REVIEWERS' GUIDELINES

Dear Reviewer,

Authors rely on your constructive and detailed feedback to improve their research.

To assist you in this process we have prepared a general review suggestion. We would like to kindly ask you to go through these suggestions before you start your review.

- The aim of this conference is to be a developmental forum through which the authors and participants will be able to publish improved work. Your review is the first step in this process. Thus, please use a language and suggestions that are constructive and will contribute to positive development of the submitted manuscript. In your review please cover the quality of the research question/hypothesis, depth and breadth of literature review, correctness of the methodology, reporting of the results (for empirical papers) and explication of the contribution.
- Your review comments for authors should be in a structured form (with bullet points) and where possible with the page number or paragraph. A good review is usually at least a half-single-spaced page in length.
- **You should suggest the following recommendation**: Strong reject or Reject or Weak reject or Borderline paper or Weak accept or Accept or Strong accept and assign an overall rating of the manuscript (from -3 to 3).

You will also be asked to grade the manuscript on a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 – very poor, 2 – poor, 3 – fair, 4 – good, 5 – excellent) for:

1. Topic
2. Abstract and Keywords
3. Goal and Structure
4. Introduction
5. Materials and Methods
6. Results
7. Discussion
8. Conclusion
9. Literature
10. Author's knowledge
11. Length
12. Figures and Tables
13. Writing style and English language
14. References
15. Summary of paper

Please post all reviews within three weeks after receiving the manuscript and do not provide information in your review that reveals your identity.

How to perform a peer review?

Here are some guidelines and a step-by-step guide to help you conduct your peer review.

Step by step guide to reviewing a manuscript

When invited to review, you will receive the manuscript abstract to help you decide whether to accept. Please respond promptly to avoid delays and disclose any potential conflicts of interest early. Editors depend on timely, constructive reviews to support publication decisions. Provide clear, specific, and actionable feedback; vague comments are of limited value. Include comments for the authors and, if needed, confidential notes for the editors. Even in anonymous review, write nothing you would not be comfortable discussing with the authors directly.

The first read-through of a manuscript

The abstract in the invitation should allow you to understand the manuscript's aims, key data, and main conclusions. If anything is unclear, note this in your review and suggest how the abstract/manuscript could be improved. Begin with a quick initial skim to form an overall impression and a preliminary recommendation (accept, revise, or reject).

Key considerations during your first read-through

- **Take notes:** Keep notes as you read, including relevant page or paragraphs. This will help you reference specific sections clearly and accurately when preparing your review.
- **Research relevance and originality:** Ask yourself if the main question addressed by the research is interesting, relevant, and original. How does the manuscript contribute to the field compared to existing studies?
- **Clarity and quality:** Assess whether the manuscript is clearly written and logically structured. Evaluate whether the conclusions are supported by the evidence presented. If the paper challenges current academic consensus, consider whether the authors provide a convincing, well-substantiated case; if not, specify what additional evidence, analysis, or clarification would be needed to make the argument credible.
- **Data presentation:** Assess whether the tables, figures, and images effectively support the manuscript's findings or if they seem unnecessary.

Identifying major flaws

Focus on finding major issues that could affect the manuscript's credibility or reliability. Key flaws may include:

Conclusions vs. evidence: Check whether the conclusions are supported by the results, or whether they contradict the authors' own statistical or qualitative evidence.

Methodological concerns: Identify any outdated, inappropriate, or unreliable methods. Ensure the methodology follows best practices and supports replicability and robustness.

Missing key processes: Consider whether the authors have overlooked well-established mechanisms or contextual factors known to strongly influence the phenomenon under study.

When reviewing a paper with a focus on experimental design, ensure the methodology is robust. Key areas to assess include:

- Sampling methods in analytical papers
- Sufficient use of control experiments

- Precision of process data
- Regularity of sampling in time-dependent studies
- Validity of research questions, the use of a detailed methodology, and the data analysis being done systematically (in qualitative research)
- That qualitative research extends beyond the author's opinions, with sufficient descriptive elements and appropriate quotes from interviews or focus groups

Major flaws in information

If the methodology is sound, examine the tables, figures, and images—especially in empirical work where data quality is critical. Serious problems may justify rejection. Check for:

- **Insufficient data** (e.g., too few observations/time points to support the claims).
- **Unclear tables/figures** (missing labels, units, legends, or inconsistent notation).
- **Contradictory evidence** (data are not internally consistent or do not support the stated conclusions).
- **Low added value** (purely confirmatory results that contribute little to current understanding, unless a strong rationale is provided).

Document concerns with clear reasoning and supporting evidence (including citations where appropriate) to strengthen your review.

