

Strengthening the Peer Review Process: A Guide to Resources and Best Practices for *IJTMB* Reviewers

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Peer review is a vital component of scholarly publishing, ensuring that research adheres to the highest standards of rigor, relevance, and integrity. For the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (IJTMB)*, peer reviewers play a critical role in advancing the field by providing constructive feedback and supporting the development of impactful research. This editorial outlines the expectations for *IJTMB* reviewers, emphasizing objectivity, inclusivity, cultural competence, and timeliness. Practical guidelines for conducting a thorough review are provided. Additionally, the editorial highlights key resources available to reviewers. By working together, reviewers, editors, and authors can strengthen evidence-based practice in therapeutic massage and bodywork.

KEYWORDS: Massage therapy; peer review; evidence-based practice; reviewer guidelines

INTRODUCTION

Peer review is the cornerstone of scholarly publishing, ensuring that the research we produce and consume meets rigorous standards of quality, integrity, and relevance. In the context of therapeutic massage and bodywork, a relatively emerging field in the academic landscape, the importance of robust peer review cannot be overstated. By critically evaluating manuscripts, peer reviewers contribute not only to individual studies but also to the growth and credibility of the field as a whole.

Yet, when I talk to people within the field of therapeutic massage and bodywork, a surprising challenge often emerges:

many members of our profession do not believe they are “expert enough” to be a peer reviewer. This hesitation stems from a misconception about what it takes to be a reviewer. The truth is, you are an expert. Each member of the profession brings unique perspectives and specialized knowledge. Whether it is clinical practice, research expertise, or experience in education, everyone has one aspect—or more—where they can offer valuable insights. With a little reading and effort, this expertise can be translated into a meaningful contribution as a peer reviewer.

At the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (IJTMB)*, peer reviewers are essential collaborators in our efforts to publish impactful research. Whether you are a seasoned reviewer or considering joining our reviewer community, understanding the expectations and resources available to support this role is an important first step. Peer review is as much an opportunity for professional development as it is a responsibility to the wider professional community.

This editorial aims to demystify the peer review process, offering guidance on what is expected of reviewers and highlighting tools and strategies to support you in providing high-quality reviews. We hope to inspire those who are new to this work and reassure those who may feel uncertain about their expertise. Let us explore what it takes to excel as a peer reviewer and how the *IJTMB* is committed to supporting you every step of the way.

EXPECTATIONS FOR PEER REVIEWERS

Peer reviewers play a pivotal role in advancing scholarly knowledge, offering critical insights that refine research

and ensure its relevance to the field. At the *IJTMB*, we have clear expectations for reviewers, designed to ensure that the peer review process remains constructive, ethical, and valuable for all parties involved.

Objectivity and Confidentiality

Peer reviewers are expected to evaluate manuscripts impartially, focusing on the content and not the identity of the authors. The *IJTMB* uses an anonymous process whereby neither the authors nor the reviewers know each other's identity. However, should the identity of the author become known to the reviewer, it is expected that the reviewer will recognize and disclose any conflicts of interest that may bias their review. Confidentiality is paramount; reviewers must not share manuscript details outside the review process. This includes not submitting authors' manuscripts to online databases for review. For example, it would not be appropriate to upload a manuscript to an authenticity checker as part of your review.

Constructive and Professional Feedback

Providing actionable, balanced feedback is essential to an effective peer review. Reviewers should highlight both strengths and areas for improvement, offering suggestions that help authors refine their work. The tone of the feedback should be professional and supportive, fostering a spirit of collaboration rather than critique for its own sake.

Thoroughness and Expertise

Reviewers are expected to engage deeply with the manuscript, assessing the validity of the research, the appropriateness of methodologies and methods, and the clarity of the writing. While no one is an expert in all aspects of therapeutic massage and bodywork, reviewers are encouraged to bring their specific expertise to the process. If a certain aspect of the manuscript is outside their knowledge, reviewers should flag this for the Editorial Team rather than guess or provide incomplete feedback.

Timeliness

Reviewers play a vital role in ensuring that the publication timeline stays on track.

Responding promptly to review invitations and submitting completed reviews within the agreed-upon timeframe benefits not just the authors but also the journal and its readership. At the *IJTMB* we ask reviewers to complete their review within 3 weeks of accepting a review assignment. If an extension is needed, you need only connect with the Associate Editor assigned to the manuscript you are reviewing.

Inclusivity and Cultural Competence

Therapeutic massage and bodywork are practiced and studied by diverse professionals and populations. Reviewers must approach manuscripts with cultural competence, recognizing and respecting the diversity of perspectives, methodologies, and experiences presented. This includes avoiding biases that could unintentionally devalue research from underrepresented groups or regions. By fostering inclusivity, reviewers not only strengthen the integrity of their evaluations but also contribute to a more equitable and representative body of knowledge.

GUIDELINES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR PEER REVIEWERS

Completing a peer review is a structured process that balances a critical eye with a collaborative spirit. For those new to the role—or even seasoned reviewers—breaking the process into clear steps ensures a thorough and meaningful evaluation.

