



Tips for Reviewing Manuscripts

Many nurses are interested in reviewing manuscripts submitted for publication. Serving as a reviewer is a good method of improving one's communication skills and keeping current with the scientific literature. What are the most effective strategies for being a good reviewer? The following are some suggestions.

- Try to have an uninterrupted block of time to read the manuscript completely. This will give you an overview of the flow of the paper. Realize that, initially, it will take several hours to complete a review. With experience, the time required probably will diminish. Develop a system. Writing a meaningful review away from your resource materials and computer is difficult.
- Your primary job as a reviewer is to review the content. Is the content accurate and up to date? To ensure that all relevant information is included in the manuscript, conduct a literature search on the topic. The manuscript should include discussion of the key studies in the field. In manuscripts that discuss drugs, are the studies with negative results included or does the author only write about the positive results? Check the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Web site for updates or warnings. Are nursing research findings part of the literature review, or does the author concentrate primarily on medical literature? The manuscript should be free of locational and institutional bias. Content also should be balanced between introductory and more advanced material. You were selected as a reviewer because of your expertise in a certain content area, and you should not assume that every reader is as familiar with the topic as you are. Basic explanatory information should be included.
- The second reading of the manuscript should take place after the literature search. Notes can be made on aspects of the manuscript that you will discuss in your review, such as missing literature, overemphasis of some sections, inaccurate or out-of-date content, lack of focus, particular strengths, clarity of tables and figures, and suggestions for change.
- Unfortunately, plagiarism is alive and well in publishing. During your literature search, look for unattributed sources. For the same reason, pull up a few Web sites geared to both professional and lay audiences to ensure that there is no duplication of content.
- Most of the content should be referenced. For nursing journals, the reference list should include a number of nursing sources. Note in your review if the majority of references are from Web sites, or if a large number are from vendors or pharmaceutical companies. Check as many references as possible. Ensure that the reference is used accurately and not taken out of context. If you find errors in reference citations, make sure to include that information in your review. Errors in references might imply a certain carelessness in manuscript preparation that may carry forward into the body of the paper.
- Do not spend time reviewing grammar or style, and do not rewrite the manuscript. Your job is to review the content, not style. However, do state in your review if the manuscript reads clearly and flows well. You should have familiarity with the style of the American Psychological Association as well as the journal's author guidelines. Note in your review if the manuscript seems right for the journal and whether the author followed guidelines.
- If you have any conflicts of interest, inform the editor and refuse the manuscript as soon as possible. Conflicts may include recognizing the author, having financial interest in the drug or company discussed, or having bias about the topic. Confidentiality is part of the reviewer role, and the manuscript should not be shared or discussed with anyone other than the editor.
- With the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing's* online manuscript review system, reviewers are asked to answer a number of questions. Because the authors receive those comments verbatim, the review should be written in complete sentences with restatement of the question. Be as specific as possible. For instance, references that should have been included should be mentioned in the review. Comments to the author should be positive and enthusiastic. Sarcasm, hostility, or blatant negativity is never appropriate in a review, and authors certainly do not need to hear those kinds of remarks about their work. If you are feeling cranky or irritable, write your review at a different time. Try to summarize your comments with the most positive aspects of the manuscript.

Reviewers play an invaluable role in upholding the professional standards of the journal. Your work is greatly appreciated.

Suggested Readings

- Brooks-Brunn, J. (1993). Reviewing manuscripts: Developing an efficient system. *Nurse Author and Editor*, 3(4), 1-4.
- DeJong, M. (2004). Spotting reference errors. *Nurse Author and Editor*, 14(2), 7-9.
- Williams, M. (1993). Reviewing manuscripts: How to be critical without being offensive. *Nurse Author and Editor*, 3(3), 1-3.

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