



Peer review

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What is peer review?

A system to assess the quality of a manuscript before it is published. Independent researchers with relevant expertise assess the manuscript's originality, the research design, and robustness, validity and significance of the findings.

Reviewers highlight strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript and provide comments to improve the work.

Their comments help editors determine whether a manuscript should be published in their journal.



Types of peer review

Single blind: reviewers know names of authors, authors do not know reviewers' identity

Double blind: the reviewers do not know the names of the authors; authors do not know who reviewed their manuscript

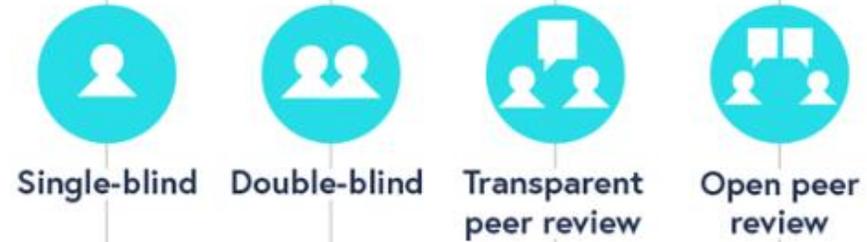
Open: Open peer: authors know who the reviewers are, and the reviewers know who the authors are. Reviewers' names may be published alongside paper upon acceptance



How peer review works



Figure from:
<https://www.biomedcentral.com/getpublished/peer-review-process>

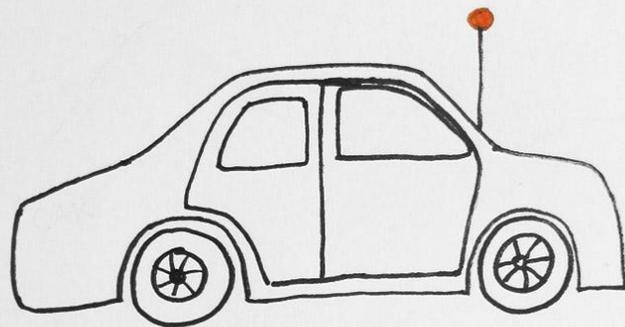


Discussion: previous experience?

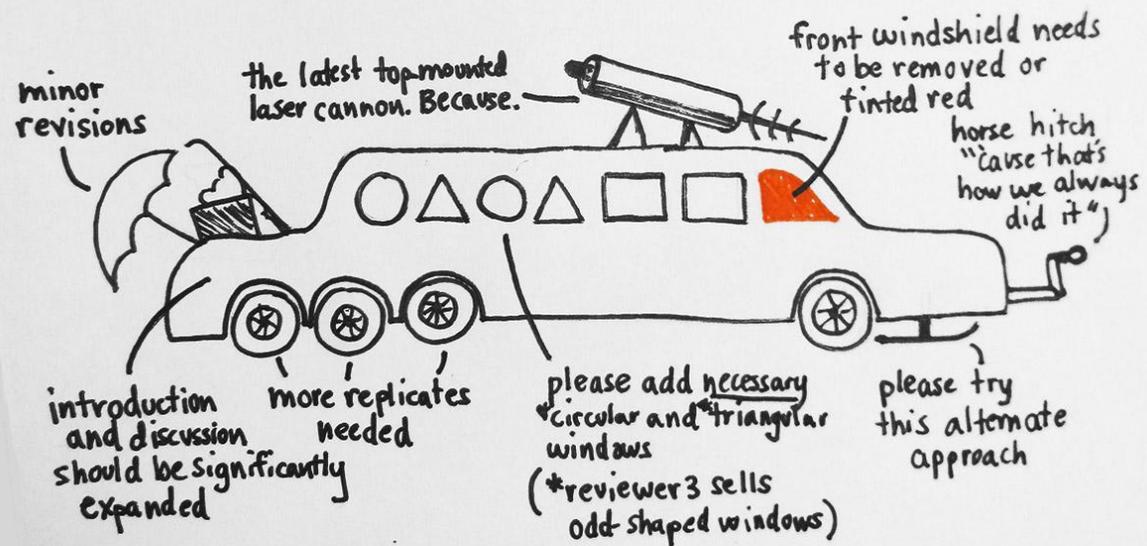
- Do you have previous experience peer reviewing a manuscript (or grant)?
- Do you have experience receiving and responding to peer review comments?



Your manuscript as submitted



... and after peer review and revision



REDPEN/BLACKPEN <http://redpenblackpen.jasonya.com>

Why do peer review?