Concluding your first read

After reviewing the paper, draft the first two paragraphs of your review:

- **Paragraph 1:** Briefly summarize the research question, methodology, objectives, and main conclusions to help the editor contextualize the work and support your recommendation. Highlight the key messages you took from the manuscript so authors can confirm they are achieving their intended aims. Also note the paper's strengths and what it does well, so the authors can build on them.
- **Paragraph 2:** Provide a concise conceptual assessment of the manuscript's contribution to the field. Indicate whether it offers novel and significant findings, and evaluate whether the methods are appropriate and the data are robust and reliable.

These considerations will help you determine whether the manuscript has fundamental flaws requiring rejection or is publishable in principle and suitable for revision. Even if you identify serious concerns, read the entire paper before making a recommendation. A complete review ensures your judgment is fair, context-based, and balanced, and allows you to highlight any strengths alongside the weaknesses.

Next steps: The second read-through

After the first read-through and deciding the paper is publishable in principle, the second detailed review aims to refine the manuscript for publication. You may still decide to recommend rejection following a second reading.

Tips to save time and simplify the review:

- **Make separate notes** instead of relying solely on manuscript comments.

- **Group similar concerns or praise** for easier reference. If using a review program to note directly onto the manuscript, still try grouping the concerns and praise in separate notes—it helps later.
- **Keep images, graphs, and data tables visible** - either printed or on a second monitor.

During this stage focus on:

- **Arguments:** Identify unclear or ambiguous sections, factual errors, or invalid arguments.
- **Clarity and style:** Assess whether the title accurately reflects the manuscript's content and whether the abstract provides a clear and accessible summary of the study. Ensure that the keywords are relevant and aligned with the paper's focus. Also evaluate whether the manuscript is appropriately structured and concise, with key messages presented clearly and accurately.
- **Language:** Your role is to evaluate the research and the clarity of the manuscript's meaning - not to copyedit. If the writing is weak but understandable, point out where clarity can be improved (e.g., in the discussion) and, if needed, recommend professional language editing before resubmission. Comment on grammar or punctuation only when it affects comprehension; final language polishing will be handled during editing. It is normal to recommend revisions as very few manuscripts are accepted without any changes.

Guidance for each section

1. The Introduction

The introduction should clearly present the research argument and situate it in recent relevant literature. It should identify gaps or unresolved debates that motivate the study. Check that it defines the intended audience, demonstrates originality, explains what is novel, and clearly justifies why the research is timely and important.

Originality

Claims of originality and timeliness should be supported by recent, authoritative literature. For example, it is not credible to argue that a debate is "current" using only sources from a decade ago.

Authors may argue that a topic has been under-researched in recent years and merits renewed attention, but this should be justified by newer developments (e.g., improved data, methods, or insights from related fields) and supported with up-to-date references. Seminal older works may still be cited where they remain foundational or where methods depend on them.

Research aims

The introduction typically ends by stating the research aims. These should be clear from the introduction, and if the aims are a surprise, the introduction needs improvement.

2. Materials and Methods

Academic research should be replicable, repeatable and robust - and follow best practice.

Replicable research: The study should include appropriate controls, repeated analyses/experiments where relevant, and adequate sampling to ensure findings are not due to chance. Statistical results must be based on transparent, replicable methods. If the work cannot be reasonably replicated, recommend rejection.

Repeatable methods: The methods should be described in enough detail for other researchers to reproduce the work. Equipment, data sources, and sampling procedures should be clearly reported so the study can be replicated. If key details are missing, request a revision of the methods section.

Robust research: The study should use a sufficient number of observations to support reliable findings. If the dataset is too limited, recommend revision (or, where necessary, rejection). Also assess whether the methodology introduces potential biases and whether these are acknowledged and mitigated - e.g., through appropriate controls or robustness checks.

Best practice: Research must comply with recognized ethical standards and best practices. If the study clearly fails to meet these requirements, rejection is appropriate. In such cases, a detailed review of the remainder of the manuscript is not necessary.

3. Results and discussion

The Discussion should present a clear, coherent narrative that answers: What did the study find, and what new insights does it offer? Good reporting typically follows this flow:

- Start with a plain-language description of what the data show.
- Refer to relevant statistical results (e.g., significance, effect sizes, goodness of fit).
- Interpret the observed trends and explain their broader meaning, supported by published research.
- Provide a critical analysis of the findings, not just a restatement of results.

The Discussion should also integrate the results into an overall "story," addressing any gaps or inconsistencies and outlining how future research could confirm, refine, or extend the findings.

4. Conclusions

The Conclusions are typically brief (a few paragraphs). They should directly reflect the study aims, stating whether and how these aims were achieved. Conclusions should be evidence-based and consistent with the results, not introducing new or unexpected claims. If the conclusions are not adequately supported, request that they be rewritten.

