

The Four Stage Review Process

The Journal of Health and Human Experience

(The Journal's process is an adaptation of a previous version invented by the JHHE Founding Editor for another publication he also led as Editor.)

The Journal Editorial Board reviews all manuscripts in the four stages described below. The entire process is overseen by the Editor-in-Chief and directed by the Editor. Each stage builds upon the previous one, ensuring that requirements from the previous stage are completed. The Chairs of each committee work with each other to achieve a level of expert synergy. Of particular importance, save for the initial receipt and review of any manuscript, the Editor-in-Chief essentially recuses himself/herself from the process. This recusal avoids, as much as possible, any conflict of interest. At the end of the process, 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/or 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 then sends the submission to the Senior Associate Editor for initial assessment by the Associate Editors Board. The Senior Associate Editor leads this Stage 1 review, which is performed by any number of Associate Editors who determine if the proposal or draft is relevant to the mission of the *Journal* and applicable to the profession and its allied arts and sciences. The Associate Editors further assess the academic and professional depth of the submission's potential. This stage is clearly central to maintaining the *Journal's* academic nature. Associate Editors normally will provide comments and recommendations. These are anonymized and shaped in language that is helpful for prospective authors. If mission relevance and applicability of content are determined, the Senior Associate Editor advises the Editor, who then conveys to the author any comments or recommendations from the board. Likewise, if a submission were not felt to be content relevant, the Editor advises the author accordingly. Presuming acceptability, the Editor then 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 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 with 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 members of the boards make a commitment to publishing the work barring the unforeseen or barring the decision by an author to detach from the process. It is also at this point that the *Journal* clearly will not engage any proposal or draft that is being submitted to any other entity for publication. Stage 1 content review is a stage of honored mutual commitment.

Stage 2: Content Review

The respective first 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 near picture-perfect compliance with all Journal Author Guidelines per APA style. When all has been accomplished, the author sends the final draft directly to the Editor-in-Chief and the Editor. The Editor, while copying all leaders, sends the draft to the Chair of the Academic Review Committee for content review. The Chair assigns the text to any number of board members whose areas of expertise are aligned with the subject matter of the draft. The Chair provides reviewers with the standard review form and details appropriate timeline requirements. Unless a reviewer agrees, authors are never told who provides the review. The Chair guides Stage 2 review to avoid any practices and attitudes in peer review that have been excoriated by scholars and authors over time. This includes any type of “inquisitional judgment” or “academic arrogance” wherein a reviewer’s intentionality is mired by a desire for power rather than collegial assistance. In fact, over time it has been decided to eliminate the categories of “accept” or “reject” from reviewer forms. Academic review of content is clearly part of the scholarly and professional journey process. There is no room for arrogance or power. However, academic reviewers must be honest, forthright, and clear about needs for improvement before a text can be recommended to the Editor as ready for possible publication. Academic reviewers must be persons of professional and mature balance. They never sacrifice the highest standards of academic excellence. Yet, the commitment to academic excellence must be provided in a way that is collegial and understanding. Authors likewise must have the maturity to accept all revisions for the sake of quality improvement. In the spirit of providing an enhanced publishing experience and mentorship, Stage 2 review often provides authors with both “required” and “suggested” revisions. Required revisions would include obvious editorial revisions such as not adhering to the author guideline format or not 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 the final publication. The author is empowered to determine whether or not to accept suggested revisions. When Stage 2 reviews are complete, the Editor and/or the Chair work directly with the author to make all required changes. When such changes have been made, the newly revised draft is sent to the Editor who then forwards it to the Manuscript Editorial Committee for Stage 3. The Editor communicates what has been accomplished to date from academic review requirements.

Stage 3: Composition Review

The Chair of the Manuscript Editorial Committee assigns the newly received draft to one or more members of the board. Members provide their expertise on a rotating basis and as available. The Chair leads the committee in the critique of the text in light of Author Guidelines that are themselves in accordance with APA standards. Such standards are adapted for *Journal* purposes. For manuscripts received, committee members and the Chair ensure that expected norms are followed. They also recommend important improvements to the style, readability, and compositional refinement of the overall text. In the end, the Editor and/or the Chair work with the author directly to ensure that all requirements have been met, and that all suggestions for improvement are made. 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. International editing requires an immense amount of skill and technical expertise. For the *Journal* this is particularly important, as it is published only in English. American English is normative, but other standards are acceptable. Committee members 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 final draft to the Editor noting that it is now certified and ready for potential publication.

Stage 4: Certification and Finalization

Having received the final manuscript edition as certified and ready for potential publication, the Editor forwards the text to the Senior Associate Editor, who asks one or more members of the Associate Editors Board to provide a final quality assurance review. Those Associate Editors who had performed the first stage are not always involved in this fourth stage. Regardless of who performs this final stage, the respective Associate Editor(s) is/are apprised generally of what has transpired to date. They communicate their final assessment back to the Senior Associate Editor. If there were any final items still needing to be addressed, the Senior Associate Editor works directly with the author. The Editor

is apprised of these final issues also. Presuming there are no final issues (or when such are completed), the Senior Associate Editor sends the final text to the Editor with recommendation for final approval. Barring the unforeseen or any larger mitigating circumstances, the Editor forwards the final manuscript to the Editor-in-Chief and asserts that it is certified ready for publication. The Editor-in-Chief writes to the author(s) formally to indicate final approval and notification that the manuscript will appear in a future edition of the *Journal*. All authors/ co-authors then complete Author Agreements and provide brief author biosketches. A copy of the text is then saved for forwarding to the publishing house for the edition of the *Journal* in which it will appear.

Conclusion

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