

Reviewers Guide

Peer Review and Editorial Procedure

Peer review constitutes a pivotal facet of our publication process, acting as a cornerstone to uphold Sciences Force's unwavering commitment to maintaining the utmost quality standards for all published papers. Each manuscript submitted to our journals undergoes a meticulous and stringent peer-review process led by domain experts.

Upon submission, our journal's Managing Editor initiates a comprehensive technical pre-check of the manuscript. Simultaneously, an invitation is extended to a qualified academic editor to conduct an editorial pre-check, propose potential reviewers, and make crucial decisions regarding the manuscript. Academic editors possess the authority to either progress with the peer review, reject a submission, or request revisions before initiating the formal review process.

In instances where the peer review is set in motion, the Editorial Office orchestrates this stage, engaging independent experts to furnish a minimum of two comprehensive review reports per manuscript. Authors are then presented with constructive feedback and asked to incorporate necessary revisions, occasionally necessitating a subsequent round of peer review. The ultimate decision rests with an academic editor, typically the Editor-in-Chief, Editorial Board Member, or the Guest Editor of a Special Issue.

Accepted manuscripts proceed through an internal process of copy-editing and English-editing to ensure coherence and adherence to language standards.

Reviewers' Profile and Responsibilities

The role of a reviewer is pivotal and carries a significant responsibility in safeguarding the integrity of the scholarly record. Every reviewer is entrusted with the task of evaluating manuscripts in a timely, transparent, and ethical manner, aligning with the guidelines established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), which can be accessed at https://publicationethics.org/files/cope-ethical-guidelines-peer-reviewers-v2_0.pdf.

Reviewers are expected to meet the following criteria:

- Hold no conflicts of interest with any of the authors.
- Should not originate from the same institution as the authors.
- Should not have collaborated on publications with the authors in the preceding three years.
- Possess a PhD or an MD (relevant for medical journals).
- Demonstrate relevant experience and exhibit a proven publication record in the field of the submitted paper, as evidenced by Scopus, ORCID, or other recognized platforms.
- Serve as experienced scholars in the field pertinent to the submitted paper.
- Maintain an official and recognized academic affiliation.

At Sciences Force, we prioritize a rigorous peer-review process to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of each manuscript, a task fundamental to our reviewers. Reviewers accepting the responsibility to assess a manuscript are expected to:

- Possess the requisite expertise to judge the scientific quality of the manuscript.
- Deliver high-quality review reports and remain responsive throughout the peer-review process.
- Uphold standards of professionalism and ethics, contributing to the maintenance of scholarly integrity in the peer-review system.

Reviewers' Benefits

The task of reviewing is often overlooked and underappreciated, despite its pivotal role. At Sciences Force, we are dedicated to acknowledging and rewarding the invaluable contributions of all our reviewers.

Reviewing for Sciences Force journals entails the following benefits:

- ✓ **Personalized Reviewer Certificate:** Reviewers receive a personalized certificate acknowledging their contribution.

- ✓ **Outstanding Reviewer Awards Eligibility:** Reviewers become eligible to be considered for the prestigious "Outstanding Reviewer Awards."
- ✓ **Inclusion in Annual Reviewer Acknowledgment:** Reviewers, especially those exceeding 50 in number for the journal in the previous year, are recognized in the journal's annual acknowledgment of reviewers.
- ✓ **Potential Promotion to Reviewer Board Members:** Exceptional reviewers may be considered for promotion to the position of Reviewer Board Members, subject to approval by the Editor-in-Chief.
- ✓ **Web of Science Reviewer Recognition Service Profile:** Reviewers have the opportunity to create a profile on the Web of Science Reviewer Recognition Service (formerly Publons), automatically documenting their reviewing activity for participating journals. Additionally, these profiles can be seamlessly integrated with ORCID.

