

EDITION 2026.09.22-REVIEW-1

Protect the assignment before judging the paper.

A fair review starts with expertise, independence, capacity, and policy. Record what you can assess, what you cannot assess, and what the journal has authorized.

Confidential manuscript. Controlled record.

Do not share the manuscript, notes, figures, data, or report with a person, service, or AI system unless the exact journal policy and required permission allow it. Do not place confidential manuscript content in this printable record if it will leave the authorized review environment.

Journal and manuscript ID

Journal, manuscript identifier, review round, article type, and invitation date.

Reviewer and deadline

Name or controlled identifier, role, accepted due date, and submission system.

Expertise coverage

Claims, methods, analyses, or domain areas you can assess competently.

Expertise limits

Decision-relevant areas outside your competence and whether another reviewer is needed.

Acceptance record

☐ Expertise is sufficient

☐ Deadline is feasible

☐ Conflict disclosed or absent

☐ Confidentiality terms saved

☐ Review model understood

☐ Editor clarification preserved

Potential conflict or limitation	Disclosure to editor	Editor response	Decision

Ethical floor: [COPE](#) and [ICMJE](#). Journal-specific policies control the assignment. A trainee or colleague is not a hidden substitute reviewer; obtain required permission and disclose contribution.

ONE ROW FOR ONE DECISION-RELEVANT CLAIM

Locate the claim.

Trace the evidence.

Separate what the manuscript reports from what you infer. A substantive concern needs a stable locator, an affected claim, and a consequence the editor can evaluate.

Central question
State the research question in the authors' terms, including population, setting, intervention or exposure, comparison, and outcome where applicable.

Central conclusion
Write the narrowest conclusion the authors ask the reader to accept.

Claim and locator	Design or method	Result and uncertainty	Stated limit	Reviewer status
				S N ?
				S N ?
				S N ?
				S N ?

Status: S = evidence supports the bounded claim; N = evidence supports a narrower claim; ? = evidence or interpretation remains unresolved. These are working labels, not journal recommendations.

Evidence links

Methods to result
Which procedure, measure, sampling rule, or analysis produces the cited result?

Result to conclusion
Which exact result supports the conclusion, and what uncertainty or assumption travels with it?

Cross-surface consistency
Check text, table, figure, supplement, registration, protocol, and data or code statement.

Alternative explanation
Name a plausible explanation only when it changes the interpretation and is grounded in the record.

ASSESS WITHIN EXPERTISE AND JOURNAL CRITERIA

Classify the effect. Then set the priority.

The size of a comment is not its importance. Record how each issue changes a claim, reader decision, reproducibility need, or named journal criterion.

Domain	Observation and locator	Affected claim or criterion	Issue class	Smallest resolution
Claim and contribution Is the claimed contribution stated precisely, and does the manuscript distinguish what the study shows from what it assumes or extrapolates?				
Design and sampling Does the design support the type and scope of inference being made, and are important threats to validity visible?				
Methods and reproducibility Could a qualified reader understand what was done, why it was done, and where material uncertainty or discretion entered?				
Analysis and uncertainty Do the analyses match the design and question, and are uncertainty and analytical limitations represented in the conclusions?				
Results and presentation Can the result supporting each central claim be located and interpreted without contradictions or missing context?				
Interpretation and limits Would a narrower claim, additional evidence, clearer limitation, or different framing repair the mismatch?				

Decision-critical The issue changes whether a central claim meets a named journal criterion or can be supported by the reported study.	Revision-relevant The issue affects transparency, interpretation, reproducibility, or reader use but does not by itself overturn the central claim as currently bounded.	Editorial-only The information concerns your conflict, review limitation, confidentiality, suspected integrity problem, policy question, or another matter the journal must handle privately.	Optional suggestion The idea could improve clarity or usefulness but is not required to support the present claim or meet the journal's criteria.
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Scope control. Do not require a different or larger study merely because it would be interesting. A publication condition should be necessary to assess or support the present claim under the named journal criteria. Label optional suggestions honestly.

PLOS recommends specific, evidence-backed, professionally phrased comments and warns against out-of-scope experiments or self-promotion. See [PLOS report guidance](#). Exact decision labels remain journal-specific.

OBSERVATION TO CONSEQUENCE TO REQUEST TO SCOPE

Write for action. Preserve the reason.

