

The Four Stage Review Process

The Journal of Health and Human Experience

The Journal Editorial Board uses a four stage review process for manuscripts submitted for publication. The stages are described below. The Editor directs/supervises the four stage process. The Editor-in-Chief provides strategic guidance for the review system and its quality improvement. Each stage builds upon the previous, with the Editor ensuring that all requirements are completed. The Chairs of each committee work with the Editor to achieve success and expert synergy. Save for the initial receipt and review of any manuscript, the Editor-in-Chief recuses himself/herself from the actual processes, thus avoiding conflict of interest. At the end of the process, with the certification of the Editor, the Editor-in-Chief finalizes and approves each manuscript. The following are brief descriptions of the four stages.

Stage 1: Concept Review

Authors may submit a full draft manuscript, or a one-to-two-page proposal for a manuscript. Either is acceptable. All submissions are sent to the Editor-in-Chief and the Editor, who make a prudential judgment whether the topic and treatment will interest the *Journal's* readership. Both, including Intellectual Property Counsel if necessary, review the text for any regulatory requirements such as human or animal research approvals. If applicability and interest are present and no regulatory non-compliance issues are found, the Editor directs the four stage review process for each submission. To begin the process, the Editor determines the needs for the first stage. The Editor may ask for initial review from various Board subject matter experts. The Editor can also choose to send the submission to the Senior Associate Editor for initial assessment by the Associate Editors. If this is the option the Editor chooses, the Senior Associate Editor leads the Stage 1 review, which is performed by any number of Associate Editors who determine if the proposal or draft is relevant to the *Journal* mission and applicable to its allied arts and sciences. In either case, the Associate Editors or other experts chosen by the Editor assess the depth of the submission's potential as central to the *Journal's* academic nature. Stage 1 reviewers normally provide comments and recommendations. Reviewers are kept anonymous and comments are shaped in language by the Editor that is helpful for prospective authors. If the proposal or draft is determined to be mission relevant and applicable, the Editor provides recommendations from the initial review process to the author. Likewise, if a submission is not felt to be content relevant, the Editor advises the author accordingly. Presuming acceptability, the Editor informs the author of final compositional requirements in accordance with *Journal* and APA standards. Authors then must submit a final full manuscript to the Editor and the Editor-in-Chief for the beginning of Stage 2

review. However, a final point must be made. It is at Stage 1 that the *Journal's* leadership makes the commitment to the author for publication of the final work. It is a commitment to engaging the author in a journey of quality improvement. The next stages are never conducted as a type of “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” activity. In fact, it is at Stage 1 that all Board members make a commitment to publishing the work barring the unforeseen or barring the decision by an author to withdraw a submission. It is also at this point that the *Journal* will not engage any proposal or draft that is being submitted to any other entity for publication. Stage 1 review is a stage of honored mutual commitment.

Stage 2: Content Review

The respective first or corresponding author of an acceptable proposed submission now has the responsibility for shaping the text in accordance with all Stage 1 requirements. This includes shaping the final draft of the manuscript in complete compliance with all Journal Author Guidelines per current APA style. When all has been accomplished, the author sends the final draft directly to the Editor-in-Chief and the Editor. The Editor, copying the Editor-in-Chief, sends the draft to the Chair of the Academic Review Committee for content review. The Chair assigns the text to any number of members whose areas of expertise are aligned with the subject matter. The Chair provides reviewers with the standard review form and details appropriate timeline requirements. Authors are never told who provides the review. The Chair guides Stage 2 review to avoid any practices and attitudes that have been excoriated by scholars and authors over time, including any possibility for a review to be mired by power rather than collegial assistance. To underscore this, the categories of “accept” or “reject” are not used on reviewer forms. Academic review is intrinsic to the scholarly and professional journey process. Academic reviewers must be honest, forthright, and clear about needs for improvement before a text can be recommended for possible publication. The highest standards of academic excellence are maintained in a manner that is collegial and understanding. Authors likewise must maturely accept all revisions for the sake of quality improvement. Stage 2 review often provides authors with both “required” and “suggested” revisions. Required revisions would include obvious editorial revisions such as adherence to the author guideline format or addressing revisions directed during Stage 1 review. Suggested revisions provide the author with thought-provoking ideas that may provide clarification or offer a different perspective that could be helpful in improving final publication. The author is empowered to determine whether or not to accept suggested revisions. When Stage 2 reviews are complete, the Editor works with the author to make all required changes. When changes have been made, the revised draft is sent to the Editor who forwards it to the Manuscript Editorial Committee Chair for Stage 3, copying the Editor-in-Chief. The Editor summarizes for the Chair what has been accomplished to date.

Stage 3: Composition Review

The Chair of the Manuscript Editorial Committee assigns the received draft to one or more members. The Chair leads the committee in the critique of the text in light of Author Guidelines in accordance with current APA standards as adapted for *Journal* purposes. Committee members and the Chair ensure that expected norms are followed. They recommend important improvements to the style, readability, and compositional refinement of the text. Of particular importance is the collegial assistance that the committee and the Chair provide for international authors when English may not be the authors' first language. For the *Journal* this is particularly important, as it is published only in English with American English and British English as normative. Reviewers embody the highest ethical respect for authors of all nations and cultures who look to the *Journal* as the forum in which they entrust their scholarship. Once editing is complete, the Chair sends the edited draft to the Editor. The Editor works with the author directly to ensure that requirements are met, and suggested improvements are made.

Stage 4: Certification and Finalization

After receiving the final version from the author, the Editor provides for a final review of the completed manuscript whether from particular experts or the Associate Editors. For the latter, the Editor directs the Senior Associate Editor to ask one or more members of the Associate Editors to provide a final quality review. Those Associate Editors who may have performed the first stage are not always involved in this stage. The final reviewer(s) is/are apprised generally of what has transpired to date. Final assessment is sent back to the Editor. If any final items are needed, the Editor works directly with the author. The Editor-in-Chief is apprised of these final issues also. Presuming no final issues (or when such are completed), the Editor forwards the final manuscript to the Editor-in-Chief certifying it as ready for publication. The Editor-in-Chief writes to the author(s) formally to indicate final approval and that the manuscript will appear in a future edition of the *Journal*. All authors/co-authors then complete Copyright Release Agreements and provide brief author biosketches. The manuscript is saved for eventual forwarding to the publishing house.

Conclusion

These are the four stages of review required for each submission to the *Journal of Health and Human Experience*. Many have cited the entire process as immensely helpful for author development and continual improvement for publication practices. The experience has been cited as growthful, wise and collegial.