Reviewer Board

The Reviewer Board (RB) comprises seasoned researchers committed to consistently and actively supporting journals by delivering high-quality, rigorous, and transparent review reports for submitted manuscripts within their specialized domains. The initial term of RB membership is one year, subject to renewal or termination. Members of the RB share the same responsibilities and benefits as regular reviewers, with additional privileges, including:

- ✓ **Review Quota:** RB Members are expected to review a minimum of six manuscripts annually. In instances where a reviewer cannot provide a report upon invitation, they are encouraged to propose alternative potential reviewers who meet the necessary criteria.
- ✓ **RB Certificate:** RB Members receive an exclusive certificate recognizing their contribution to the Reviewer Board.
- ✓ **Recognition on the Journal Website:** RB Members are publicly acknowledged on the journal website for their active involvement.
- ✓ **Potential Promotion to Topical Advisory Panel:** Active RB members may be considered for promotion to the prestigious Topical Advisory Panel, contingent upon approval by the Editor-in-Chief.

This initiative aims to enhance the engagement and commitment of reviewers, fostering a community of experts dedicated to maintaining the standards of excellence in peer review and contributing to the advancement of scholarly publications.

Volunteer Reviewers

Sciences Force journals actively seek the valuable contributions of Volunteer Reviewers to ensure a robust peer-review process. If you are interested in becoming a Volunteer Reviewer, please review the following guidelines:

✓ **Expression of Interest:**

- If you are passionate about contributing to the scholarly peer-review process, express your interest by reaching out to the journal's Editorial Office.
- Clearly state your expertise and the specific journals or subject areas you are interested in reviewing for.

✓ **Expertise and Availability:**

- Volunteer Reviewers should possess relevant expertise in the field of the journal they intend to review for.
- Communicate your availability for review assignments, ensuring that you can commit to providing timely and thorough evaluations.

✓ **Review Commitment:**

- Volunteers are encouraged to commit to reviewing a minimum number of manuscripts per year, demonstrating an active engagement in the peer-review process.

✓ **Quality and Objectivity:**

- Uphold the highest standards of quality and objectivity in your reviews.
- Provide constructive feedback that helps authors enhance the clarity, validity, and impact of their work.

✓ **Communication:**

- Maintain open and clear communication with the Editorial Office regarding your availability, preferences, and any potential conflicts of interest.

✓ **Reviewer Recognition:**

- Volunteer Reviewers will be acknowledged for their contributions, fostering a sense of community and appreciation for their dedication.

✓ **Benefits:**

- While Volunteer Reviewers do not hold formal memberships, they will receive recognition for their service.
- Exceptional contributors may be considered for inclusion in the Reviewer Board or other recognition programs.

✓ **Reviewer Training:**

- If necessary, Volunteer Reviewers may be provided with access to resources or training to enhance their reviewing skills.

By becoming a Volunteer Reviewer, you play a crucial role in maintaining the quality and integrity of scholarly publications. Your commitment is vital to the advancement of scientific knowledge, and Sciences Force journals appreciate and value your contributions.

General Guidelines for Reviewers

Invitation to Review

Manuscripts submitted to Sciences Force journals are reviewed by at least two experts, who can be volunteer reviewers, members of the Reviewer Board or reviewers suggested by the academic editor during the preliminary check. Reviewers are asked to evaluate the quality of the manuscript and to provide a recommendation to the external editor on whether a manuscript should be accepted, requires revisions, or should be rejected.

We ask invited reviewers to:

- accept or decline any invitations as soon as possible (based on the manuscript title and abstract);
- suggest alternative reviewers if an invitation must be declined;
- request a deadline extension as soon as possible in case more time is required to provide a comprehensive report.

Manuscripts submitted to Sciences Force journals undergo a rigorous review process conducted by a minimum of two experts. These experts may include volunteer reviewers, members of the Reviewer Board, or individuals recommended by the academic editor during the initial assessment. The primary responsibility of these reviewers is to assess the manuscript's quality thoroughly and furnish a recommendation to the external editor regarding acceptance, the need for revisions, or rejection.

Invited reviewers are kindly requested to adhere to the following guidelines:

1. **Timely Response:** Please promptly accept or decline any review invitations upon receipt, based on a preliminary evaluation of the manuscript's title and abstract.
2. **Alternative Reviewers:** In the event of declining an invitation, we appreciate suggestions for alternative reviewers who may be available to assess the manuscript.
3. **Deadline Extension:** If additional time is required to furnish a comprehensive review report, we encourage reviewers to request a deadline extension at the earliest convenience.

