This will have a section where they can make comments which will be seen by the author; there will be another section for their private comments to the Editor (usually not communicated back to the author). Once they have written their review, the referees **must** / **should** dispose of their copy (usually electronic) of that version of the article.

Time Line: Realistically, this stage can take (at least) about four to six weeks, though we usually ask for reviews to be sent back within two weeks.

Peer Review Process: Stage 3: The two reviews will be received back; the reviewers will be thanked (as it is quite a hidden ‘thankless’ task otherwise – they are also often offered some ‘perks’) and/or the reviewers may be also ‘invited’ to review a book (or something) so that there is some recompense for their services. The two reviews are then received back by the Editor. Then their reviews are also anonymized (so that the author does not become aware of the reviewer’s identity).

Time Line: About 1 week.

Editorial Decision Stage

If the number of submissions to a journal is large, and the number of articles that can be published is limited, then a larger number of “rejections” – sometimes of very good articles – is almost inevitable. Ultimately, the journal may decide to publish more issues – but that also depends on a great number of other factors.

The Editors’ decision-making policies vary considerably: some reject articles if just one peer reviewer recommends a rejection; other Editors only when both reviewers recommend rejection; and some Editors only when both reviewers conform with their own opinion about a possible rejection.

It is quite common for different peer reviewers to give quite conflicting reviews about the same manuscript. In such cases, the Editor may choose to send the paper out to a third reviewer, before arriving at a final decision, and the author may have to wait longer before the decision stage of the process is completed. In actuality, reviewers often tend to recommend acceptance more frequently than rejection. So, editors end up having to reject more articles than their reviewers might have recommended, based on their own opinions of the articles’ worthiness.

Editorial 2nd Check: So, the article has come back to the Editor, with two reviews. At this point, there is a definite “decision” to be made – based (in part) on the reviewers’ opinions, but also (in part) on several other factors and considerations.

The decision that is taken will be based on the Editor’s “considered opinion”. The Editor’s decision is usually final.

Ultimately, the scope, style, impact, tone and reputation of the Journal is based on these Editorial decisions – essentially whether (or not) to publish certain articles. Under a different editor, any particular journal will inevitably be slightly (or considerably) different and will choose to publish this article or that article, which might not have been

published by a different Editor. However, this is the editor's personal impact on the Journal: the tone or trend of the Journal and any decisions about the published articles are often substantiated or elaborated on in their 'Editorial'.

There are three basic editorial "classifications" of articles: (1) excellent-quality work that makes a contribution => it is "publishable"; (2) satisfactory work that *might* make a worthwhile contribution => it is "possibly publishable"; or (3) poor quality work that does not make a worthwhile contribution => it is "un-publishable".

So, there are usually about six different decisions about an article that the Editor can make: **(i)** Accept it (basically) as it stands; **(ii)** Accept it with minor revisions – these are usually indicated by the Editor and reviewers; **(iii)** Require the author to re-submit it: i.e. it requires several revisions - these are usually indicated by the Editor and reviewers; **(iv)** Refer it to a specialist (in that area) for another opinion; **(v)** It is "better suited" to another Journal (with a possible recommendation); or **(vi)** Reject it, with reasons supplied.

Editorial Decisions:

There are therefore two (somewhat) **"negative decisions"**: -

- If the basic decision is to ... **"Reject"** (Option **vi**), then that's it: this is pretty final – and the reasons should be given for the rejection in a way that may be useful to the author: this 'decision' could (theoretically) be appealed against to the IJP Editorial Board, but only on the grounds of "improper process". Since all articles follow the same process, this would indicate an exceptional situation.
- The decision ... **"Better suited to another Journal"** – means that, whilst this article may be basically suitable for publication, there is possibly/probably either another journal that is better suited to publishing it, or that the article would benefit from being published 'there' rather than 'here'. Reasons for this decision, and a recommendation about alternatives, will usually be given. In the IJP, we often get sent articles more suited to (say) clinical psychology.

There are also two **"conditional decisions"**: -

- A decision ... **"Refer to another specialist"** – means that there are some quite complicated issues involved in this article and/or some quite technical reasons (i.e. with a research article) why a decision cannot be made at this moment, or by this journal 'team', and therefore another (specialist) opinion has to be consulted: this might take another month to 6 weeks. This is purely an interim decision and therefore could be seen as not being too negative. As mentioned above, the article may need to be reviewed by a third referee as the first two referees have disagreed quite radically.
- The decision ... **"Re-submit: requires major revisions"** – means essentially what it says: the article is just not acceptable in its present state: maybe, the English language is not "good enough"; or it may mean that there are some serious revisions needed – suggested by the reviewers (or the Editor); or that more research is needed; etc. The reasons for this decision must be stated; recommendations and suggestions may also be made and these may be 'general' or 'specific'; and a time factor may be given.

There are also two (mostly) **"positive decisions"**: -

- A decision to ... **"Accept, with minor revisions"** – is actually the most commonly made decision: especially if the author has selected the appropriate journal and is also reasonably competent and literate. The Editor should indicate what general sort of revisions that s/he would like; s/he may be more specific and "suggest" certain recommendations – vis. language, syntax, etc. A time factor for these revisions (and a possible publication date) should be given.
- A decision to ... **"Accept it as it stands"** – is actually very rare, as nearly every article usually needs some minor revisions or amendments. However, there it is – and it is very welcome.