5. Figures, graphs and data tables

If any table, figure, or dataset does not convey a clear and interpretable message, request improvements in presentation. Issues may relate to unclear titles, missing labels, incorrect statistical notation, or poor image quality.

Where the information is clear, verify that:

- The results appear plausible and free from obvious data errors.
- The observed trends support the discussion and conclusions.
- The dataset is sufficient (e.g., enough observations over time to justify the reported trends).

Also assess whether images have been edited or enhanced. Such adjustments may be acceptable if transparently reported (e.g., highlighting specific areas). If you suspect undisclosed manipulation, raise this concern in a confidential comment to the editor.

6. References

You will need to check referencing for accuracy, adequacy, and balance.

Accuracy: If a cited source is central to the manuscript's argument, check that it is accurately represented and appropriately referenced, keeping in mind that citation practices vary across disciplines. A full technical check of reference formatting and completeness, however, is primarily the editor's responsibility.

Adequacy: Evaluate whether the references adequately support the manuscript's claims and whether key studies—both supporting and opposing—have been considered. Identify any significant omissions. A limited or unbalanced reference base may suggest the need for additional sources, though quality is more important than quantity. Ensure that the references are current, relevant, and accessible.

Balance: Check that the reference list is balanced, useful to readers, fair to related researchers, and not overly dependent on self-citation. It should acknowledge foundational discoveries and key related work that underpin the study. You can usually assess balance without verifying every citation, but flag concerns if important perspectives or strands of research appear underrepresented.

7. Suspected Plagiarism and Originality

If you suspect plagiarism, carefully assess the manuscript's originality.

Identified overlap: If you are aware of a very similar publication, consider whether the similarity results from an overlooked source, a recent publication, or work published outside the authors' primary field. You may suggest that the authors clarify and better emphasize the novel contribution of their study, revise their aims or conclusions, or explicitly differentiate their work from related research. However, if the overlap is substantial and undermines originality, rejection may be necessary.

Suspected plagiarism (including self-plagiarism): If you suspect misconduct but cannot identify the exact source, still flag the concern. Editors can use plagiarism-detection tools to investigate. Addressing concerns during peer review is preferable to post-publication corrections or retractions.

How to Structure Your Review?

1. Summary

- Begin with balanced, constructive feedback (without overstating positives if recommending rejection).
- Briefly summarize the manuscript's aims, methods, and key findings.
- Place the work in the context of existing literature and comment on its originality and significance.
- Highlight strengths, overall quality, and completeness.
- Note any major weaknesses or special concerns (e.g., overlooked theories).

2. Major Issues

- **Major flaws and impact**: Identify any serious weaknesses and explain how they affect the validity, interpretation, or contribution of the manuscript.
- **Unacknowledged related work**: Note whether closely similar studies exist and have not been properly cited or discussed.
- **Challenges to established views**: If the paper disputes prevailing understanding, assess whether the evidence is strong enough and whether counterarguments and opposing literature are addressed fairly.
- **Required major revisions**: Specify clearly what substantial changes are needed for the paper to be publishable.
- **Presentation/structure**: Flag major issues in organization, tables/figures, or overall clarity that prevent proper assessment of the work.
- **Ethics and integrity**: Report potential ethical issues or research-integrity concerns; use confidential comments to the editor when appropriate.

3. Minor Issues

- **Clarity**: Identify unclear or ambiguous passages and suggest how they can be clarified.
- **Citations**: Note missing key references, excessive citation, or biased/self-heavy referencing.
- **Accuracy**: Flag factual mistakes, numerical inconsistencies, or incorrect units.
- **Tables and figures**: Check that tables/figures are necessary, sufficient, correctly labeled, and easy to interpret.

Review Presentation and Style

Your review should help the author improve the manuscript. Be professional, objective, and constructive.

- Write clearly and avoid unnecessarily complex language.
- Number your comments and refer to specific page and line numbers.
- If reviewing only certain aspects, state this clearly.
- Treat the manuscript as you would wish your own work to be treated.

Confidential Comments to the Editor

Use confidential comments primarily to report concerns such as plagiarism, fraud, unethical procedures, duplicate publication, bias, or conflicts of interest. State your recommendation if requested.

Write professionally, recognizing that comments may potentially be shared.

Recommendations

Acceptance: Explain clearly why the manuscript is suitable for publication and note any minor improvements.

Revision (major or minor): Specify the required changes. Indicate whether you are willing to review the revised version. Authors should be able to respond point by point.

Rejection: If serious flaws exist, focus on explaining the core research problems rather than presentation details.

- Provide constructive, research-focused feedback.
- Avoid personal criticism.
- Ensure that your recommendation to the editor aligns with the feedback given to the author.

Even when recommending rejection, offer constructive comments that help the authors improve their work and clarify for the editor why publication is not appropriate.