

FOR AUTHORS

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

NOTE: These guidelines are retrieved from Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan manual for "**Ethical Guidelines for Journals**", which has been prepared by Dr. Rukhsana Kausar, Director Institute of Applied and Clinical Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

FOR AUTHORS:

The following ethical guidelines are mandatory for all author(s). Violation of these guidelines may result in the application of penalties by the competent authorities, which will lead to the suspension or cancellation of publishing rights.

REPORTING STANDARDS:

- Will ensure that the research report and data contains satisfactory detail and references.
- False, knowingly inaccurate, or inappropriate statements are unethical and unacceptable in any way/case.

ORIGINALITY OF RESEARCH AND PLAGIARISM:

- If Plagiarism is found in any of its forms, it sets up unethical publishing manners and leads to the rejection of research.
- Material quoted in the same must be placed in quotation marks.
- The similarity index shouldn't be more than 20%, As per HEC's policy.

DECLARATION & CERTIFICATE:

- A declaration certificate will be required that the Article/Research Paper/ manuscript contains only author(s) original work that is not under consideration for publishing in any other journal/proceedings in any form.
- The co-authored paper must be accompanied by an undertaking in order to claim the right to authorship and to ensure that all have agreed to the sequence/order of authorship.

SUBMISSION TO OTHER JOURNALS FOR PUBLICATION:

- Submission of the same manuscript to more than one journal is unethical and leads to rejection at once.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SOURCES IN RESEARCH:

- A paper must contain a proper acknowledgment of the work of others.
- The author(s) must also acknowledge the contributions of people, organizations, and institutes who assisted the process of research or financial funding (in the acknowledgment).
- It is the duty of the author(s) to conduct a literature review and cite the original publications.

RESEARCH WORK AUTHORSHIP CREDIT:

- Authorship of the work will be only credited to those who have made a significant contribution in the presentation of the concept, data analysis, and writing up of the manuscript.
- The corresponding author(s) should ensure that all co-authors have seen and approved the final version of the paper and have agreed to its submission for publication.

PRIVACY OF PARTICIPANTS/AUTHOR(S):

- Authors must respect the privacy of the participant(s) of the research.
- Authors must ensure that in examples where the identity of the participant needs to be revealed in the study, obvious and informed consent of the concerned party is obtained.

RESEARCH DATA ACCESS AND PRESERVATION:

- If any 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.

ALREADY DISCLOSURE AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

- The potential conflicts of interest of all author(s) must be conveyed to the editor at the earliest possible stage, including but not limited to employment, consultancies, honoraria, etc.
- If necessary for Research, all sources of financial support for the project should be disclosed at the earliest.

CONDITIONS OF MANUSCRIPT'S ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION:

- 60 days after submission of the Paper and receiving an acknowledgment letter, the author can ask about the status of his article.
- In case of any recommended and suggested revision, the author(s) will be demanded to revise his research accordingly in the time given by the Editor.

Later on, he must provide a description of all corrections made in the manuscript and the revised copy.

- If the author does not satisfy with the decision of rejection, the author can appeal the decision by contacting the Editor.

FOR REVIEWERS

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FOR REVIEWERS [EXPLANATION]:

The peer reviewer is responsible for critically reading and evaluating a manuscript in their specialty field, and then providing respectful, constructive, and honest feedback to authors about their submission. It is appropriate for the Peer Reviewer to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the article, ways to improve the strength and quality of the work, and evaluate the relevance and originality of the manuscript. Review of the manuscript by reviewers is not only an essential component of formal scholarly engagement, but is also a fundamental step in the publication process as it aids Editor in the editorial decision making. It also allows author(s) improve their manuscript through editorial communications. Scholars accepting to review a 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 the trust, and demands that a reviewer is supposed to fulfill ethically. These professionals are the momentum arm of the review process, but they may be performing this job without any formal training. As a consequence, they may be (especially young professionals) unaware of their ethical obligations. The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan wants to list down 'Ethical Guidelines for Reviewers' so that all reviewers provide their valuable services in a standardized manner.

