



HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

H-9, Islamabad (Pakistan)

Phone: (051) 90402116, Fax: (051) 90402102,

E-mail: tshah@hec.gov.pk

Ethical Guidelines for Journals

Ethical Guidelines For Editors

Editor of a research journal plays an important role in establishing and maintaining the professional standards. Publication of a paper in an HEC recognized journal is expected to be a reflection of quality work of author (s) and the affiliating institution (if any). Editor is expected to perform the responsibility towards the journal on its all aspects and at varied stages i.e. from receiving of an article to publishing it. Keeping this in view, it becomes prime responsibility of an editor to adapt the following guidelines while publishing papers in his/her research journal.

1. Editor's Responsibilities

Editor of a research journal should be responsible for:

- To establish and maintain quality of the journal by publishing quality papers in his/her journal,
- Promotion of freedom of expression within the cultural, constitutional/legal framework,
- Providing integrity and credibility of the research contributions,
- Meeting the needs of authors and readers,
- Maintaining ethical standards of their journal,
- Providing corrigendum for any correction, clarification and apologies where required.

1.2 Good practices for their job would include to:

- encourage new ideas and suggestions of authors, peer reviewers, members of editorial board and readers for improving quality of his/her journal,
- apply the process of blind peer review in true letter and spirit,
- promote innovative findings in respective field and publishing them on priority,
- promote anti plagiarism policy,
- educate contributors (authors) about ethical practices in research, and
- implement the journal's policy without institutional pressure and revise the policy from time to time.

1. Formation of Editorial Board

- Editor must ensure that editorial board comprises of prominent scholars of the field who can adequately promote the journal,

- The editorial board shall be comprised of:
 - Editorial Committee, who will be responsible for providing logistics, and
 - Advisory Committee, who will be responsible for reviewing the submitted research papers. This committee should have at least 50% representation of scholars from abroad.
- May appoint editorial board members for a prescribed duration and add or revise the board if required,
- Editor should inform new board members about ethical guidelines and their expected role and update editorial board members about development, challenges and any changes made in the journal policy,
- The editorial board should maintain the quality of the journal because an assigned category by the HEC (e.g. X, Y, and Z categories) will depend on the quality of published papers in it. It is professional duty of the board members to select credible research work, and
- To ensure smooth functioning of the journal, editors are responsible to conduct the editorial board meetings on regular basis (at least twice a year).

2. Fair play and Impartiality

- The criteria for the selection of research papers must be impartial and editor should select academically and scientifically sound papers,
- Editor should:
 - Promptly respond to the author (s) of the papers submitted for publication, and
 - Assign a specific number to an article submitted for processing; and pay impartial consideration to all research papers submitted for publication
- ensure to evaluate (get evaluated) the content of research papers impartially and on merit, and
- disregard the discriminating factors, e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, religious belief, cultural sentiments, political affiliation, seniority and/or institutional association of the author(s) while selecting articles for publication, and
- ensure impartiality of the review process by informing reviewer (s) that s/he needs to disclose any conflicts of interest regarding the submitted research paper.

3. Confidentiality

- The editor must ensure confidentiality of the author(s) and reviewers during the process of double-blind peer review,
- Information pertaining to a research paper should not be disclosed by the editor to anyone except the author(s), reviewer(s), and editorial board members,
- Upon reaching a decision about a research paper, the editor may only disclose or announce title of the study and name of the author(s) that has been accepted for

publication. Any other information may only be disclosed with the prior approval of the author(s), and

- Confidentiality of the participants of the research should also be ensured by protecting personal information (e.g. identifiable personal details, images, and/or individual results), editor should declare clear guidelines to the contributors (authors) regarding confidentiality of the individual participant.
- Prior to publication, the content of the manuscript should be kept confidential, both the editor and reviewer(s) will not share or use any part of the work.

