

## A Guide to Peer Review

The *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (AJPM) is the official journal of the [American College of Preventive Medicine](#) and the [Association for Prevention Teaching and Research](#). Started in 1985, AJPM is a fully peer-reviewed international journal that publishes original research articles, reviews, current issues papers, commentary, and correspondence on all aspects of practice, education, policy, and research in preventive medicine and public health.

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### Introduction

Thank you for registering as an AJPM reviewer. We are grateful for the time and expertise of our reviewers. You are an essential part of the publishing process, so we have created this resource for both new and experienced reviewers.

If you are new to reviewing, welcome. We will guide you through the review process, as it may initially appear to be an unstructured task. If you are a seasoned reviewer looking to make certain you have dotted your “I”s and crossed your “T”s, you may wish to skim to find the sections most relevant to you or go directly to [AJPM’s reviewer checklists](#).

### Journal Scope

The *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* is the official journal of the American College of Preventive Medicine and the Association for Prevention Teaching and Research. It publishes articles in the areas of prevention research, teaching, practice and policy.

AJPM publishes original research papers on the following issues:

- Interventions aimed at the prevention of chronic and acute disease and the promotion of individual and community health.
- Primary and secondary prevention of important clinical, behavioral and public health issues such as injury and violence, infectious disease, women's health, smoking, sedentary behaviors and physical activity, nutrition, diabetes, obesity, and substance use disorders.
- Educational initiatives aimed at improving the ability of health professionals to provide effective clinical prevention and public health services.
- Health services research pertinent to prevention and public health.
- Official policy statements from the two co-sponsoring organizations, review articles, media reviews, and editorials.
- Supplements and special theme issues devoted to areas of current interest to the prevention community.

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### The Role of the Peer Reviewer

The peer reviewer acts as an advisor to journal editors, helping to identify only the most timely and important manuscripts.

The peer reviewer also acts as a mentor to authors. Even if the reviewer does not feel the manuscript is worthy of publication, he or she should still provide advice that will allow the authors to improve the manuscript for submission to a different journal and avoid similar mistakes in future research.

### Being Invited to Review

Your invitation to review will come by email. In your invitation email, you will be provided with the title and authors of the manuscript, as well as a study abstract (if applicable). AJPM utilizes a single-blind review, whereby authors are blinded to the reviewer's identity. Therefore, please do not disclose any information in your review that may identify you or your institution.

### How do I register to review with AJPM?

AJPM welcomes your interest in reviewing submissions. You can register to review at: <http://ees.elsevier.com/ajpm>

Once registered, keep your profile current with appropriate and detailed classifications of your research expertise, so your name can be found in relation to particular subject areas. Your classifications should identify your expertise in a clear and detailed fashion. Please go through the choices carefully to make certain all

relevant options are selected. Please refrain from selecting areas of peripheral interest, as that may lead to inappropriate invitations to review.

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## Deciding to Accept a Review

Before agreeing to review you should ask yourself:

### Is the manuscript in my field of expertise?

Ideally, the manuscript addresses a topic you are currently working in, meaning you will be up to date on current literature. You should be sure that you know enough about manuscript content to produce a quality review.

### Do I have time to complete the review by the deadline?

AJPM requests reviewer feedback within two weeks. While the Editorial Office is happy to accommodate an extended schedule for you if possible, AJPM strives to provide authors with editorial decisions in a timely manner. Regardless of whether the Editorial Office extends your due date, you should only agree to review if you can deliver your feedback on time.

### Do I have any conflicts of interest?

You may not undertake peer review for a manuscript if you have a conflict of interest (personal, financial, or professional) or any competing financial demands with the manuscript content you are invited to review.

Please note that having previously worked with authors on separate projects does not necessarily constitute a conflict of interest. It is a conflict, however, if you feel you will lack objectivity in your review.

If you accept the invitation to review and, while reading the full manuscript, you come to the conclusion that you do have a conflict of interest, you are required to withdraw from review. Should this happen, please inform the Editorial Office immediately and we will secure another reviewer.

### Am I able to treat the manuscript as a confidential document?

While under review, the manuscript should not be discussed with others without express permission from the Editorial Office. If you are collaborating with a colleague or student on your review, please note that in your comments to the editors. After you review the manuscript, you should not keep any copies.

### What if I need to Decline a Review Invitation?

If you decide not to accept an invitation to review, please use the link in your invitation email to notify the journal immediately so that editors can seek alternative reviewers.

If you are able, suggest alternative reviewers. Finding and securing appropriate reviewers is one of the most challenging facets of editorial peer review, so our Editorial Office is grateful for your support in this way.

## Preparing to Review

When you approach your review task, you should write a review that you would wish to receive as an author and researcher. The best reviewers demonstrate an ability to be objective, constructive, systematic and conscientious.

After accepting an invitation to review, the process begins with a read-through. Some reviewers may approach this read-through simply as a reader only and then put the manuscript away until it is time to review. Other reviewers might jot down initial questions and impressions.

After some time has passed, return to the manuscript to begin your review. Depending on your schedule and personal preferences, this could be a few hours, a day, or a week after your initial read-through. You may wish to consult [a Review Checklist](#) for guidance at this point.

Follow these general guidelines to achieve a quality review:

- Discuss article originality and contribution to current scholarship and science.
- Discuss the value of the topic to AJPM readership.
- Acknowledge strengths and weaknesses of study design, data collection, and data analysis.
- Discuss the author’s interpretation of results.
- Comment on manuscript writing, organization, statistical approaches, and tables and figures.
- Supply evidence and references (within text and in literature) to substantiate critical comments.
- Give a clear recommendation, with constructive comments in a courteous tone.
- Complete original review and any re-reviews in timely fashion.
- Refrain from making personal comments, such as those related to the author’s affiliation, rank, or previous publication history.