CONDUCTING A REVIEW

INITIAL STEPS:

Read the manuscript, supplementary data files and ancillary material thoroughly (e.g., reviewer instructions, required ethics and policy statements), getting back to the journal if anything is not clear and requesting any missing or incomplete items you need. Do not contact the authors directly without the permission of the journal. It is

important to understand the scope of the review before commencing (i.e., is a review of raw data expected?).

CONFIDENTIALITY:

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

Respect the confidentiality of the peer review process and refrain from using information obtained during the peer review process for your own or another's advantage, or to disadvantage or discredit others. Do not involve anyone else in the review of a manuscript (including early career researchers you are mentoring), without first obtaining permission from the journal. The names of any individuals who have helped with the review should be included so that they are associated with the manuscript in the journal's records and can also receive due recognition for their efforts.

FAVORITISM AND COMPETING INTERESTS:

It is important to remain unbiased by considerations related to the nationality, religious or political beliefs, gender or other characteristics of the authors, origins of a manuscript or by commercial considerations. If you discover a competing interest that might prevent you from providing a fair and unbiased review, notify the journal and seek advice. While waiting for a response, refrain from looking at the manuscript and associated material in case the request to review is rescinded. Similarly, notify the journal as soon as possible if you find you do not have the necessary expertise to assess the relevant aspects of a manuscript so as not to unduly delay the review process. In the case of double-blind review, if you suspect the identity of the author(s) notify the journal if this knowledge raises any potential competing or conflict of interest.

SUSPICION OF ETHICS VIOLATIONS: **CONSIDERATIONS:**

- If the reviewer suspects that the research paper is almost the same as someone else's work, s/he will ethically inform the Editor and provide its citation as a reference.
- If the reviewer suspects that results in the research paper to be untrue/unrealistic/fake, s/he will share it with the Editor,
- If there has been an indication of violating 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 is based on any previous research study or is replica of an earlier work, or the work is plagiarized for e.g. the author has not acknowledged/referenced others' work appropriately, then this should

If you come across any irregularities with respect to research and publication ethics do let the journal know. For example, you may have concerns that misconduct occurred during either the research or the writing and submission of the manuscript, or you may notice substantial similarity between the manuscript and a concurrent submission to another journal or a published article. In the case of these or any other ethical concerns, contact the editor directly and do not attempt to investigate on your own. It is appropriate to cooperate, in confidence, with the journal, but not to personally investigate further unless the journal asks for additional information or advice.

TRANSFERABILITY OF PEER REVIEW:

Publishers may have policies related to transferring peer reviews to other journals in the publisher's portfolio (sometimes referred to as portable or cascading peer review). Reviewers may be asked to give permission for the transfer of their reviews if that is journal policy. If a manuscript is rejected from one journal and submitted to another, and you are asked to review that same manuscript, you should be prepared to review the manuscript afresh as it may have changed between the two submissions and the journal's criteria for evaluation and acceptance may be different. In the interests of transparency and efficiency it may be appropriate to provide your original review for the new journal (with permission to do so from the original journal), explaining that you had reviewed the submission previously and noting any changes.

SUITABILITY AND RAPIDITY:

The 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 for a review report, and
- Not unnecessarily delay 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:

- The 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,
- The reviewer may justifiably criticize a manuscript but it would be inappropriate to resort to personal criticism on the author(s), and
- The 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 bias.

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 confidential and the reviewer shall not be allowed to use if for his/her personal study,
- A reviewer must declare any potentially conflicting interests (e.g. personal, financial, intellectual, professional, political or religious). In such situation, s/he will be required to follow the journal's policies.
- A reviewer should be honest enough to declare conflicts of interest, if, the research paper under review is the same as 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 the situation.
- Without the prior approval of the Editor.
- then this should be brought in the Editor's knowledge.

CONTENT QUALITY AND ORIGINALITY:

- Is the article sufficiently novel and interesting to warrant publication?
- Does the article adhere to the journal's standards?
- Is the research question an important one?
- In order to determine its originality and appropriateness for the journal, it might be helpful to think of the research in terms of what percentile it is in?
- Is it in the top 25% of papers in this field?