4. Editing and Formatting Guidelines

- The editors should prepare clear guidelines about preparing and formatting of a paper and print these guidelines in each issue of the journal,
- The guidelines should cover information related to ‘content’ and ‘format’ of a research paper,
- Any preferred manual of style (e.g. APA, Chicago Manual, MLA Style, etc) should be declared as a policy decision.

5. Review Process

- Details about review process should be declared,
- Editor should ensure that all published papers have gone through a double-blind peer review, and at least one of the reviewers is from outside the country,
- Editor should ensure that peer-review is masked in both directions and as such the identity of the author is removed from the manuscript prior to its review in order to protect the confidentiality and privacy,
- Editor should provide sufficient guidelines to reviewers, including necessary information about the review process and provide them a reviewer comment form for recording his/her comments,
- Editor must ensure that peer review process is prompt, nondiscriminatory and highly professional,
- Editor should develop a system of confidentiality of research papers undergoing the review process,
- Editor is required to send reviewers’ comments to author(s) promptly,
- Editor should ensure that the corrections suggested by the reviewers are incorporated by the author(s) in letter and spirit,
- Editor to critically evaluate peer review practices regularly and make improvement, if, required,
- Editor should maintain a database of competent and qualified reviewers. For this purpose, s/he may use various sources other than personal contacts to identify new reviewers (e.g. referring by author (s), citations and references section in a book/journal), and

- Editor should refer trouble cases (e.g. in case of one acceptance and one rejection or any conflict arisen after review) to advisory committee in order to resolve the matter amicably.

6. Dealing with Misconduct

- Editor should encourage reviewers to comment on ethical issues and possible research and publication misconduct in case the submitted research paper has indulged in (e.g. inappropriate research design, incomplete detail on participant's consent, data manipulation, presentation,
- Editor should encourage reviewers to comment on the validity of submitted research paper and identify 'subtle (simply copy-paste)' and/or 'blatant (paraphrasing)' type of plagiarism, if, practiced by the author(s),
- Editor should confirm plagiarism (carry out objective check through Turnitin) and/or searching for similar titles to the submitted research paper, and
- Editor should be prepared to publish a corrigendum, remove and retract a plagiarized article if it comes to his/her knowledge subsequent to its publication.

7. Transparency

- Editor must ensure that multiple papers as a principal investigator submitted by an author should not be published in the same issue,
- Only ONE co-authorship will be allowed for those author who will also contribute a research paper as a principal investigator in the same issue,
- For the members of the editorial board (including the editor), it will only be limited to ONE paper per issue either to submit research paper as a principal investigator or co-author, and
- Editor should adopt authorship or co-authorship policy that will lead to set example in the scientific community and strictly discourage any misconduct (e.g. forcible inclusion of a name in the author list). Authorship should only be given to those individuals who have substantially contributed in the said article

8. Conflict of Interest

- Editor should not edit a submitted paper for those author(s) and/or institution against which s/he has any conflicts of interest (e.g. resulting from competitive, collaborative and/or professional standing),
- Editor should also apply this guideline on their reviewers and editorial board members.
- To ensure unbiased review, the editor should declare a clear cut policy for his/her own submission and a research paper submitted by a editorial board member, and
- Editor must publish a list of common interests (e.g. financial, academic and/or any other type) for all editorial board members and editorial staff. This list should be updated from time to time.

- To ensure unbiased review, the editor should declare a clear cut policy for his/her own submission and a research paper submitted by a editorial board member.
- Suggested that "decision pertaining to the editor's submitted article/s, one of the associate editors must decide and the information about reviewers should be kept confidential from the editor

9. Disclosure

- Editor must not use any unpublished information/data from the submitted research paper without the permission of the author(s), and
- Any information received after peer review process must be kept confidential and not used for personal gains.