1. **Accept or decline the review invitation:** When invited, consider whether the manuscript aligns with your expertise. If it does not, or if there is a potential conflict of interest, decline promptly so we can find an alternative reviewer. Ensure you can meet the review deadline. Timely communication with the Associate Editor is essential if scheduling conflicts arise.
2. **Review the manuscript holistically:** Start with a complete read of the manuscript to gain a general understanding of its goals, structure, and relevance to the field. Avoid making detailed notes at this stage; focus on the big picture.
3. **Tailor your review to the manuscript type:** Depending on the type of manuscript (e.g., original research, systematic review, case study), adapt your review

approach to match the study design and objectives. You will be provided with a reviewer checklist to guide your review. However, if you find the checklist challenging to use or determine that it does not fit the unique nature of the manuscript you are reviewing, please use other resources and note this in your response to the Associate Editor.

Regardless of manuscript type, focus on clarity, rigor, and relevance. For research studies, this includes evaluating the methods and results. For reviews or commentaries, assess the coherence of arguments and depth of analysis. Not all sections require equal attention. For example, methodology may be central to a research study, while the discussion might take precedence in a literature review.

4. **Provide constructive feedback:** Recognize what the manuscript does well, such as innovative methods, strong clinical applications, or unique contributions to the field. Offer specific, actionable suggestions for improvement. For example, instead of saying, “The methods are unclear,” provide concrete guidance, like, “Consider providing more detail on the recruitment process.” Frame your feedback in a constructive tone, ensuring it encourages authors to refine their work without feeling discouraged. Use concise and respectful language to make your feedback actionable and easy to understand.
5. **Make a recommendation:** End your review with a clear recommendation. Common recommendations include: accept as is, minor revisions, major revisions, or reject. Support your recommendation with examples from your review, aligning your evaluation with the journal’s expectations. Your recommendation will be considered by the Associate Editor together with the recommendations from other reviewers.
6. **Submit the review:** Before submission, re-read your feedback to ensure it is clear, professional, and free of errors. Use the journal’s submission platform to submit your review, adhering to any specific instructions provided by the Editorial Team.
7. **Reflect on the process:** After completing the review, take a moment to reflect on what you learned from evaluating the manuscript. Peer review is a

professional development opportunity, offering insights into research trends and methodologies. Consider whether there is any support you need prior to completing your next review, and see whether the resources provided help you to further enhance your participation in the process.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS FOR REVIEWERS

Being an effective peer reviewer requires a combination of knowledge, skills, and access to reliable resources. To support reviewers in this important role, the *IJTMB* provides tools and guidance, alongside other reputable resources from the broader academic publishing community. Below are some key resources to help you excel as a peer reviewer.

***IJTMB* Reviewer Webpage⁽¹⁾**

The *IJTMB* reviewer webpage (<https://ijtmb.org/index.php/ijtmb/reviewers>) serves as a hub for peer reviewers. It includes guidance on the review process, reviewer checklists tailored to different manuscript types (e.g., case reports, systematic reviews, research studies), and tips for writing clear and constructive feedback. By regularly visiting this page, reviewers can access updated tools and resources to streamline their work and deliver impactful reviews.

Taylor & Francis: A Guide to Becoming a Peer Reviewer⁽²⁾

This guide from Taylor & Francis offers practical advice for reviewers at any stage of their journey. It provides step-by-step instructions for conducting a thorough review, examples of constructive feedback, and tips for avoiding common pitfalls. This resource complements the *IJTMB*’s offerings by broadening the perspective on peer review practices. You can explore the guide here (<https://editorresources.taylorandfrancis.com/reviewer-guidelines/>).

Web of Science Academy: An Introduction to Peer Review⁽³⁾

The Web of Science Academy provides a free, interactive course on peer review that helps reviewers develop confidence and expertise. Topics include evaluating

research rigorously, structuring reviews for clarity and impact, and adhering to ethical principles while avoiding bias. Completing the course also provides a certificate, making it a valuable tool for professional development. Learn more about the course here (<https://webofscienceacademy.clarivate.com/learn/courses/119/an-introduction-to-peer-review>).

COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers⁽⁴⁾

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) offers a detailed guide to ethical practices in peer review. It covers essential topics such as maintaining confidentiality, addressing conflicts of interest, and resolving ethical dilemmas. This resource ensures that reviewers can approach their role with integrity and professionalism. Access the guidelines here (<https://publicationethics.org/guidance/guideline/ethical-guidelines-peer-reviewers>).

CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Peer review is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is an opportunity to shape the future of therapeutic massage and bodywork research while contributing to the growth and credibility of the field. As a peer reviewer, your insights and feedback can elevate the quality of the manuscripts we publish, ensuring that they meet the highest standards of rigor, relevance, and integrity. Beyond advancing knowledge, engaging in peer review also fosters professional growth, allowing you to deepen your expertise and stay connected to emerging trends.

We invite you to join the *IJTMB's* community of reviewers or to renew your commitment if you are already part of this vital network. Whether you are new to peer review or a seasoned contributor, the tools and resources we have outlined are here to support you. If you are ready to take the next step, visit our reviewer webpage and either create or update your reviewer profile on <https://www.ijtmb.org/>.

The more information you can provide, the better able the Editorial Team is to match you with a manuscript aligned with your expertise. Together, we can strengthen the foundation of evidence-based practice in therapeutic massage and bodywork, creating a lasting impact on the profession.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST NOTIFICATION

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