You might wish to do a quick literature search using tools such as Scopus to see if there are any reviews of the area. If the research has been covered previously, pass on

references of those works to the editor. As for as evaluating originality, the reviewers should consider the following elements:

- Does the research paper add to existing knowledge?
- Are the research questions and/or hypotheses in line with the objective of the research work?

ORGANIZATION AND CLARITY:

Title: Does it clearly describe the article?

Abstract: Does it reflect the content of the article?

Introduction: Does it describe what the author hoped to achieve accurately, and clearly state the problem being investigated? Normally, the introduction should summarize relevant research to provide context, and explain what other authors' findings, if any, are being challenged or extended. It should describe the experiment, the hypothesis and the general experimental design or method.

Method: Does the author accurately explain how the data was collected? Is the design suitable for answering the question posed? Is there sufficient information present for you to replicate the research? Does the article identify the procedures followed? Are these ordered in a meaningful way? If the methods are new, are they explained in detail? Was the sampling appropriate? Have the equipment and materials been adequately described? Does the article make it clear what type of data was recorded; has the author been precise in describing measurements?

Results: This is where the author/s should explain in words what he/she discovered in the research. It should be clearly laid out and in a logical sequence. You will need to consider if the appropriate analysis has been conducted. Are the statistics correct? If you are not comfortable with statistics, please advise the editor when you submit your report. Interpretation of results should not be included in this section.

Conclusion/Discussion: Are the claims in this section supported by the results, do they seem reasonable? Have the authors indicated how the results relate to expectations and to earlier research? Does the article support or contradict previous theories? Does the conclusion explain how the research has moved the body of scientific knowledge forward?

PREPARING A REPORT

FORMAT:

Follow journal's instructions for writing and posting the review. If a particular format or scoring rubric is required, use the tools supplied by the journal. Be objective and constructive in your review, providing feedback that will help the authors to improve their manuscript. For example, be specific in your critique, and provide supporting evidence with appropriate references to substantiate general statements, to help editors in their evaluation. Be professional and refrain from being hostile or inflammatory and from making libelous or derogatory personal comments or unfounded accusations.

APPROPRIATE FEEDBACK:

Bear in mind that the editor requires a fair, honest, and unbiased assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript. Most journals allow reviewers to provide confidential comments to the editor as well as comments to be read by the authors. The journal may also ask for a recommendation to accept/revise/reject; any recommendation should be congruent with the comments provided in the review. If you have not reviewed the whole manuscript, do indicate which aspects of the manuscript you have assessed. Ensure your comments and recommendations for the editor are consistent with your report for the authors; most feedback should be put in the report that the authors will see. Confidential comments to the editor should not be a place for denigration or false accusation, done in the knowledge that the authors will not see your comments.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE:

Remember it is the authors' paper, so do not attempt to rewrite it to your own preferred style if it is basically sound and clear; suggestions for changes that improve clarity are, however, important. In addition, be aware of the sensitivities surrounding language issues that are due to the authors writing in a language that is not their first or most proficient language, and phrase the feedback appropriately and with due respect.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK:

It is the job of the peer reviewer to comment on the quality and rigor of the work they receive. If the work is not clear because of missing analyses, the reviewer should comment and explain what additional analyses would clarify the work submitted. It is not the job of the reviewer to extend the work beyond its current scope. Be clear which (if any) suggested additional investigations are essential to support claims made in the manuscript under consideration and which will just strengthen or extend the work.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

Prepare the report by yourself, unless you have permission from the journal to involve another person. Refrain from making unfair negative comments or including

unjustified criticisms of any competitors' work that is mentioned in the manuscript. Refrain from suggesting that authors include citations to your (or an associate's) work merely to increase citation counts or to enhance the visibility of your or your associate's work; suggestions must be based on valid academic or technological reasons. Do not intentionally prolong the review process, either by delaying the submission of your review or by requesting unnecessary additional information from the journal or author.

FOR EDITOR

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

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FOR EDITOR:

Being an editor, he/she should carry out their responsibilities with much dedication to improve the quality of the journal. It is advisable to oversee the journal policies time to time and assisting the publisher in maintaining the journal's quality towards serving the scientific community. The 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 the author (s) and the affiliating institution (if any). The 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.

