

Scholarly writing, peer-review and quality papers for *Healthcare Infection*

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At *Healthcare Infection*, we think it is important for our readers, authors and reviewers to understand the journal's peer-review processes. It is now more than 13 years since an editorial was published describing peer-review within the original *Australian Infection Control*.¹ We decided it is time to do so again.

Each manuscript submitted to *Healthcare Infection* undergoes an initial review by the Editorial Assistant and subsequently by the Editor-in-Chief. The purpose of this review is to determine whether the manuscript:

- complies with the journal's Guidelines to Authors
- contains novel research or comment
- demonstrates relevance in relation to journal objectives
- displays high quality writing

If the manuscript does not meet these criteria, it is either rejected or returned to the author with a request to amend the manuscript. If the manuscript does meet the criteria, it then undergoes a blind peer review. The blind peer review process follows a standard formula for the journal.

The editorial team considers a variety of options when selecting a peer reviewer for a manuscript: the *Healthcare Infection* database of peer reviewers (according to registered expertise), literature databases – to identify experts who have published in the relevant field – and authors' own suggestions. All reviewers listed in the database have significant research experience and/or are acknowledged experts in particular content areas. Each paper is reviewed by methodological and content experts. To ensure consistency, a member of the editorial board is also assigned to review every manuscript where possible. This process aims to ensure the journal's scientific quality.

We invite potential peer reviewers by email and include the abstract of the submission. Reviewers have 10 days to respond to the invitation before electronic reminders are sent. We provide a link to the full manuscript for those reviewers who accept the invitation. Each reviewer has 21 days to assess the article (now reduced from 30 days). We also provide peer reviewers with guidelines on the journal's website and ask that they comment on:

- originality of the research
- quality of the research
- research design
- data analysis and relevant conclusions
- potential commercial bias

Reviewers are requested to make the appropriate recommendation to the Editor-in-Chief. This should fall within one of the following categories: accepted for publication; requirement for minor, moderate or significant revision; or reject.

The Editor-in-Chief takes responsibility for the final decision on publication based on a range of criteria: reviewers' recommendations, associate editors' input where required, journal space limitations, potential for reader interest, prioritisation of topics and originality of the manuscript. A request to revise does not necessarily mean that the manuscript will be published. During 2012, the average time between submission and the first decision by the Editor-in-Chief was 23 days.

The final decision is sent to the author, along with reviewer feedback. In the case of revision, we ask authors to respond to the reviewers' comments and amend the manuscript where necessary. It is important for authors to address each point

raised when returning their comments to the Editor-in-Chief. Authors should consider reviewer feedback as constructive and provide a suitably professional response. It is entirely acceptable to challenge reviewer comments where appropriate. When the author resubmits the manuscript, the Editor-in-Chief reviews the author's responses and amendments and may decide to organise further review of the manuscript. This may entail approaching original reviewers or finding alternative experts for considered opinion. Following further feedback from peer reviewers, the Editor-in-Chief should make the final decision on the manuscript, with the support of the editorial team if required.

Our peer-review policy aims to ensure that we publish – in timely fashion – only high-quality articles in *Healthcare Infection*. With our description of the peer review process in mind and through collective experiences, we offer potential authors three pieces of advice: prepare, persevere and become involved in peer review. There are some things that authors can do to maximise the opportunity of success. Preparation of manuscripts is critical. This includes reading related papers including those from the submitting journal, proof reading, preparing and revising your article according to author guidelines, and seeking assistance as necessary. Perseverance is required through the entire process of publication, from

original preparation through to revision and responding to reviewers comments. Do not become disheartened; few papers are ever accepted without any revision. If your article is rejected, consider whether it was due to flawed research or other factors, such as poor presentation, submission to an inappropriate journal, or more subjective reasons. Think of the editorial process as an opportunity to plan your next step.

We hope that this overview of the peer review process, including a brief perspective on successful writing, will assist current and potential authors. We look forward to receiving novel submissions in the field of infection prevention and control from all prospective authors now and in the future.

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Conflict of interest

The authors are members of the Editorial Board for *Healthcare Infection*.

References

1. Spearing N. Editorial. *Australian Infection Control* 2000; 5(4): 6.