Time Line: About three to four weeks may be needed for this stage.

Total Time:

This makes a total of about 12 weeks, or about 3 months, from the point of submission, but this is an "indicative" figure only. As noted, there may be other consulting work needed; there may have been some "normal" delays (e.g. holidays, illness, etc.); and – sometimes – a referee has to be reminded by the Assistant Editor; or another referee may have had to be found. We are 'dependent' – to a certain extent – on the efficiency of our referees. They are doing this job – not because they are being paid – but because this is their contribution to the "web of science".

If you (the author) have not heard back from us within this overall time frame (i.e. about 12-15 weeks), it is totally appropriate to send us an email asking about ... where the article has got to in this process ... and the Editorial staff should respond fairly quickly to such a request.

Final Stages - Prior to Publication

Finally, the article should be / will be sent back to the author - by the Editor - with this "double-blind", peer-review process virtually completed.

The author should receive their article back, plus the two (or more) anonymized copies of each of the reviews – with the referees' comments and suggestions – as well as the Editor's own comments and suggestions, and ... any specific corrections that are needed should be clearly identified.

This is often done using the “Reviewing” toolbar in MSWord (under the “View” menu), which allows every single one of the various changes (insertions and deletions) to be ‘marked’ using “Track Changes” and/or also allows “Comments” or “Notes” to be added in various places to the article.

This aspect of MSWord – not commonly used – is a powerful tool for reviewers and can also help authors to go through their article methodically and address all the changes.

The author must now decide how s/he will address all this information.

If any ‘major’ suggestions are ignored, this might result in the article not being finally accepted; but, slavishly following ‘every’ suggestion or recommendation might also compromise the author’s creativity and integrity: so ... there is usually a balance between these two extremes. And, for the most part, these are (mostly - just) ‘suggestions’: if the Editor ‘requires’ certain changes, then this should be made very clear, and the author should comply with these ‘requirements’, or risk a final rejection.

A “Final Version” should then be returned to the Editor, within any stipulated timeframe. If this deadline is not met, then the article may have to wait to be published in the next (or in another) issue. A journal will not delay its publication for any particular article; there will almost certainly be another one available, or one waiting “in the wings”, that can be substituted fairly quickly and easily.

Once the article is received back from the author, and finally checked, then it will be sent for “typesetting”. At this point, some publishers get the author to proofread and ‘approve’ the final version; however, we don’t. These final processes can take even more additional time, and – at this point of time in our evolution as a professional journal, we don’t have that facility.

This means that your “Final Version” – this last submission (subject to any minor mistakes) is your very last chance to correct the article before publication. We will print it as received – subject to any very minor ‘typos’.

You will then receive a PDF file of the final article – for your website (or whatever) - as well as a printed copy of that issue of the Journal, sent to the address that you have given us. Multiple authors may be sent copies for each of the authors to the ‘main’ author’s address.

As a published IJP author, you may be asked to help review other (potential) IJP authors’ work. We also offer our reviewers a couple of ‘perks’ – PDF copies of any 6 previously published articles (usually sold at €3.00 per article) or a PDF copy of a full issue; and the opportunity to review any newly published books that have been sent to us (for review) (see [here](#)). We will send you the book; you write the review; and then you get to keep the book.

Ethos for Peer Reviewers

COPE, the Committee on Publication Ethics, has published guidance for peer reviewers (sometimes called ‘referees’). The following basic principles are taken from the COPE guidelines. Peer reviewers (and/or referees) should agree and adhere to ... the following:

- Only agreeing to review manuscripts for which they have the subject expertise required to carry out a proper assessment and which they can assess in a timely manner;
- Respecting the confidentiality of the peer review process and not revealing any details of a manuscript or its review, during or after the peer-review process, beyond those that are released by the Journal;
- Not keeping a copy of the article once it has been reviewed, and once the review has been clearly accepted back by the Journal;
- Not using the article, nor quoting from it, nor citing the article, in advance of publication;
- Not using information obtained during the peer-review process for their own or any other person’s or organization’s advantage, or to disadvantage, nor to discredit others;
- Declaring all potential conflicting interests, seeking advice from the Journal if they are unsure whether something constitutes a relevant interest;
- Not allowing their reviews to be influenced by the origins of a manuscript, by the nationality, religious or political beliefs, gender or other characteristics of the authors, or by any commercial considerations;
- Being objective and (especially) constructive in their reviews, refraining from being hostile or inflammatory, and from making any libellous or derogatory personal comments;
- Acknowledging that the peer-review process is largely a reciprocal endeavour; and undertaking to carry out their fair share of reviewing, in a timely manner;
- Providing the Journal with personal and professional information that is accurate and a true representation of their own particular expertise;
- Recognising that impersonation of another individual or obfuscation of one’s own identity during the review process is considered as serious professional misconduct (i.e. please don’t use pseudonyms).

Double-Blind Peer-Review Process Flowchart