GUIDELINES FOR BEST EDITOR'S CHARACTERISTICS:

Shortly, these Characteristics should be in an Editor:

- To improve the ways of journal processes, the editor should actively seek the views of editorial board members, reviewers, authors

- Encourage research into peer review, technological advances and reassess journal processes in the light of new discoveries
- He welcomes their editor's suggestions in providing appropriate resources, guidance from experts and training to perform the publisher's role in a professional manner and improve the quality of the journal
- Encourage initiatives designed to prevent research misconduct and educate researchers about publication ethics
- Encourages submission of quality articles to the journal by personally recruiting authors, assisting them with outreach, and ensuring the marketing plan is executed
- Ensures feedback provided to authors is constructive, fair, and timely
- Should determine whether a submitted manuscript is appropriate for the journal
- Article submitted for peer review is a privileged communication that should be treated in confidence, taking care to guard the author's identity and work
- Recruit high profile reviewers using multiple sources, e.g., personal recommendations, Web databases, published choice review
- Should monitor the process of peer review and take steps to ensure this is of high standard
- Communicate with reviewers as regularly as possible, according to their availability and give them clear instructions in maintaining quality of the journal
- Avoid conflicts of interest when making assignments. Check whether reviewer has history of conflict with author
- Should encourage reviewers to comment on- ethical questions and possible research and publication misconduct raised by submissions (e.g. unethical research design, inappropriate data manipulation and presentation)
- The originality of article submissions and to be alert to redundant publication and plagiarism
- Ensure to rewrite content when required.(Typographical errors, incorrect line or page breaks, Spelling errors, Errors in grammar and syntax, Errors in word usage, graphs, the styling of tables, and other art, including their labels, captions, and text mentions, Ambiguous vocabulary and syntax)
- Should communicate directly with the author and the review team
- Recommend acceptance or rejection of the articles considered for publication to the journal Editor
- Should be able to resolve any conflicts
- **THE EDITOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES:**

The Editor of a research journal should be responsible for:

- Establishing and maintaining 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:

- The Editor must ensure that the Editorial Board comprises prominent scholars of the field who can adequately promote the journal,
- The Editorial Board should comprise of and be responsible for the following:
 - An Editorial Committee, who will be responsible for providing logistics, and
 - Advisory Committee, who will be responsible for reviewing the submitted research articles, 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 constitution of the Board if required,
- The Editor should inform new board members about ethical guidelines and their expected role and update the Editorial Board members about development, challenges and any changes made in the journal policy,
- The Editorial Board should maintain quality of the journal because an assigned category by the HEC (e.g. W, X, Y, and Z categories) will depend on the quality of published papers in it. It is the professional duty of the Board members to select credible research work, and
- To ensure smooth functioning of the journal, the Editors are responsible for conducting the Editorial Board meetings on regular basis (at least twice a year).

1. FAIR PLAY AND IMPARTIALITY:

- The criteria for the selection of research papers must be impartial and the Editor should select academically and scientifically sound articles,
- The 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.

- To ensure evaluation of the content of research papers impartially,
- 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,
- To ensure impartiality of the review process by informing the reviewer (s) that s/he needs to disclose any conflicts of interest regarding the submitted research paper.

1. **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, only the Editor may 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.

1. **EDITING AND FORMATTING GUIDELINES:**

- The Editor 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.

1. **THE REVIEW PROCESS:**

- Details about the 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.
- The 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.

- The 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.
- The Editor must ensure that peer review process is prompt, nondiscriminatory and highly professional.
- The Editor should develop a system of confidentiality of research papers undergoing the review process.
- The Editor is required to send reviewers' comments to author(s) promptly and should ensure that the corrections suggested by the reviewers are incorporated by the author(s) in true letter and spirit.
- The Editor to critically evaluate peer review practices regularly and make improvements, if, require.
- The 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
- The Editor should refer troublesome 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.

1. **DEALING WITH MISCONDUCT:**

- The Editor should encourage reviewers to comment on ethical issues and possible research and publication misconduct (e.g. inappropriate research design, incomplete detail on participant's consent, data manipulation, and presentation).
- The 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).
- The Editor should confirm plagiarism (carry out objective check through Turnitin) and/or searching for similar titles to the submitted research paper, and
- The 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.