Your cooperation in abiding by these guidelines ensures the efficiency and effectiveness of our peer-review process, contributing to the overall quality and integrity of Sciences Force publications.

Potential Conflicts of Interest

Reviewers are kindly requested to disclose any potential conflicts of interest and contact the journal Editorial Office if uncertainties arise about whether a situation constitutes a conflict of interest. Potential conflicts of interest encompass various scenarios, including (but not limited to):

- The reviewer works within the same institute as one of the authors.
- The reviewer holds a recent academic connection, such as being a co-author, collaborator, or joint grant holder with any of the authors within the past three years.
- The reviewer shares a close personal relationship, rivalry, or antipathy with any of the authors.
- The reviewer stands to gain or lose financially from the publication of the paper in any way.

- The reviewer has non-financial conflicts of interest, such as political, personal, religious, ideological, academic, intellectual, or commercial affiliations with any of the authors.

It is crucial for reviewers to disclose conflicts of interest that could be perceived as biasing their evaluation of the paper or authors, whether for or against. Reviewers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the relevant guidelines outlined in the Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Please note that assessing a manuscript previously reviewed for another journal is not considered a conflict of interest. In such instances, reviewers are welcome to inform the Editorial Office about any improvements or lack thereof compared to the previous version.

Declaration of Confidentiality

Sciences Force journals operate single- or double-blind peer review. Until the article is published, reviewers should keep the content of the manuscript, including the Abstract, confidential. Reviewers should also be careful not to reveal their identity to the authors, either in their comments or in metadata for reports submitted in Microsoft Word or PDF format. Reviewers must inform the Editorial Office if they would like a colleague to complete the review on their behalf.

Sciences Force journals offer the possibility for authors to publish review reports together with their paper (Open Review) and for reviewers to sign their open review reports once “Open Review” is selected by the authors. However, this will only be done at publication with the reviewer’s permission. In all other cases, review reports are considered confidential and will only be disclosed with the explicit permission of the reviewer.

Sciences Force journals adhere to a single- or double-blind peer review process. Throughout the pre-publication phase, reviewers are entrusted with maintaining the confidentiality of the manuscript content, encompassing the Abstract. It is imperative that reviewers refrain from divulging their identity to the authors, whether in their comments or through metadata in reports submitted in Microsoft Word or PDF format. If reviewers wish for a colleague to conduct the review on their behalf, it is essential to notify the Editorial Office.

Sciences Force journals provide an option for authors to opt for Open Review, wherein review reports can be published alongside the paper. Additionally, reviewers have the opportunity to sign their open review reports when authors select "Open Review." However, this disclosure occurs only at the time of publication with explicit permission from the reviewer. In all other instances, review reports are treated as confidential and will only be revealed with the explicit consent of the reviewer.

Review Reports

The review report must be crafted in English, and we have outlined comprehensive instructions to assist you in preparing an effective and constructive assessment. Consider the following guidelines as you embark on the review process:

- ✓ **Thorough Examination:** Read the entire article, including supplementary material if available, with careful attention to figures, tables, data, and methods.
- ✓ **Holistic Analysis:** Your review report should critically analyze the article in its entirety, examining specific sections and key concepts presented throughout.
- ✓ **Detailed Feedback:** Ensure that your comments are detailed, providing clarity for the authors to understand and address the points you raise.
- ✓ **Avoid Self-Citation Recommendations:** Refrain from recommending the citation of your own work, that of close colleagues, another author, or the journal unless it is essential for improving the manuscript's quality.
- ✓ **Mitigate Excessive Citations:** Reviewers should not advocate for excessive self-citations, honorary citations, or citations from the journal where the manuscript was submitted. References should enhance the manuscript's quality explicitly.
- ✓ **Neutral and Constructive Tone:** Maintain a neutral tone in your review, focusing on providing constructive criticism that aids the authors in enhancing their work. Derogatory comments will not be tolerated.
- ✓ **Exclusion of AI or AI-Assisted Tools:** Reviewers must refrain from utilizing AI or AI-assisted tools, such as ChatGPT, for reviewing submissions or generating peer review reports. The use of AI technologies for this purpose breaches peer review confidentiality, and reviewers are solely responsible for the content of their reports.

