

On Becoming a Peer Reviewer for the *Journal of Forensic Nursing*

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The *Journal of Forensic Nursing* (JFN), the official journal of the International Association of Forensic Nurses, is a quarterly peer-reviewed publication. What this means, not unlike most professional and scientific journals, decisions of what is published are informed by the contributions and recommendations of peer reviewers. Watson (2020) notes that “peer review is a commonplace and accepted aspect of academic publishing and is so well embedded that it is hard to imagine the process without it” (p. 1). Although not a perfect process, from my perspective, the peer review process is a win-win situation. My decisions regarding what will or will not be published are informed by peer reviewers, whose knowledge, expertise, and critical evaluation of journal submissions contribute to the overall scientific integrity of the journal. Through their commitment to the responsibilities inherent in their roles, whether recommending acceptance or rejection, or something in between, their feedback provides authors with guidance to enhance their submissions (even if this is a reject and the author is free to submit elsewhere). Not only do authors benefit directly from this assistance, once published, they experience a sense of pride in meeting the standards of publication in the JFN. Readers also benefit from this process, because of the filtering mechanism and seal of approval that peer review provides. Finally, through completing peer reviews, peer reviewers also win. They have the opportunity to think critically about forensic nursing science and practice and have the privilege of being exposed to new ideas before publication (Peternelj-Taylor, 2010; Watson, 2020). In short, peer review is fundamental to the publication process, and peer reviewers are integral to the JFN's scholarly mandate.

As Editor in Chief, I am indebted to the members of our peer review panel, who contribute countless volunteer hours to the advancement of forensic nursing science and practice through their contributions to the peer review process. As the journal matures, the number of manuscripts submitted for consideration for publication has almost doubled in the last couple of years, a testament to the growth of our discipline and our specialty. On the other hand, our peer review panel has not kept abreast with the number of increased submissions, leaving us in a position where we find ourselves needing to recruit new peer reviewers. However, if you are looking for fame, fortune, and notoriety, becoming a volunteer peer reviewer for the JFN may not be for you. As Chinn (2020) notes, peer reviewers' involvement really is “behind the scenes” but, as indicated previously, fundamental to the development of forensic nursing.

So how does one become a peer reviewer with JFN you ask? How does one learn how to become a peer reviewer? Or further develop their peer review skills? What peer review training and resources are available for both novice and experienced reviewers? How does one get started? Perhaps a good place to start is looking to see what resources are available. In recent years, there has been a plethora of invaluable resources come to fruition. I have included three of my favorites here for your information and perusal.

- Wolters-Kluwer who publishes the JFN, together with Editage, a professional editing service, has developed two peer review training courses: a basic course and an advanced course. The basic course, which is completely free, consists of six interactive modules, including videos, quizzes, a discussion forum, and a downloadable peer review template. Once you sign up, you have access to work through the interactive modules at your own speed, but in general, working through the modules will take about 3 hours to complete. The advanced course (for a fee) is structured similarly but offers additional downloadable tools, checklists, and guides as well as a review assignment. Upon completion of the course, registrants will be provided with a certificate of completion. For more information and to register for either the basic or advanced courses, please see <https://wkauthorservices.editage.com/peer-reviewer-training-course/>.

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- *Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers*, developed by the Committee on Publication Ethics, is a comprehensive guide designed to inform reviewers, novices and experts alike, on the ethical and practical components of peer review, such as professional responsibility, accountability, confidentiality, timeliness, offering appropriate feedback, and the importance of continuing professional development (Committee on Publication Ethics Council, 2017).
- *Nurse Author & Editor*—an international publication, dedicated to scholarly writing and publishing in the nursing literature—has a list of resources for reviewers as well as a number of articles dedicated to peer review including “Becoming a Peer Reviewer” (Chinn, 2020), “The Contribution of Peer Review to Scholarly Publishing” (Watson, 2020), “Civility in Nursing Peer Review: Giving and Receiving Feedback” (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018), and “On Reviewing Well” (Yoder-Wise, 2013), to name only a few. In addition, here you will also find *Reviewing Journal Manuscripts* (Pierson, 2015), a comprehensive guidebook that addresses what peer review is, how to become a reviewer, how to provide constructive feedback, and how to review different types of manuscripts (e.g., clinical papers, research papers, literature review manuscripts). This is my “go-to” reference when mentoring new peer reviewers—it is comprehensive and informative and offers numerous examples of how to frame feedback in a constructive manner. Access to these resources is freely available.

As I contemplated the reviews I have received over the years, the ones I have appreciated the most fall into the category I will call the “ideal review.” I present my top 10 list for your consideration. The ideal review is one that:

1. Follows the review guidelines by evaluating the following manuscript attributes: appropriateness, methodology, innovation, readability, ethics, and clinical Implications. These categories should underpin the evaluation of the manuscript and provide a framework for the written response.
2. Is submitted on time. Reviewers have 21 days to complete a review. Please do not agree to do the review if you do not have time to complete it, as it delays the whole process. If you need an extension, let us know, and we will gladly provide one.
3. Provides authors with constructive feedback and suggestions for revision in a way that is respectful and supportive. Think about the feedback you would like to receive and remember the Golden Rule—“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” I appreciate when reviewers share more direct matter-of-fact comments in the “Comments to the Editor” as this also informs editorial decisions.
4. Understands the scope and mandate of the *JFN* and its readership and reflects this understanding in the written report.
5. Makes a definitive decision accompanied by an appropriate rationale. As per our journal guidelines, peer reviewers' recommendations fall into one of the following categories: accept, accept with minor revisions, revise and resubmit, and reject. If truly not sure, it is fine to share this information in the “Comments to the Editor.”
6. Leaves the final editorial decision for the editor to make. The ideal review does not include the reviewer's recommendation to the author, only to the editor.
7. Reflects the reviewer's knowledge of the discipline, as one who is well versed in the literature or, as Goodman (2021) notes, one who reads “widely and critically” and becomes familiar with what a well-written paper looks and feels like.
8. Provides overall feedback on grammar, syntax, flow, and APA—but does not assume the copyeditor's role (see Wallace, 2019). In general, such specific feedback can be confusing for authors. I would rather read a review that addresses the methodological soundness of the paper and implications for practice and follows the review guidelines, rather than one that suggests where a comma is needed.
9. Notes that the reviewer has read for content and notifies the editor if there are sections of the manuscript that they are not versed in, for example, a particular statistical or methodological approach (see Pierson, 2015). Occasionally, I invite reviewers to review outside their area of expertise, as they too have much to offer, particularly from a general reader's perspective.
10. Adheres to the *Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers*.

In closing, I hope this editorial has inspired you to consider taking the necessary steps to becoming a peer reviewer. Although providing a step-by-step “how-to” guide is beyond the scope of this editorial, I do hope that you will join members of the *JFN* Editorial Board at the 2021 International Conference on Forensic Science and Practice and attend our workshop entitled “Become a (Great!) Peer Reviewer for the *Journal of Forensic Nursing*” on Wednesday, September 22, 2021. We will also be recording our presentation, and it will be available for review at a later date online. We look forward to working with you and mentoring you in this important role.

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