1. **TRANSPARENCY:**

- The 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 is allowed for those authors who 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

- The Editor should adopt authorship or co-authorship policy that will set an 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.

1. **CONFLICT OF INTEREST:**

- The 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).
- The 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 an Editorial Board member, and
- The 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 an Editorial Board member.
- In case of article (s) submitted by the Editor, the decision pertaining to the editor's submitted article/s, one of the Associate Editors must take responsibility for the evaluation of the article and information pertaining to reviewers should be kept confidential.

1. **DISCLOSURE:**

- The 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 the peer review process must be kept confidential and not used for personal gains.

1. **PUBLICATION DECISIONS:**

- The Editor should only shortlist research papers which have relevance to the scope of the journal clearly stated in the Journal, using his /her judgment, but without any personal bias.
- After completion of the reviewing process, the submission of revised manuscript, and assessing the quality and validity, the Editor has a right to accept or reject a research paper.
- The Editor's decisions to accept or reject a paper for publication should be based purely on merit, academic standards and professional demands of the journal.
- The Editor must justify the reason (s) of rejecting a research paper to author(s). This may include:

- Failure to fit in the scope of the journal (may 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)
 - The Editor is required to timely communicate the editorial decision to the author(s),
 - The Editors should not reverse decisions in favor or against author(s) on their own.

1. ESTABLISHING A PROCEDURE FOR APPEAL:

- The 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.

Infringement of Ethical boundaries in any manner.

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- The corresponding author(s) should ensure that all co-authors have seen and approved the final version of the paper and have agreed to its submission for publication.

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FOR REVIEWERS [EXPLANATION]:

The peer reviewer is responsible for critically reading and evaluating a manuscript in their specialty field, and then providing respectful, constructive, and honest feedback to authors about their submission. It is appropriate for the Peer Reviewer to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the article, ways to improve the strength and quality of the work, and evaluate the relevance and originality of the manuscript. Review of the

manuscript by reviewers is not only an essential component of formal scholarly engagement, but is also a fundamental step in the publication process as it aids Editor in the editorial decision making. It also allows author(s) improve their manuscript through editorial communications. Scholars accepting to review a 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 the trust, and demands that a reviewer is supposed to fulfill ethically. These professionals are the momentum arm of the review process, but they may be performing this job without any formal training. As a consequence, they may be (especially young professionals) unaware of their ethical obligations. The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan wants to list down 'Ethical Guidelines for Reviewers' so that all reviewers provide their valuable services in a standardized manner.

CONDUCTING A REVIEW

INITIAL STEPS:

Read the manuscript, supplementary data files and ancillary material thoroughly (e.g., reviewer instructions, required ethics and policy statements), getting back to the journal if anything is not clear and requesting any missing or incomplete items you need. Do not contact the authors directly without the permission of the journal. It is important to understand the scope of the review before commencing (i.e., is a review of raw data expected?).

CONFIDENTIALITY:

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

Respect the confidentiality of the peer review process and refrain from using information obtained during the peer review process for your own or another's advantage, or to disadvantage or discredit others . Do not involve anyone else in the review of a manuscript (including early career researchers you are mentoring), without first obtaining permission from the journal . The names of any individuals who have helped with the review should be included so that they are associated with the manuscript in the journal's records and can also receive due recognition for their efforts.

FAVORITISM AND COMPETING INTERESTS:

It is important to remain unbiased by considerations related to the nationality, religious or political beliefs, gender or other characteristics of the authors, origins of a manuscript or by commercial considerations. If you discover a competing interest that might prevent you from providing a fair and unbiased review, notify the journal and seek advice. While waiting for a response, refrain from looking at the manuscript and associated material in case the request to review is rescinded. Similarly, notify the journal as soon as possible if you find you do not have the necessary expertise to assess the relevant aspects of a manuscript so as not to unduly delay the review process. In the case of double-blind review, if you suspect the identity of the author(s) notify the journal if this knowledge raises any potential competing or conflict of interest.