10. Publication Decisions

- editor to only short list research papers which have relevancy with the scope of the journal based on his/her judgment, but without any prejudice,
- After completion of the reviewing process, submission of revised manuscript, and assessing the quality and validity, the editor has a right to accept or reject a research paper,
- Editor's decisions to accept or reject a paper for publication should be purely based on merit, academic standards and professional demands of the journal,
- Editor must justify the reasons of rejecting a research paper to author(s). This may include:
 - Failure to fit in the scope of the journal (can be communicated after preliminary review)
 - Insufficient depth of content
 - Major errors related to design, analysis, write up and format
 - any misconduct or conflicting factors (e.g. plagiarism, copyright infringement, legal issues, fake data, authorship issues)
- Editors are required to timely communicate the editorial decision to the author(s),
- Editors should not reverse decisions in favor or against author(s) at his/her own.

11. Establishing a Procedure for Appeal

- Editor is responsible for establishing a proper mechanism for appeals launched against:
 - the rejection of a research paper
 - objections to publications causing harm to any party
 - infringing ethical boundaries in any manner

Ethical Guidelines for Author(s)

The following ethical guidelines are obligatory for all author (s) violation of which may result in application of penalties by the editor (s), including but not limited to the suspension or revocation of publishing privileges.

Reporting Standards

- It is the author (s)' responsibility to ensure that the research report and data contain adequate detail and references to the sources of information in order to allow others to reproduce the results.
- Fraudulent or knowingly inaccurate statement constitutes unethical behavior and will be unacceptable.

Originality and Plagiarism

- It is the author(s)' responsibility to ascertain that s/he has submitted an entirely original work, giving due credit, by virtue of proper citations, to the works and/or words of others where they are used.
- Plagiarism in all its forms constitutes unethical publishing behavior and is not acceptable.
- Material quoted verbatim from the author (s)' previously published work or other sources must be placed in quotation marks.
- As per HEC policy, in case manuscript has been found to have a similarity index of more than 19% it will either be rejected or left at the discretion of the editor for purposes of a conditional acceptance.

Declaration

- Authors are required to provide an undertaking / declaration stating that the manuscript under consideration contains solely their original work that is not under consideration for publishing in any other journal in any form.
- Authors can submit manuscript previously published in abstracted form, e.g. in the proceedings of an annual meeting, or in a periodical with limited circulation and availability e.g. reports by government agencies or university departments.
- Manuscript that is co-authored must be accompanied with an undertaking explicitly stating that each Author has contributed substantially towards the preparation of the manuscript in order to claim right to authorship.
- It is responsibility of the corresponding author that s/he has ensured that all those who have substantially contributed in the manuscripts have been included in the author list and they have agreed to the order of authorship.

Multiple, Redundant and Current Publication

- Authors should not submit manuscripts describing essentially the same research to more than one journal or publication except if is a re-submission of a rejected or withdrawn manuscript.
- Authors can re-publish previously conducted research that has been substantially altered or corrected using more meticulous analysis or by adding more data.
- The authors and editor must agree to the secondary publication, which must cite the primary references and reflect the same data and interpretation of the primary document.

- Concurrent submission of the same manuscript to more than one journal is unethical publishing behavior and is unacceptable.

Acknowledgment of Sources

- A paper must always contain proper acknowledgment of the work of others, including clear indications of the sources of all information quoted or offered, except that what is common knowledge.
- Author (s) must also acknowledge the contributions of people, organizations and institutes who assisted the process of research, including those who provided technical help, writing assistance or financial funding (in acknowledgement).
- It is duty of the author (s) to conduct a literature review and properly cite the original publications that describe closely related work.

Authorship of the Work

- Authorship of the work may only be credited to those who have made a noteworthy contribution in conceptualization, design, conducting, data analysis and writing up of the manuscript.
- It is the responsibility of the corresponding author to include name of only those co-authors who have made significant contributions to the work.
- The corresponding author should ensure that all co- authors have seen and approved the final version of the paper and have agreed to its submission for publication. Others who have participated in certain substantive aspect of the research should be acknowledged for their contribution in an “Acknowledgement” section.

Privacy of Participants

- Authors must respect the privacy of the participant of research and must not use any information obtained from them without their informed consent.
- Authors should ensure that only information that improves the understanding of the study is shared.
- Authors must ensure that in instances where the identity of the participant needs to be revealed in the study, explicit and informed consent of the concerned party is obtained.
- In the event of the demise of a participant, consent must be obtained from the family of the deceased.