- Integral part of scientific publishing – ‘scientific duty’
- Through providing peer review you support robustness of scientific literature
- Through review you can also help address wider issues in science, e.g. bias in research towards ‘WEIRD’ populations, lack of attention for relevance of research to LMIC
- Providing review can help self reflection and make you a better writer yourself
- Put peer review role on your CV; may later be asked as editorial board member/editor etc



How to provide a peer review

Good guidance provided here:

<https://authorservices.wiley.com/Reviewers/journal-reviewers/how-to-perform-a-peer-review/step-by-step-guide-to-reviewing-a-manuscript.html>

Also read any journal-specific instructions, some journals want you to comment on specific aspects / assess the paper following specified criteria



How to provide a peer review

1. Read the paper to get an overview of the work and draft broad overview comments
2. If you identify large flaws that make the manuscript unsuitable for publication, include sufficient details to describe the shortcomings, but no need for more detailed comments
3. If no large flaws: provide more detailed comments that systematically go through the full manuscript

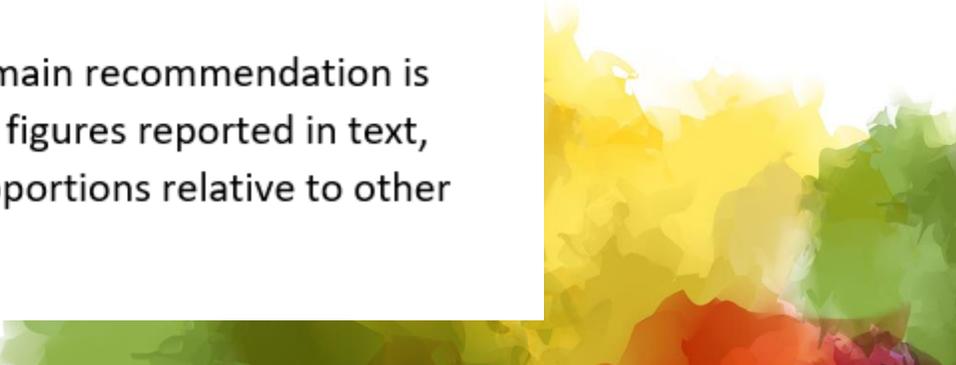


Example summary paragraph that start review

This manuscript reports thorough analyses on a comprehensive systematically collected dataset from England. The systematic reporting of these data as well as the detailed analyses employed are insightful and add real value to the existing literature regarding social determinants relevant to autism, a field dominated by studies from the USA, which has a very different health system.

The marked differences in prevalence for different ethnic groups compared to what was previously reported in the USA (where autism diagnoses are more likely in White and high SES groups) is fascinating and important to report. The graphs showing prevalence rates per local authority are helpful and illustrate how variable these rates are and how much we still have to learn about causes of this variation.

Overall, I have minor comments only, described in more detail below. My main recommendation is to substantially revise Table 1 and supplementary table 1, and some of the figures reported in text, so that you highlight actual prevalence estimates per groups instead of proportions relative to other reported figures.



Example more detailed comments that follow

Abstract “and to speak English”: this should read ‘and to speak English as additional language’, because the vast majority of these children will speak English (just not as first language).

Page 8, line 130-135 “the difference between these concepts”: can you clarify this sentence please? Which two ‘concepts’ are you talking about? The British definition of ‘learning difficulties’ vs the definition used in ICD-11 and DSM-5? Or the difference between ICD-11 and DSM-5? Did you perhaps mean to use the term ‘learning disability’ in the preceding sentence, and are explaining the difference between ‘learning disability’ and ‘learning difficulty’ in the British system in this sentence?

Page 10, line 177-180: The sentence here suggests the equation used is prevalence EHCP/support. If that is the case a *higher* SSR suggests higher proportion EHCP?

Page 10, line 184-185: Why projections from 2011, not more recent? Was more recent data unavailable?



Structuring your review

1. If you have lots of comments it can be helpful to divide them into 'major comments' and 'minor comments'
2. Use bullet points, or even better, numbers, to structure your comments. This will make it easier for authors to respond and/or for the editor in their response letter to highlight a particular sticking point. (e.g. "in your revised submission, please pay particular attention to the third comment made by reviewer #2")



What to focus on in peer review?