SUSPICION OF ETHICS VIOLATIONS: **CONSIDERATIONS:**

- If the reviewer suspects that the research paper is almost the same as someone else's work, s/he will ethically inform the Editor and provide its citation as a reference.
- If the reviewer suspects that results in the research paper to be untrue/unrealistic/fake, s/he will share it with the Editor,
- If there has been an indication of violating 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 is based on any previous research study or is replica of an earlier work, or the work is plagiarized for e.g. the author has not acknowledged/referenced others' work appropriately, then this should

If you come across any irregularities with respect to research and publication ethics do let the journal know. For example, you may have concerns that misconduct occurred during either the research or the writing and submission of the manuscript, or you may notice substantial similarity between the manuscript and a concurrent submission to another journal or a published article. In the case of these or any other ethical concerns, contact the editor directly and do not attempt to investigate on your own. It is appropriate to cooperate, in confidence, with the journal, but not to personally investigate further unless the journal asks for additional information or advice.

TRANSFERABILITY OF PEER REVIEW:

Publishers may have policies related to transferring peer reviews to other journals in the publisher's portfolio (sometimes referred to as portable or cascading peer review). Reviewers may be asked to give permission for the transfer of their reviews if that is journal policy. If a manuscript is rejected from one journal and submitted to another, and you are asked to review that same manuscript, you should be prepared to review the manuscript afresh as it may have changed between the two submissions and the journal's criteria for evaluation and acceptance may be different. In the interests of

transparency and efficiency it may be appropriate to provide your original review for the new journal (with permission to do so from the original journal), explaining that you had reviewed the submission previously and noting any changes.

SUITABILITY AND RAPIDITY:

The 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 for a review report, and
- Not unnecessarily delay 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:

- The 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,
- The reviewer may justifiably criticize a manuscript but it would be inappropriate to resort to personal criticism on the author(s), and
- The 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 bias.

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 confidential and the reviewer shall not be allowed to use if for his/her personal study,
- A reviewer must declare any potentially conflicting interests (e.g. personal, financial, intellectual, professional, political or religious). In such situation, s/he will be required to follow the journal's policies.

- A reviewer should be honest enough to declare conflicts of interest, if the research paper under review is the same as 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 the situation.
- Without the prior approval of the Editor.
- then this should be brought in the Editor's knowledge.

CONTENT QUALITY AND ORIGINALITY:

- Is the article sufficiently novel and interesting to warrant publication?
- Does the article adhere to the journal's standards?
- Is the research question an important one?
- In order to determine its originality and appropriateness for the journal, it might be helpful to think of the research in terms of what percentile it is in?
- Is it in the top 25% of papers in this field?

You might wish to do a quick literature search using tools such as Scopus to see if there are any reviews of the area. If the research has been covered previously, pass on references of those works to the editor. As for as evaluating originality, the reviewers should consider the following elements:

- Does the research paper add to existing knowledge?
- Are the research questions and/or hypotheses in line with the objective of the research work?

ORGANIZATION AND CLARITY:

Title: Does it clearly describe the article?

Abstract: Does it reflect the content of the article?

Introduction: Does it describe what the author hoped to achieve accurately, and clearly state the problem being investigated? Normally, the introduction should summarize relevant research to provide context, and explain what other authors' findings, if any, are being challenged or extended. It should describe the experiment, the hypothesis and the general experimental design or method.

Method: Does the author accurately explain how the data was collected? Is the design suitable for answering the question posed? Is there sufficient information present for you to replicate the research? Does the article identify the procedures followed? Are

these ordered in a meaningful way? If the methods are new, are they explained in detail? Was the sampling appropriate? Have the equipment and materials been adequately described? Does the article make it clear what type of data was recorded; has the author been precise in describing measurements?

Results: This is where the author/s should explain in words what he/she discovered in the research. It should be clearly laid out and in a logical sequence. You will need to consider if the appropriate analysis has been conducted. Are the statistics correct? If you are not comfortable with statistics, please advise the editor when you submit your report. Interpretation of results should not be included in this section.

Conclusion/Discussion: Are the claims in this section supported by the results, do they seem reasonable? Have the authors indicated how the results relate to expectations and to earlier research? Does the article support or contradict previous theories? Does the conclusion explain how the research has moved the body of scientific knowledge forward?