Data Access and Retention

- If question arises about the accuracy or validity of the research work during the review process the author (s) should provide raw data to the editor.

Images

- The author (s) should ensure that images included in an account of research performed or in the data collection as part of the research are free from manipulation,
- Authors must provide an accurate description of how the images were generated and produced.

Disclosure and Conflicts of Interest

- The potential and relevant competing financial, personal social or other interest of all author (s) that might be affected by publication of the results contained in the manuscript must be conveyed to the editor.
- Author (s) should disclose any potential conflict of interest at the earliest possible stage, including but not limited to employment, consultancies, honoraria, patent applications/registrations, grants or other funding.
- All sources of financial support for the project should be disclosed alongside a brief overview of the role played, if any by the responses during the various stages of research.

Copyright

Authors may have to sign an agreement allowing the journal to reserve the right to circulate the article and all other derivative works such as translations.

Manuscript Acceptance and Rejection

- The review period can last between 1-2 months or longer and during this period author has reserve a right to contact editor to ask about the status of the review.
- Once the review process has been completed, the author will be informed about the status of the manuscript which could either be an acceptance, rejection or made revision. In the event of rejection, the Author reserves the right to publish the article elsewhere.
- In case of revisions, the author must provide an exposition of all corrections made in the manuscript and the revised manuscript will, then, go through the process of affirmation of revisions and be accepted or rejected accordingly.
- In case of dissatisfaction over the decision of rejection, author can appeal the decision by contacting the editor.

Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers

Preamble:

Review of manuscript by peer-reviewers is not only an essential component of formal scholarly engagement, but is also a fundamental step in the publication process as it aids a journal editor in making editorial decisions. It also allows an author to improve the paper via editorial communications. Scholars when they accept to review the research paper have an ethical responsibility to complete this assignment professionally. The quality, credibility and reputation of a journal also depend on the peer review process.

The peer review process depends on trust, and demands that professional involved supposed to fulfill his/her role ethically. These professionals are the momentum arm of this process, but they are may be performing this job without any formal training. As a consequence, they may be (especially young professors) unaware of their ethical obligations. The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan wants to set out ‘Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers’ so that all peer reviewers provide their valuable services in a standardized manner.

Suitability and Promptness

Peer reviewers should:

- Inform the editor, if they do not have the subject expertise required to carry out the review and s/he should inform the editor immediately after receiving a request,
- Be responsible to act promptly and submit review report on time,
- Immediately inform the editor of any possible delays and suggest another date of submission a review report, and
- Not unnecessarily delaying the review process, either by prolonged delay in submission of their review or by requesting unnecessary additional data/information from the editor or author(s).

Standards of Objectivity

- Reviews should be objectively carried out with a consideration of high academic, scholarly and scientific standards,
- All judgments should be meticulously established and maintained in order to ensure the full comprehension of the reviewer’s comments by the editors and the author(s),
- Both reviewers and author(s) in rebuttal should avoid unsupported assertions,
- Reviewer may justifiably criticize a manuscript but it would be inappropriate and impressive to resort to personal criticism on the author(s), and
- Reviewers should ensure that their decision is purely based on the quality of the research paper and not influenced, either positively or negatively, by any personal, financial, or other conflicting considerations or by intellectual biases.

Disclosure and Conflict of Interest

- A reviewer should not, for the purpose of his/her own research, use unpublished material disclosed in a submitted manuscript, without the approval of the editor,

- The data included in the research paper is required to be kept confidential and the reviewer shall not be allowed to use it for his/her any personal study,
- Reviewer must declare any potentially conflicting interests (e.g. personal, financial, intellectual, professional, political or religious). In this situation, s/he will require to follow journal's policies on situations they consider to represent a conflict to reviewing,
- A reviewer should be honest to declare conflicts of interest, if, the research paper under reviews is the same to his/her presently conducted study,
- If the reviewer feels unqualified to separate his/her bias, s/he should immediately return the manuscript to the editor without review, and justify to him/her about this.