An author should be able to locate the issue and understand the bounded request. An editor should be able to see why it matters for the decision.

Opening synthesis Central question, approach, material strength, and the main decision-relevant issue. Do not speculate about author motives.	Journal criteria applied Name the exact criteria or reviewer question used to organize the report.
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Comment record

1 / Observation What is reported, absent, inconsistent, or unclear? Add a stable manuscript locator.	2 / Consequence Which claim, interpretation, reproducibility need, reader decision, or journal criterion is affected?
3 / Request What is the smallest clarification, evidence, analysis, correction, limitation, or editorial action that resolves the issue?	4 / Scope Required for the present study, optional suggestion, or future-work idea?

Editor handoff

Recommendation and rationale Use the journal labels. Tie the recommendation to named criteria and decision-critical issues.	Confidential editor information Conflict, review limitation, policy question, or specific integrity observation. Do not hide author-actionable science here.
Required disclosures Co-reviewer or trainee, permitted AI assistance, identity choice, and any other journal-required disclosure.	Unresolved uncertainty What could not be verified, what expertise is missing, and what the editor may need from another source.

EVIDENCE CHECKED SEPTEMBER 22, 2026

Audit the report before release.

Run each test independently. A clear report can still fail through a confidentiality breach, unsupported accusation, scope expansion, or recommendation mismatch.

1

Fit test
Expertise coverage, limitations, conflicts, and deadline are explicit and any uncertainty has been disclosed to the editor.

☐

2

Confidentiality test
The manuscript, notes, data, report, and communications remain within journal-authorized people, systems, and uses.

☐

3

Locator test
Every substantive comment identifies the manuscript evidence and the claim or criterion it affects.

☐

4

Inference test
The report distinguishes reported facts, reviewer interpretation, unresolved uncertainty, and suspected integrity concerns.

☐

5

Scope test
Required work is necessary to assess or support the present study under the named journal criteria.

☐

6

Fairness test
The report addresses the manuscript rather than the authors, acknowledges material strengths, and uses professional, neutral language.

☐

7

Consistency test
Issue priority, author-facing report, confidential comments, and recommendation are mutually consistent and tied to journal criteria.

☐

8

Handoff test
Disclosures, contributors, AI use if permitted, unresolved limits, editor-only concerns, submission date, and record disposition are documented.

☐

Submission and system receipt
Date, time, review round, recommendation label, submission confirmation, and any journal correspondence.

Record disposition
Journal-required deletion or authorized retention action for manuscript, notes, data, and local files.

Primary-source register

A. COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers

Committee on Publication Ethics / Before, during, and after review; preparing a report
[Open source](#)

C. Use of AI by Reviewers

International Committee of Medical Journal Editors / AI use by reviewers
[Open source](#)

E. Resources for Reviewers

BMJ / Reviewer responsibilities and peer-review terms
[Open source](#)

G. How to Write a Peer Review

PLOS / Reviewer report structure and effective feedback
[Open source](#)

Reuse. Original Manusights decision architecture and worksheet: CC BY 4.0. Credit Manusights, title, edition, and <https://manusights.com/resources/how-to-peer-review>; identify changes. Third-party sources retain their own status. A decision and evidence record for invited reviewers assessing a scholarly manuscript. It does not replace the journal's current reviewer instructions, subject or method expertise, editorial judgment, research-integrity procedures, statistical review, ethics review, or permission to share or process a confidential manuscript.

Maintenance. Recheck all primary sources after a material publisher, editorial-ethics, confidentiality, AI, or peer-review policy change and no later than 90 days after this review. At the time of use, verify the exact journal criteria, review model, confidentiality terms, AI policy, conflict process, recommendation labels, and editor instructions.

B. Responsibilities in the Submission and Peer-Review Process

International Committee of Medical Journal Editors / Section II.C.2.c, Peer Reviewers
[Open source](#)

D. Peer Review Policy

Nature / Reviewer conduct, confidentiality, co-reviewing, and AI
[Open source](#)

F. How to Read a Manuscript as a Peer Reviewer

PLOS / Reviewer role and manuscript assessment
[Open source](#)

H. How to Conduct a Review

Elsevier / Before, during, and after review; reviewer ethics
[Open source](#)