- What does the paper add to what we already know on the topic? (Is the work presented novel/does it fill a gap/exceptionally thorough/comprehensive?)
- Is existing relevant literature adequately covered?
- Is the methodology sound?
 - Do the aims/research questions match with the methodology?
 - Are the methods and results well written and clearly presented, so the reader can understand what was done?
 - Are the analyses correctly applied and presented? (e.g. appropriate stats, in depth qual analysis?)
- Is the conclusion drawn appropriate or overblown? Are relevant implications of the findings presented?
- Do the authors acknowledge limitations to the work?

What not to focus on

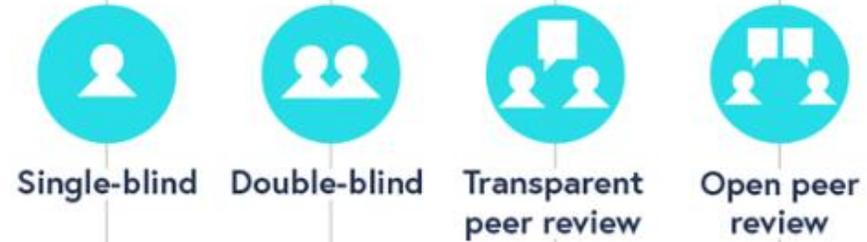
- Don't ask the authors to write the paper exactly how you would have written it/ carry out your 'hobby analysis' – If authors use a different approach that is valid or slightly different writing style that is clear and easy to read, no need to ask them to change.
- More important to focus on design issues, issues of interpretation of data, big gaps in literature covered etc then on pointing out typos.
- It is not your task to edit the paper to make it readable.



Be critical, but constructive

- Focus on improvement: Criticism is always more beneficial when it comes with suggestions for improvement.
- Be considerate: Don't let your anonymity tempt you into being derogatory; never include anything that you wouldn't be prepared to discuss with the author face-to-face.





Responding to peer review

- Be polite
- Respond to each and every point made by the reviewers, don't skate over comments you don't like/find difficult to address
- Make very clear in your response letter how you addressed the reviewer's comment in the revised manuscript and where the revision can be found
- Some authors include a revision table, mapping directly the comment and response

→ You want to make the job of re-review easy for the reviewer and for the editor, this makes acceptance much more likely

Responding to peer review

Start response with a thank you and explain how you have responded to the comments. E.g.:

Dear Dr X,

Thank you for your invitation to revise and resubmit our manuscript following the helpful comments from three reviewers. Below we have responded in detail to each of the reviewers' comments. The reviewers' comments are in italicised text and our responses are inserted after each comment in plain text. The revisions are also highlighted in the manuscript text itself using coloured text.



On p.7, it would be helpful to give a rationale for selecting the acute version of the PedsQL - perhaps because of the nature of the controls (medical condition may not have been chronic). Could this have had any impact on the case group with NDD / ASD which generally IS a chronic (though emerging) condition?

We opted to validate the acute version because we are intending to use the PedSQLTM FIM as an outcome measure in an evaluation of an intervention that is relatively short in duration. The acute version (asking about the past seven days) is more likely to be sensitive to change over this short period than the version asking about behaviours over the past month. In addition, our team of Ethiopian researchers and clinicians felt caregivers would find it easier to reflect on the past seven days than having to consider the full month. We have added a brief explanation on page 7 of the revised manuscript why we used the acute version.

p.7, line 26: Respondents are asked to indicate how often they have experienced each item?

Thank you, we have revised the sentence and further clarified that every item describes a problem related to functioning.

Cultural adaptation: p.8, lines 22-24: It would be enlightening to give examples of how items were changed into a question, and how the response categories were presented orally in alternate order in the interview.

We have now revised this section and included a couple of examples.



Responding to peer review

You don't have to blindly follow all reviewers' suggestions, you may have a good reason not to do so. If you don't follow their advice you need to explain why not

3. *While cultural adaptations of diagnostic and screening tools are mentioned, there should be a section on this. At least 1 study found that a gold standard diagnostic tool is not as valid with a Spanish speaking population in the US. There may be other studies that have looked at validity of diagnostic tools in other countries:*

*Vanegas, S., Magaña, S., Morales, M., & McNamara, E. (2016). Clinical validity of the ADI-R in a US-Based Latino Population. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 46, 1623-1635.*

The revised manuscript now includes a discussion of this paper (page 6). We have not included a separate section on cultural adaptations of diagnostic and screening instruments, since several review papers have been published on this topic in recent years (e.g. Al Maskari et al., 2018; Marlow, Servili, & Tomlinson, 2019; Soto et al., 2015; Stewart & Lee, 2017). In order to not make the current manuscript excessively long we instead refer the reader to these reviews (page 7).





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