Some reviewers may wish to put their review aside for 24 hours before submitting to the journal in case they find they have new insights to add.

## Timeline for Reviewing

AJPM expects reviewers to complete feedback in a 2-week timeframe. The majority of accepted papers go through all three of the following stages of review:

Review type	Speed of decision	Feedback to author
In-house Editorial Office review	Less than one week	Reason for rejection or confirmation that manuscript is being forwarded for peer review
External peer review	Approximately 6 weeks (may be longer if undergoing Editorial Office statistical review)	Detailed review comments
Additional review	2 – 3 weeks	Detailed review comments

Some manuscript types, such as book reviews and commentaries, do not require peer review. In rare instances, a peer reviewed paper may not require re-review before acceptance.

## The AJPM Reviewer Form

Please note AJPM uses a single-blind review policy, and authors will not know the identity of their reviewers.

The online reviewer form is structured as follows:

## Comments to Authors

The purpose of comments to the authors is to provide constructive feedback. **All comments about manuscript quality, originality, and publication worthiness belong in comments to editor, not authors.** This section should address study design and methodology; identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas in need of clarification; and review appropriateness of citations. More detailed Review Checklists can be found [here](#).

The peer reviewer is not obligated to provide copy edits. All accepted papers will go through several levels of edits after acceptance, so it is unnecessary for a reviewer to identify grammatical errors on text that may be rewritten in revision. One exception is that if you find authors are using terminology that is dated or being phased out, we would welcome this correction. In addition, we expect reviewers to refrain from making unprofessional personal comments to the author(s) or engage in any unreasonable self-promotion (i.e. recommendations to authors to cite the reviewer's own paper).

Please do not rewrite the paper by redirecting the scope of the research. Seek to understand what the authors have set out to demonstrate, and critically analyze the results to see if they have accomplished what they intended. If you conclude that authors have not accomplished what they intended, please identify how the authors can improve their work. If you do not feel the research adds anything new to the literature, please let the editor know.

### Comments to Editors

In addition to your comments and recommendations for authors, AJPM provides you with the opportunity to communicate directly to editors; these comments are not typically provided to authors.

Please do not use Comments to the Editors to make substantive review points. Any general concerns that impact your overall recommendation should be clearly indicated in your author feedback, and the tone of your comments to editors should be consistent with that to authors (for example, please avoid writing constructive comments with mild criticism to authors, coupled with more detailed critique or a different recommendation to editors. If significant disparity exists between your comments to authors and to editors, editor comments may be disclosed to authors).

Some examples of appropriate comments to the editors:

- Explain your approach to the review and/or your own expertise in the area.
- Summarize your reasons for your rating and recommendations; advise editors more bluntly why this manuscript is a good or poor fit for AJPM.
- Consider the original aspects of the work and its importance.
- Disclose that you have seen earlier versions of the paper; communicate ethical concerns or other issues of this sort (including conflicts of interest and scientific misconduct).

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### Reviewer Recommendations

Reviewer recommendations guide the decisions of editors, but please note that editors will not always be in agreement with reviewer conclusions. Also, it is common for manuscripts to receive mixed reviews.

<b>Reject Recommendation</b>	A reject recommendation may be appropriate if a paper adds nothing to the existing literature, if there are fatal flaws in the methodology, or if it is inappropriate for the journal's audience.
<b>Major Revisions Recommendation</b>	A major revisions recommendation may be appropriate if a manuscript brings value to the field, but substantial work is needed before it is worthy of publication.
<b>Minor Revisions Recommendation</b>	A minor revisions recommendation may be appropriate if the paper is well-written and has novel findings but has areas in need of clarification or other minor revision.

<p>Shorten to Brief Report Recommendation</p>	<p>A shorten to a brief report may be appropriate if a paper makes a valuable contribution but is not complex enough to require 3,000 words.</p>
<p>Accept Recommendation</p>	<p>An accept recommendation may be appropriate if the only changes needed can be made in copyediting. Please note it is very unusual for a paper to be worthy of acceptance in the first draft submitted. Please use the <a href="#">Reviewer Checklist</a> to see if there are any issues you may have missed before recommending acceptance on a manuscript that has not yet gone through revision.</p>
<p>Re-Review</p>	<p>In cases where Editors request that authors revise and resubmit their manuscript, the revised submission is generally sent back to some or all original peer reviewers for re-review. Approximately half of all papers that go through peer review also require re-review. Reviewers are asked to assess authors' responses to previous recommendations as well as changes in the manuscript content that reflect these changes. Further rounds of re-review may be necessary if reviewers disagree or if the manuscript is highly technical.</p>

## Submitting Your Review

Before submitting your review to AJPM, please make certain that you have addressed the following:

- Mention all conflicts of interest.
- Complete the review checklist form, and use the space for free text comments to editors and to authors.
- Number your comments; this helps authors when responding.
- Acknowledge help from others if, after checking with the Editorial Office, you have shared the review task with colleagues or graduate students, please acknowledge their help in your review.
- Make certain your review covers the positives of the research, identify limitations, suggest areas for revision, and assess the potential contribution to the field.
- Send in your review on time. If you need more time, please contact the Editorial Office at [ajpm@umich.edu](mailto:ajpm@umich.edu) so that we're aware of the need for a deadline extension and can notify authors of any delay, as necessary.

## Additional Reviewer Development

Working with a mentor is an excellent way for new reviewers to develop their reviewing skills. In addition to finding a mentor, there are several training modules and guides to peer review available online:

## External Resources

[Elsevier Research Academy](#)

[Publons Academy](#)

[American Chemical Society Reviewer Lab](#)