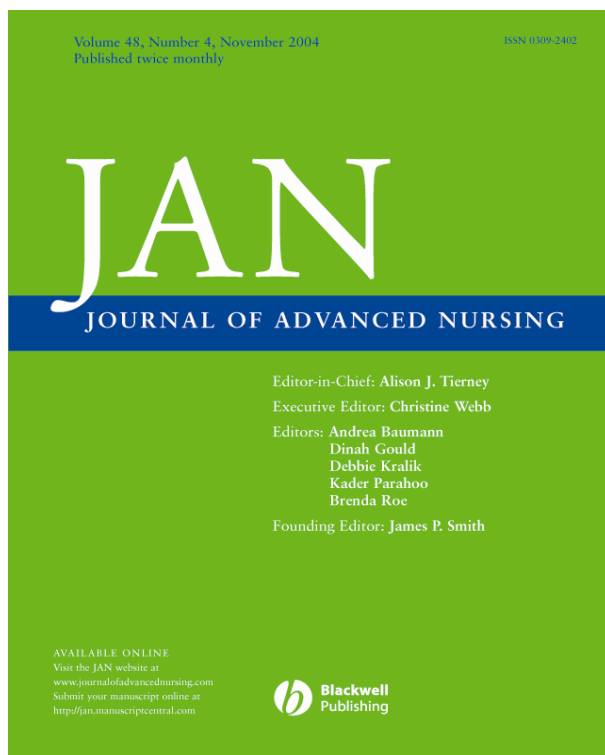


A Workshop for Authors and Reviewers

Peer Review



RCN Research
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Newcastle

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This presentation is partly based on a workshop given by my *JAN* colleagues, Debbie Kralik and Kader Parahoo, at the 2009 RCN Research Conference in Cardiff. I also have drawn on a presentation on 'Strategies for becoming an effective manuscript reviewer' by Donna Algase et al at the MNRS Conference in Indianapolis in March 2008.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- The aim of this session is to explain and discuss Peer Review, a process that is vital for helping to maintain and improve standards and quality in journal publishing.

Quantity, Quality

The amount of writings of a profession is a measure of its vitality and activity, whilst their quality is a rough indication of its intellectual state.

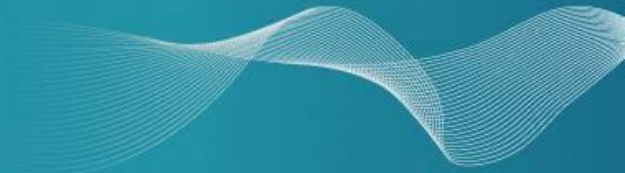


Sir Robert Hutchison (1871-1960) writing
in *The Lancet*, 2, 1059, 1939

- ❑ This workshop is directed at reviewers *and* authors.
- ❑ For less experienced authors an understanding of the review process, and common criticisms of reviewers, provides helpful insight to what makes a sound paper.
- ❑ Being a reviewer is an excellent way of learning about good (and poor) research reporting.

Outline of the session

1. What is peer review?
2. The review process
3. Common criticisms of reviewers
4. Ethical & other issues



1. What is peer review?

- ❑ Scholarly critique of a scientific article by another scientist (a peer)
- ❑ Integral to the original conception of a scientific journal (Oldenburg -1665)
- ❑ But not widespread until after World War II when research ethics came under scrutiny
- ❑ Extended to conference abstracts in 1980s
- ❑ Now disbanded in some open-to-all e-journals
- ❑ Validity & reliability of PR is still debatable
- ❑ But the consensus of researchers is that it is indispensable

- What are the arguments in support of peer review?
- The idea that science benefits from scrutiny and criticism
- Provides a quality assurance system for a journal
- Guides the revision of manuscripts

Types of peer review

- Double blind peer review: reviewer does not know who is the author and vice versa
- Single blind peer review: identity of the author is known to the reviewer, but not vice versa
- Unblinded/open review: both know who the other/s are

Preferences of reviewers

- Baggs JG et al (2008) Blinding in peer review: the preferences of reviewers for nursing journals. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 64, 2, 131-8.
- Web-based international survey
- 1675 anonymous reviewers via 52 editors of nursing journals

- Double-blind peer review was the most common method reported
- 17% could identify authors less than 10% of the time
- Double-blind peer review preferred by 94% of reviewers
- Majority believe it adds quality
- Un-blinding could lead to resignation of reviewers

Quality of reviews

- Henly SJ, Dougherty MC (2009) Quality of manuscript reviews in nursing research. *Nursing Outlook*, 57, 18-26.
- 464 reviews of 203 manuscripts submitted to *Nursing Research* in 2007 were rated on a tool developed for the purpose (GARNR: General Assessment of Review of Nursing Research)

- Reviews were generally balanced and fair
- But many lacked critical commentary on important aspects (e.g. theoretical framework)
- Statistical reviews and those from research-intensive institutions were of higher quality
- Paper highlights the responsibility of editors to monitor quality of reviews
- Authors expect & deserve proper review

Why become a reviewer?