PREPARING A REPORT

FORMAT:

Follow journal's instructions for writing and posting the review. If a particular format or scoring rubric is required, use the tools supplied by the journal. Be objective and constructive in your review, providing feedback that will help the authors to improve their manuscript. For example, be specific in your critique, and provide supporting evidence with appropriate references to substantiate general statements, to help editors in their evaluation. Be professional and refrain from being hostile or inflammatory and from making libelous or derogatory personal comments or unfounded accusations.

APPROPRIATE FEEDBACK:

Bear in mind that the editor requires a fair, honest, and unbiased assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript. Most journals allow reviewers to provide confidential comments to the editor as well as comments to be read by the authors. The journal may also ask for a recommendation to accept/revise/reject; any recommendation should be congruent with the comments provided in the review. If you have not reviewed the whole manuscript, do indicate which aspects of the manuscript you have assessed. Ensure your comments and recommendations for the editor are consistent with your report for the authors; most feedback should be put in the report that the authors will see. Confidential comments to the editor should not be a place for denigration or false accusation, done in the knowledge that the authors will not see your comments.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE:

Remember it is the authors' paper, so do not attempt to rewrite it to your own preferred style if it is basically sound and clear; suggestions for changes that improve clarity are, however, important. In addition, be aware of the sensitivities surrounding language issues that are due to the authors writing in a language that is not their first or most proficient language, and phrase the feedback appropriately and with due respect.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK:

It is the job of the peer reviewer to comment on the quality and rigor of the work they receive. If the work is not clear because of missing analyses, the reviewer should comment and explain what additional analyses would clarify the work submitted. It is not the job of the reviewer to extend the work beyond its current scope. Be clear which (if any) suggested additional investigations are essential to support claims made in the manuscript under consideration and which will just strengthen or extend the work.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

Prepare the report by yourself, unless you have permission from the journal to involve another person. Refrain from making unfair negative comments or including unjustified criticisms of any competitors' work that is mentioned in the manuscript. Refrain from suggesting that authors include citations to your (or an associate's) work merely to increase citation counts or to enhance the visibility of your or your associate's work; suggestions must be based on valid academic or technological reasons. Do not intentionally prolong the review process, either by delaying the submission of your review or by requesting unnecessary additional information from the journal or author.

FOR EDITOR

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

NOTE: *These guidelines are retrieved from Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan manual for "Ethical Guidelines for Journals", which has been prepared by Dr. Rukhsana Kausar, Director Institute of Applied and Clinical Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore.*

FOR EDITOR:

Being an editor, he/she should carry out their responsibilities with much dedication to improve the quality of the journal. It is advisable to oversee the journal policies time to time and assisting the publisher in maintaining the journal's quality towards serving the scientific community. The 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 the author (s) and the affiliating institution (if any). The 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.

GUIDELINES FOR BEST EDITOR'S CHARACTERISTICS:

Shortly, these Characteristics should be in an Editor:

- To improve the ways of journal processes, the editor should actively seek the views of editorial board members, reviewers, authors
- Encourage research into peer review, technological advances and reassess journal processes in the light of new discoveries
- He welcomes their editor's suggestions in providing appropriate resources, guidance from experts and training to perform the publisher's role in a professional manner and improve the quality of the journal
- Encourage initiatives designed to prevent research misconduct and educate researchers about publication ethics
- Encourages submission of quality articles to the journal by personally recruiting authors, assisting them with outreach, and ensuring the marketing plan is executed
- Ensures feedback provided to authors is constructive, fair, and timely
- Should determine whether a submitted manuscript is appropriate for the journal
- Article submitted for peer review is a privileged communication that should be treated in confidence, taking care to guard the author's identity and work
- Recruit high profile reviewers using multiple sources, e.g., personal recommendations, Web databases, published choice review
- Should monitor the process of peer review and take steps to ensure this is of high standard
- Communicate with reviewers as regularly as possible, according to their availability and give them clear instructions in maintaining quality of the journal
- Avoid conflicts of interest when making assignments. Check whether reviewer has history of conflict with author

- Should encourage reviewers to comment on- ethical questions and possible research and publication misconduct raised by submissions (e.g. unethical research design, inappropriate data manipulation and presentation)
- The originality of article submissions and to be alert to redundant publication and plagiarism
- Ensure to rewrite content when required.(Typographical errors, incorrect line or page breaks, Spelling errors, Errors in grammar and syntax, Errors in word usage, graphs, the styling of tables, and other art, including their labels, captions, and text mentions, Ambiguous vocabulary and syntax)
- Should communicate directly with the author and the review team
- Recommend acceptance or rejection of the articles considered for publication to the journal Editor
- Should be able to resolve any conflicts
- **THE EDITOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES:**

The Editor of a research journal should be responsible for:

- Establishing and maintaining 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.

