

Reviewing a review



Peer review for a narrative review article can be quite different from the process for an empirical manuscript. We demystify the aims of and procedures for peer review at *Nature Reviews Psychology*.

All of our Review and Perspective articles are peer reviewed by experts in the field. Our peer review process for these papers has many broad similarities to peer review of empirical research papers. However, it also has a few unique aspects. For one thing, review-type articles do not report any original analyses, so there are no methodological details or statistical analyses to evaluate. Instead, papers in our journal should organize, synthesize and critically discuss the literature, as well as conveying recommendations for future research in the field.

Our instructions to reviewers echo these broad aims, as well as the specific aims of each article type. We ask reviewers whether the scope of the article is clear and whether the coverage of material is appropriate, both within the specific topic area and across the broader context of the field. For a Review, discussion of major theories or findings should be balanced, and any intentional omissions should be explained to the reader. For a Perspective, the authors should not ignore alternative points of view even as they centre their own account.

Another major aspect of the manuscript that we ask peer reviewers to consider is its timeliness: does the article provide a needed update, an authoritative synthesis, a unique angle or a useful framework? Importantly, we do not ask reviewers to evaluate the ‘novelty’ of a manuscript. Because reviews must be based in existing literature, a truly novel manuscript with only original ideas wouldn’t be a review at all!

Finally, we ask reviewers to evaluate how the paper might be received by our broad audience of researchers, academics and clinicians across psychology. We want our articles to strike a balance between authoritative and accessible so that a broad audience of topic experts and non-experts alike can benefit from their insights. That said, we want reviewers to focus on the article content. Writing issues such as typos, run-on sentences or grammatical mistakes will be addressed when the paper undergoes a detailed edit before publication.

Like editors at any journal, we aim to secure expert reviewers in each major topic covered by the manuscript. For some topics, we might invite researchers who don’t primarily consider themselves academics, such as clinicians or industry researchers. We aim for a diverse reviewer panel with respect to geographical location, racial and

ethnic background, gender and career stage. All of these aspects can influence a reviewer’s evaluation of a manuscript, and a range of perspectives helps contribute to an overall evaluation that is fair and unbiased. Of course, we avoid reviewers with conflicts of interest, such as past or current collaborators.

The majority of our papers will go back to authors for a revision, and we want that revision to be as productive as possible. To that end, we annotate individual points of feedback in the peer review reports to help authors focus their revision efforts. We highlight comments that are particularly valuable or that we see having a substantial impact on the final article. For instance, some reviewers ask authors to motivate or reconsider a particular decision they made, such as to focus on a particular phenomenon, omit a specific outdated theory, or discuss topic A before topic B. Revisions in response to these types of request are often straightforward to implement but have a big impact on the eventual reader. We also adjudicate when two reviewers ask for opposing changes or make contradictory remarks, adding editorial guidance to help authors break the stalemate. Finally, we keep the scope and narrative cohesiveness of the article in mind. If a reviewer seems to be asking for the paper to be refocused around a different topic or wants extensive discussion of a tangential issue, we might tell authors that they can politely decline that particular piece of feedback. Ultimately, our aim is to provide authors with a clear path to a successful revision.

When we receive the revised version of a manuscript, we do a thorough read of the point-by-point rebuttal letter and the revised manuscript to determine whether the reviewers’ requests have been conscientiously addressed. Typical reviewer comments are about how concepts are explained, the space authors dedicate to discussing particular aspects of the literature, or alignment between the manuscript’s stated aims and its content. As professional editors with doctoral degrees in psychology, we are trained to evaluate the extent to which revisions to the text satisfy these types of reviewer concern; many manuscripts are not returned to peer reviewers for a second round after our evaluation. However, if substantial scientific information has been added or if we’re uncertain whether a reviewer’s concerns have been addressed, we will enlist all or a subset of the original peer reviewers to re-evaluate the manuscript.

The peer review process at *Nature Reviews Psychology* is designed to facilitate the transfer of critical yet constructive feedback between experts. It is a collaborative effort by the authors, the peer reviewers and the editor to bring out the best version of each article.

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