Note that Sciences Force journals follow several standards and guidelines, including those from the ICMJE (medical journals), CONSORT (trial reporting), TOP (data transparency and openness), PRISMA (systematic reviews and meta-analyses) and ARRIVE (reporting of in vivo experiments). See the Publishing Standards and Guidelines page or contact the Editorial Office for more details. Reviewers that are familiar with the guidelines should report any concerns they have about their implementation.

For further guidance on writing a critical review, please refer to the following documents:

- ✓ *COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers*. Committee on Publication Ethics. [Available online](#).
- ✓ Hames, I. *Peer Review and Manuscript Management in Scientific Journals: Guidelines for Good Practice*. Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, UK, 2007.
- ✓ *Writing a journal article review*. Australian National University: Canberra, Australia, 2010. [Available online](#).
- ✓ Golash-Boza, T. *How to write a peer review for an academic journal: Six steps from start to finish*. [Available online](#).

Review reports play a crucial role in providing insightful feedback to authors, and as a reviewer, your input is vital for the improvement of the manuscript. Your review report should encompass the following components:

- ✓ **Brief Summary:** Provide a concise paragraph summarizing the paper's aim, main contributions, and strengths.
- ✓ **General Concept Comments:**
 - **Article Comments:** Address areas of weakness, testability of the hypothesis, methodological accuracy, missing controls, etc.
 - **Review Comments:** Evaluate the completeness and relevance of the review topic, identify knowledge gaps, assess the appropriateness of references, etc.

These comments should be specific and focused on the scientific content, enabling authors to respond effectively.

- ✓ **Specific Comments:** Point out inaccuracies within the text, referencing line numbers, tables, or figures. Concentrate on scientific content, excluding spelling, formatting, or language issues, as these can be addressed later by our internal staff.

To guide your assessment for research articles, consider the following questions:

- ✓ **Clarity and Relevance:** Is the manuscript clear, relevant to the field, and well-structured?
- ✓ **Citations:** Are the cited references recent (within the last 5 years) and pertinent? Is there an excessive number of self-citations?
- ✓ **Scientific Soundness:** Is the manuscript scientifically sound, and does the experimental design effectively test the hypothesis?
- ✓ **Reproducibility:** Can the manuscript's results be reproduced based on the details in the methods section?
- ✓ **Figures/Tables/Images/Schemes:** Are visual elements appropriate, clearly presenting data and easy to interpret? Ensure details on statistical analysis or data sources are included.
- ✓ **Consistency:** Do the conclusions align with the evidence and arguments presented?
- ✓ **Ethics and Data Availability:** Evaluate the adequacy of ethics statements and data availability statements.

General questions to help guide your review report for review articles:

- ✓ Is the review clear, comprehensive and of relevance to the field? Is a gap in knowledge identified?
- ✓ Was a similar review published recently and, if yes, is this current review still relevant and of interest to the scientific community?
- ✓ Are the cited references mostly recent publications (within the last 5 years) and relevant? Are any relevant citations omitted? Does it include an excessive number of self-citations?

- ✓ Are the statements and conclusions drawn coherent and supported by the listed citations?
- ✓ Are the figures/tables/images/schemes appropriate? Do they properly show the data? Are they easy to interpret and understand?

The content of your review report will be rated by an Academic Editor from a scientific point of view as well as general usefulness to the improvement of the manuscript. The overall grading results will be used as a reference for potential promotion of Reviewer Board Members, Volunteer Reviewers and regular Reviewers.