2. FORMATION OF EDITORIAL BOARD:

- The Editor must ensure that the Editorial Board comprises prominent scholars of the field who can adequately promote the journal,
- The Editorial Board should comprise of and be responsible for the following:
- An Editorial Committee, who will be responsible for providing logistics, and

- Advisory Committee, who will be responsible for reviewing the submitted research articles, 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 constitution of the Board if required,
- The Editor should inform new board members about ethical guidelines and their expected role and update the Editorial Board members about development, challenges and any changes made in the journal policy,
- The Editorial Board should maintain quality of the journal because an assigned category by the HEC (e.g. W, X, Y, and Z categories) will depend on the quality of published papers in it. It is the professional duty of the Board members to select credible research work, and
- To ensure smooth functioning of the journal, the Editors are responsible for conducting 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 the Editor should select academically and scientifically sound articles,
- The 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.
- To ensure evaluation of the content of research papers impartially,
- 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,
- To ensure impartiality of the review process by informing the reviewer (s) that s/he needs to disclose any conflicts of interest regarding the submitted research paper.

2. **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, only the Editor may 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.

2. EDITING AND FORMATTING GUIDELINES:

- The Editor 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.

2. THE REVIEW PROCESS:

- Details about the 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.
- The 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.
- The 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.
- The Editor must ensure that peer review process is prompt, nondiscriminatory and highly professional.
- The Editor should develop a system of confidentiality of research papers undergoing the review process.
- The Editor is required to send reviewers' comments to author(s) promptly and should ensure that the corrections suggested by the reviewers are incorporated by the author(s) in true letter and spirit.
- The Editor to critically evaluate peer review practices regularly and make improvements, if, require.
- The 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
- The Editor should refer troublesome 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.

2. DEALING WITH MISCONDUCT:

- The Editor should encourage reviewers to comment on ethical issues and possible research and publication misconduct (e.g. inappropriate research design, incomplete detail on participant's consent, data manipulation, and presentation).
- The 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).
- The Editor should confirm plagiarism (carry out objective check through Turnitin) and/or searching for similar titles to the submitted research paper, and
- The 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.

2. **TRANSPARENCY:**

- The 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 is allowed for those authors who 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
- The Editor should adopt authorship or co-authorship policy that will set an 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.

2. **CONFLICT OF INTEREST:**

- The 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).
- The 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 an Editorial Board member, and
- The 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 an Editorial Board member.

- In case of article (s) submitted by the Editor, the decision pertaining to the editor's submitted article/s, one of the Associate Editors must take responsibility for the evaluation of the article and information pertaining to reviewers should be kept confidential.

2. **DISCLOSURE:**

- The 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 the peer review process must be kept confidential and not used for personal gains.

2. **PUBLICATION DECISIONS:**

- The Editor should only shortlist research papers which have relevance to the scope of the journal clearly stated in the Journal, using his /her judgment, but without any personal bias.
- After completion of the reviewing process, the submission of revised manuscript, and assessing the quality and validity, the Editor has a right to accept or reject a research paper.
- The Editor's decisions to accept or reject a paper for publication should be based purely on merit, academic standards and professional demands of the journal.
- The Editor must justify the reason (s) of rejecting a research paper to author(s). This may include:
 - Failure to fit in the scope of the journal (may 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)
 - The Editor is required to timely communicate the editorial decision to the author(s),
 - The Editors should not reverse decisions in favor or against author(s) on their own.

2. **ESTABLISHING A PROCEDURE FOR APPEAL:**

- The 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.

Infringement of Ethical boundaries in any manner.