(it is an unpaid role)

- Gives you pre-view of the latest research & scholarship in your field
- Provides you with examples of the best (and worst) writing, to assist your own development as an author
- Sharpens your critical appraisal skills
- Allows you to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of standards of writing and publishing

2. The review process (JAN)

- Author submits paper
- Receiving editor assigns reviewers :-
 1. topic
 2. method
 3. statistical
- JAN has an international panel of 700 reviewers

- *JAN* uses the double blind method of PR
- Return of review requested in 3-4 weeks
- Late reviewers are chased
- Reviewers are advisory to editor
- Editor makes the decision (accept, accept subject to revision, reject)
- Authors are provided with feedback
- Reviewers can look (after the decision) at the other review/s

JAN's guidelines for reviewers

- What we expect in general
 - ✓ expert advice on suitability, importance, interest, scholarship
 - ✓ awareness of JAN's international readership
 - ✓ confidentiality
 - ✓ constructive critique
 - ✓ honesty, courtesy

JAN Review: Evaluation Criteria

1. Does the paper have a clearly stated aim or purpose?
2. From an initial reading, is it clear what the paper is about?
3. Does the paper have any fatal flaw(s), i.e. flaws which cannot be rectified? If yes, please reject the paper and do not continue to answer the questions below. Please explain the fatal flaw(s) in the author and/or editor comments boxes at the end of the form.
4. Has the relevant up-to-date international literature been covered?
5. Is the context/background made explicit for global readers?
6. Does the paper have sound theoretical/scientific/policy base?

7. Does the paper contribute anything new?
8. Are the relevance/applications/implications for nursing included?
9. Can you identify any potential copyright problems (including plagiarism)?
10. Is there anything missing from the paper that you would expect to see?
11. Are the style and English of the paper readable and accessible to readers?
12. Does the title accurately reflect the paper's contents?

JAN Review: continued

☐ Recommendation

Acceptable without revision

Revision necessary

Not acceptable

☐ Confidential Comments to the Editor

☐ Comments to the Author

3. Most common criticisms in reviews

- Does not fit with the journal's expressed aims and scope
- Aim of the paper is not clear
- There is no clear structure and 'storyline'
- In a research report, the research question/s or hypothesis is not clearly stated

Reviewer criticisms: Introduction and Background

- Limited scope of underpinning literature
- Literature not set in context
- Outdated literature
- Missing literature
- No review of similar studies
- Unsubstantiated statements
- No adequate rationale

Reviewer criticisms: Design and methods (quantitative)

- Rationale for design
- Conceptual framework
- Operational definitions
- Rationale for methods (inc. tools)
- Existing tools
- New tools
- Translation
- Strategies for increasing responses
- Methods/design not detailed enough

Reviewer criticisms: Design and methods (qualitative)

- Aim too vague
- Rationale for approach is weak
- Approach not clearly explained
- List of questions for interviews
- Who did interviews/observations ?

Reviewer criticisms: Sampling

- Sample frame
- Detail of the selection technique
- Random sampling or selected at random
- Size (justification and calculation)
- Purposive or convenience sampling
- Composition of focus groups
- Characteristics of sample

Reviewer criticisms: Ethical aspects

- How were names obtained?
- How were participants accessed?
- How was informed consent obtained?
- Ethical approval
- Ethical implications of data collection

Reviewer criticisms: Results

- Not clear what the findings are
- Findings not related to aims/questions
- Findings and discussion lumped together
- Findings from different methods together
- Findings from different groups together
- Themes do not emerge out of data
- Characteristics of groups (RCTs)
- Absolute numbers and percentages

Reviewer criticisms: Discussion

- Generalisations
- Key findings not discussed
- No discussion on implications
- No limitations (inadequately discussed)
- One-sided or biased arguments

Presentational issues

- Grammar
- Spelling
- Referencing
- Page numbers
- Unclear terms
- Degrading terms
- 'Subjects'
- Confusing title
- Abbreviations
- Repetitive words
- Chaotic structure
- Informal writing
- Assignment/Essay
- Paper poorly written
- Word limit

Criteria for rejection of papers

- The paper is unclear and poorly written
- Says nothing new
- Duplication (salami-slicing)
- Plagiarism
- Fundamentally flawed
- Unsuitable for this journal

Modifiable deficiencies

- Update the literature
- Provide a stronger rationale
- Provide more detail about methodology
- Better presentation of findings
- More discussion
- More on limitations/implications
- Make the conclusions clear

4. Ethical and other issues in reviewing

Confidentiality

Bias

- ✓ against a particular approach
- ✓ different/opposing views
- ✓ own work not being recognised/cited
- ✓ may 'know' the author

Consistency

- ✓ all authors to be treated equally, applying the same criteria to all

Fairness and collegiality

Wurzbach M (2007) Manuscript reviewing: An ethical perspective. *Nurse Author & Editor*, 16, 3.

Fairness and collegiality

- ❑ Your *attitude*, in other words!
- ❑ Always note the positives
- ❑ Be constructive, not scathing, about the deficiencies, avoid inflammatory terms
- ❑ Be clear and specific about concerns
- ❑ Provide comments that will help guide revision
- ❑ Raise any serious concerns in confidence with the editor (e.g. plagiarism)

Study the open reviews on the Nursing Research editor's website

- www.nursing-research-editor.com/authors/open.php
- By end 2009 there were 60 open manuscript reviews on the website
- Reviewers and authors are named
- For each, the original Manuscript is shown along with the Reviews and the author's Response

Other re/sources

- Guidebook for Manuscript Reviewers (2007).
<http://www.nurseauthoreditor.com/forreviewers.asp>
- The British Academy (2007) Peer Review: the challenges for the humanities and social sciences.
www.britac.ac.uk
- Research Information Network (2010) Peer review: a guide for researchers. www.rin.ac.uk

Peer review of journal articles

- Any questions or comments?
- Thank you for coming!

