

## South African Medical Journal

### Reviewer guidelines

#### **Why is peer review important?**

As a reviewer, you will be advising the editors who will make the final decision on a manuscript. Your input as an expert in the field is therefore significant to ensuring that the article is suitable and acceptable for publication among the academic and scientific community. Providing constructive and clearly detailed comments will assist both the editors in their decisions and the authors in their revisions to improve the manuscript.

*SAMJ* reviewers will be publicly thanked annually by their names being published on the *SAMJ* website.

#### **What to consider before and upon accepting to undertake a review**

*Availability.* It is essential to consider whether you have the time to appropriately complete a review within a reasonable timeframe. Reviewers are usually expected to complete and submit their reviews within three weeks.

*Necessary expertise.* Do you have the needed knowledge to assess and evaluate the submission fairly and constructively?

*Disclosures of interests.* It is important to disclose any conflicts of interest in reviewing and if necessary, to withdraw yourself from reviewing a particular submission.

*Suspected misconduct, fraud or plagiarism.* If you suspect a case of misconduct or plagiarism, please inform the editorial office and include as much detail to justify your concerns as possible.

*Confidentiality.* Please note that as an unpublished manuscript, these are confidential documents and should not be discussed with colleagues. Your role as a reviewer should not be disclosed until the article is formally published.

#### **The *SAMJ* peer review process**

The Editors aim to provide prompt reviews to optimise the quality of the published papers. All submissions are reviewed by an editorial advisory group, who will check for scope, fit, quality, originality, interest for the readership, etc., and recommend acceptance, rejection or referral for review. Submissions sent for review include Research, Reviews, Guidelines, In Practice and Clinical Trials. Editorials, CME, Book reviews, Obituaries and Correspondence do not go through peer review.

A double blind review process is followed, which means that both the reviewer and author identities are concealed from each other throughout the review process. A majority of manuscripts will be sent to one or two reviewers, under the management of an editor assigned to the submission. Reviewers as experts in the field provide comments to authors and editors on the

importance, originality and scientific merit of the manuscript and suggest changes which may improve the quality and validity of the manuscript. The review process itself takes approximately 4 – 6 weeks to complete.

If the decision is for revision, the author is requested to address each comment by the reviewers, and submit a letter outlining their responses accompanying their revised manuscript. The original editor will re-evaluate the revisions and will either make a decision or send the manuscript for a second round of review, usually to the original set of reviewers. Reviewers will be informed of the outcome of manuscripts which they have reviewed.

The Editor-in-Chief has the final decision on any submitted manuscript.

### **Format of a review**

As a general guide, a standard review should begin with a couple of lines describing the type of article and its main message, and then some general comments summarising the reviewers' opinion of the article as a whole. If necessary, the reviewer can include comments that are solely for the eyes of the editor, and not to be communicated to the authors. These should be clearly marked.

The reviewer should provide feedback on all components of the article, including the methodology, results and discussion. Specific comments about the substance of the manuscript should be divided into major and minor remarks.

- Major remarks include suggestions for adding or deleting sections, undertaking additional data collection or analyses, restructuring the article, or highlighting methodological or conceptual weaknesses that should be addressed.
- Minor comments refer to language and text, changes to the figures or tables, format and structure, references, and declarations of interests.

The review should conclude with a recommendation: accept, accept with minor revisions, major revisions needed, or reject.

### **What should a review contain or not contain?**

A review should not contain unprofessional comments and insults, and unconstructive criticism. It should also not be just a one-liner with no further explanation, or mere correcting of technical errors in writing.

Quality reviews should offer constructive advice on how to improve the manuscript for publication and therefore involve commentary and engagement with ideas and interpretations, methodologies followed, and whether conclusions are supported by the data. The aim is to support authors to improve their manuscripts; criticisms should be accompanied by suggestions for how to address the problems.

Below is an example of the information a reviewer can provide in his/her review:

Dear Reviewer

Thank you for accepting the invitation to review this manuscript. Your input is a crucial part of the peer review process and contributes to ensuring the quality of the articles published by the *SAMJ*.

Please use the following as a guide to your feedback. You may edit on this appraisal document and upload it along with your recommendation.

**Manuscript title:**

**Submission number:**

**General impression**

Is the article relevant?

Does it offer anything new?

Are there similar studies in our region/outside the region (quick search of Pubmed helpful here)?

Does it add to the existing medical body of knowledge?

On first glance, are the methods, results and conclusions reasonable?

Do the conclusions actually draw on the results?

Does the article have a clear message?

Will it help *SAMJ* readers make better decisions and, if so, how?

Is a general medical journal the right place for it?

**Methods and analysis**

**Study design:**

Is the research question clearly defined?

Was the sample adequate and sufficiently described?

Are the methods adequately described and appropriate to the study objectives?

**Statistical considerations:**

Are simple statistical methods applied appropriately?

Or, is specific input needed from a statistician?

**Ethical considerations:**

Does the article raise any ethical concerns?

**Results**

Is the population/sample adequately described?

Are the results clearly presented?

Are they credible and do they answer the research question?

Are tables clear and useful, not simply mirroring data discussed in the Results text?

**Discussion**

Are the results well discussed in light of previous evidence and the literature?

Are the limitations of the study sufficiently discussed?

Is the meaning and relevance discussed?

**Conclusion**

Are the implications of the research summarised?  
Do the authors make relevant recommendations for future research or application?

**References**

Are these up to date and comprehensive?

**Use of English language**

Does it need extensive language editing?

**Reviewer's recommendation to the editors**

Accept

Resubmit for review

Revisions required

Reject