Confidentiality

- Reviewers should keep the research paper as confidential document and must not discuss its content in any platform except in cases where a professional advice is being sought with the authorization of the editor, and
- Reviewers are professionally and ethically bound not to disclose the details of the research paper prior to its publication without the prior approval of the editor.

Ethical Considerations

- If reviewer would suspect that the research paper is almost the same of someone else's work, s/he will ethically inform the editor and provide its citation as a reference,
- If reviewer would suspect the results in research paper to be untrue/unrealistic/fake, s/he will share it with the editor,
- If there has been an indication for violating the ethical norms in the treatment of human beings (e.g. children, female, poor people, disabled, elderly, etc), then this should be identified to the editor, and
- If the research paper based on any previous research study or is replica of an earlier work, or the work is plagiarized e.g. the author has not acknowledged/referenced others' work appropriately, then this should be brought in the editor's knowledge.

Originality

For evaluating originality, peer reviewers should consider the following elements:

- Does the research paper add to the existing knowledge?
- Do research questions and/or hypotheses are appropriate to the objective of the research work?

Structure

If the layout and format of the paper is not per prescribed one, the reviewers should discuss it with the editor or should include this observation in his/her review report. On the other side, if the research paper is exceptionally well, the reviewer may overlook the formatting issues. Other times, reviewers may suggest restructuring the paper before publication. The following elements should be carefully evaluated:

- If there is serious problem of language expression and reviewer gets an impression that the research paper does not fulfill the linguistic requirements and readers would face difficulties to read and comprehend the paper. Such situation would usually arise when the author's native language is not English. The reviewer should record this deficiency in his/her report and suggest the editor to make its proper editing.
- The data presented in the paper is original or reproduced from previously conducted or published work. The papers which reflect originality are more likely to be given preference for publication.
- The clarity of illustrations including photographs, models, charts, images and figures is essential to note. If there is duplication that should be reported in the review report. Similarly, descriptions provided in the 'results' section should correspond with the data presented in tables/figures, if not then it should be clearly listed in the review report.
- Critically review the statistical analysis of the data. Also check rational and appropriateness of the specific analysis.
- Reviewers should read the 'Methodology' section in detail and make sure that the author(s) has demonstrated the understanding of the procedures being used and presented in the manuscript.
- The relationship between 'Data, findings' and 'Discussion' requires evaluating thoroughly. Unnecessary conjecture or unfounded conclusions that are not based on the presented data are not acceptable.
- The organization of the research paper is appropriate or deviate from the standard or prescribed format?
- Does the author(s) follow the guidelines prescribed by the journal for preparation and submission of the manuscript?
- Is the research paper free from typographical errors?

Review Report

- Reviewer must explicitly write his/her observations in the section of 'comments' because author(s) will only see the comments reviewers have made,
- For writing a review report, the reviewers are requested to complete a prescribed form (s),

- It is helpful for both the editor and author(s) if the reviewer writes a brief summary in the first section of the review report. This summary should comprise of reviewer's final decision and inferences drawn from full review,
- Any personal comments on author(s) should be avoided and final remarks must be written in a courteous and positive manner,
- Indicating any deficiencies is important. For the understanding of editor and author(s), the reviewers should highlight these deficiencies in some detail with specificity. This will also justify the comments made by the reviewer,
- When reviewer makes a decision regarding research paper, it will clearly indicate as 'Reject', 'Accept without revision', or 'Need Revision' and either of the decisions should have justification of the same.
- The reviewers should indicate the revisions clearly and comprehensively, and show willingness to confirm the revisions submitted by the author (s), if editor wishes so, and
- The final decision about publishing a research paper (either accept or reject) will solely rest with the editor and it is not a reviewer's job to take part in this decision. The editor will surely consider reviewer's comments and have a right to send the paper for another opinion or send back to the author(s) for its revisions before making the final decision.