Rating the Manuscript

During the manuscript evaluation, please rate the following aspects:

- ✓ *Novelty*: Is the question original and well-defined? Do the results provide an advancement of the current knowledge?
- ✓ *Scope*: Does the work fit the journal scope*?
- ✓ *Significance*: Are the results interpreted appropriately? Are they significant? Are all conclusions justified and supported by the results? Are hypotheses carefully identified as such?
- ✓ *Quality*: Is the article written in an appropriate way? Are the data and analyses presented appropriately? Are the highest standards for presentation of the results used?
- ✓ *Scientific Soundness*: Is the study correctly designed and technically sound? Are the analyses performed with the highest technical standards? Is the data robust enough to draw conclusions? Are the methods, tools, software, and reagents described with sufficient details to allow another researcher to reproduce the results? Is the raw data available and correct (where applicable)?
- ✓ *Interest to the Readers*: Are the conclusions interesting for the readership of the journal? Will the paper attract a wide readership, or be of interest only to a limited number of people? (Please see the Aims and Scope of the journal.)
- ✓ *Overall Merit*: Is there an overall benefit to publishing this work? Does the work advance the current knowledge? Do the authors address an important long-

standing question with smart experiments? Do the authors present a negative result of a valid scientific hypothesis?

- ✓ *English Level:* Is the English language appropriate and understandable?

*At this stage reviewers can also suggest that a manuscript may be more appropriate for publication in another Sciences Force journal. To save the time and effort of reviewers, authors have the possibility to request the transfer of review reports to another Sciences Force journal. The full list of journals published by Sciences Force can be found [here](#).

Manuscripts submitted to Sciences Force journals should meet the highest standards of publication ethics:

- ✓ Manuscripts should only report results that have not been submitted or published before, even in part.
- ✓ Manuscripts must be original and should not reuse text from another source without appropriate citation.
- ✓ The studies reported should have been carried out in accordance with generally accepted ethical research standards.

If the reviewer becomes aware of any scientific misconduct or fraud, plagiarism or any other unethical behavior related to the manuscript, they should raise these concerns with the in-house editor immediately.

Overall Recommendation

Kindly provide your holistic recommendation for the manuscript's next processing stage using the following options:

- ✓ **Accept in Present Form:** The paper is suitable for acceptance without further modifications.
- ✓ **Accept after Minor Revisions:** The paper can be accepted with minor revisions, and authors are allotted five days for these adjustments.
- ✓ **Reconsider after Major Revisions:** The manuscript's acceptance depends on substantial revisions. Authors should furnish a detailed response or present a rebuttal if certain reviewer comments cannot be addressed. Typically, two rounds of major revisions are allowed. Authors are requested to submit the revised paper

within ten days for further review. If the anticipated revision time exceeds 2 months, we recommend authors withdraw their manuscript before resubmitting to avoid unnecessary time pressure and ensure thorough revisions.

- ✓ **Reject:** The article exhibits significant flaws, lacks original contribution, and is unsuitable for resubmission to the journal. No opportunity for resubmission will be extended. Please note that your recommendation is exclusively visible to journal editors and remains undisclosed to the authors. All decisions regarding revisions, acceptance, or rejections must be thoroughly justified.

Guidelines for Reviewers for Registered Reports Papers

The review process for Registered Reports is divided into two stages. In Stage 1, reviewers assess study proposals before data is collected. In Stage 2, reviewers consider the full study, including results and interpretation.

When reviewing Stage 1 papers, note that no experimental data or results will be included. Reviewers only need to assess the method, including, for example:

- ✓ The importance and soundness of the proposed hypotheses;
- ✓ The suitability and feasibility of the experimental and analysis methodology;
- ✓ Whether there are sufficient details given to replicate the proposed experimental procedures and analysis;
- ✓ Whether there are sufficient outcome-neutral tests of the hypotheses, including positive controls and quality checks.

Manuscripts that pass Stage 1 peer review may be published immediately or after the successful completion of Stage 2 (at the authors' discretion). Editorial decisions will not be based on the importance or novelty of the results.

For Stage 2 manuscripts, reviewers will be asked to appraise:

- ✓ Whether the data was adequate to test the proposed hypotheses by satisfying the approved outcome-neutral conditions (such as quality checks, positive controls);
- ✓ Whether the stated hypotheses tested was the same as the approved Stage 1 submission;
- ✓ Whether the authors adhered precisely to the registered experimental procedures or were able to sufficiently justify any changes;

- ✓ Whether any new analyses (not mentioned at Stage 1) are methodologically sound and relevant;
- ✓ Whether the authors' conclusions are justified given the data.