Guidelines for Reviewers

Thank you for your dedication to professional improvement by acting as a reviewer for TESL-EJ!

Executive summary:

Reviewers are to consider the following:
  1) Relevance: Is the manuscript relevant and of interest to the TESL-EJ readership?
  2) Research: Is the research original, valid, and appropriate?
  3) Ethical Standards: Are ethical standards in research and citation followed?
  4) Writing Quality: Is the writing style accessible and of high quality?
  5) References: Are the references relevant and current?
  6) Formatting: Does the manuscript follow the basic "TESL-EJ Style Guidelines".

Overview of the process

When a paper is submitted to TESL-EJ, it is checked for basic conformity to the journal guidelines before being allocated to an editor who sees it through the review process. After reading through the paper, the shepherd will ask two or more suitable reviewers to prepare reviews, preferably people with knowledge of the field of the paper (though it is not always possible to find reviewers with a deep knowledge of the specific subject matter of a given paper). In light of the recommendations of the reviewers and his/her own reading of the paper, the shepherd will contact the writer(s) and supervise the process of revision where appropriate, and a second round of reviews if necessary, before forwarding publishable papers to the editor for final approval. Reviewers can expect that their reviews, or extracts from them, will be forwarded to writers, so reviewers should aim to express themselves courteously and where possible balance criticism with praise."

Possible Recommendations

The role of the reviewer is thus to provide an appropriately detailed and informed critique of the paper, and to make a recommendation: "Accept as is" (relatively rare), "Request revisions" (Common), "Minor revisions required", "Not suitable for publication", or "Submit for publication elsewhere". The review should justify the recommendation, and provide the co-editor with the necessary information for action.

If the recommendation is to accept the paper as is, the reviewer needs to provide some evidence of its quality for the benefit of the editor, bearing in mind that editors may not be specialists in the field.

The longest and most detailed reviews will usually be for potentially publishable papers that **require revision**. Recommendations for revision should be as detailed and specific as possible (without the reviewer actually rewriting the paper). Care should be taken to recommend revisions that are realistic. A recommendation that the writer repeats the data collection in an empirical study in a revised format, for example, is not realistic; it is better to reject the current paper but give a suggestion for a new study in the same field.

If the reviewer finds that the paper is **not suitable for publication**, this needs to be justified briefly but in sufficient detail for the shepherd to form an opinion (perhaps in the light of a conflicting recommendation from another reviewer) and to give some feedback to the writer. Serious submissions deserve an explanation for rejection, one that will perhaps help the writer in preparing future papers.

If the paper is not suitable for TESL-EJ but is nevertheless potentially **publishable elsewhere**, the reviewer should, if possible, suggest the (type of) journal to which it could be submitted. Often this will be a national or regional rather than an international journal in the case of papers that seem relevant to teaching/learning in a specific country or area of the world but have little interest for readers outside that area. It is not necessary to review such papers in detail beyond explaining why the subject matter is not suitable for TESL-EJ.

Checklist prior to submission

□ Does the abstract adequately reflect the content of the paper?
□ Is there a clear presentation of the problem/issue that the paper is addressing?
□ Is the article clearly structured, using sections with headings and sub-headings as appropriate?
□ If the paper is a research study, is there a list of research questions or hypotheses? Are the results discussed in a way that deals with each of these research questions/hypotheses separately?
□ Have you examined any statistics in the paper and checked that they are clearly presented and analysed using appropriate statistical instruments? [Some reviewers may not feel qualified to comment on the statistical aspects of the paper; just please say if this is the case for you.]
□ Does the study have important limitations? Are any such limitations to the study mentioned in the conclusion? Are there suggestions for future research to overcome these limitations?
□ Have you attempted to provide explicit, actionable suggestions when possible?
□ Have you done a Google search to see if any recent, relevant publications exist that might have enhanced the study?
□ Have you removed your own name from MS Word's "properties" in any Word file you submit as part of the review in addition to the standard review form? ("How to" information follows below.)
□ Do the comments in your review adequately justify your recommendation, whether positive or negative?

Returning your assessment of the manuscript

There are three ways to return your assessment. Many reviewers elect to use all three.

1) Providing a separate document with your comments

Such a document allows you to "speak" directly with the author, allowing you to discuss the article in a more friendly manner. When possible try to follow your comments with an explicit, actionable suggestion. To avoid duplication, you may then state **"See separate document"** in the questionnaire response boxes.

2) Providing feedback in a copy of the paper via MS Word's "Track Changes" and/or comments

If you would like to point out specific issues with the content, please take advantage of MS Word's "Track Changes" and/or comment features. These can be very help to the author(s) and the editor.

Focus on areas that are unclear. You might suggest amplification where additional information seems desirable. There is no need to focus on mechanics or sentence-level issues unless they affect comprehension. Feel free to suggest additional references that the author might have overlooked.

Be sure to anonymize your document. Instructions for various MS Word versions can be found at the end of this information.

3) The review form (provided for most reviews)

The TESL-EJ submissions site provides a review form with prompts for areas to be covered, but reviewers should use this form constructively to say what they want to say about the paper. However, if the writer has private comments that should not be forwarded to the writer, there is a separate section for comments to the editor.

The sections of the review form are:

Relevance: *Is the manuscript relevant and of interest to the TESL-EJ readership?*

The TESL-EJ readership comprises primarily ESL teachers and teacher trainers, and researchers in the field of Applied Linguistics. Anything relevant to teaching/learning English as a second language, at any level and in any context, may be considered potentially of interest. Most articles published are reports of empirical studies, and these should conform with the norms of valid research. "Opinion" essays / survey articles are also potentially acceptable, though these should always be well-informed.

Please note that TESL-EJ has an international readership. It is our hope that **whatever findings there are in the manuscript will be applicable beyond the culture where the study was conducted.** If the findings are clearly only relevant to a specific country, then no matter how well the article may be written, it should be submitted to a local or regional journal, not to TESL-EJ.

Research: *Is the research original, valid, and appropriate?*

These are areas where the expert knowledge of the reviewer of the specific field of the paper will be especially valuable. However, not all articles can be sent to reviewers who are experts in the relevant field; so some internet research by the reviewer may be necessary. For empirical research articles, a careful examination of the research methods and the interpretation of the results will be particularly important.

Ethical Standards: *Are ethical standards in research and citation followed? If no, explain.*

Please look out for anything that might be categorised as plagiarism or wholesale use of AI.

Ethical standards in research include maintaining appropriate confidentiality. Research subjects should not be identified by name. Normally it is acceptable to identify institutions, but reviewers should form an opinion on this where appropriate. It should be evident from the paper what steps were taken to comply with reasonable ethical standards in empirical research.

Where the research involves some kind of intervention – trialling a teaching technique, for example – every effort should be made to ensure that students are not disadvantaged in their learning by their participation in the research.

If they are to be inconvenienced in some way – for example, by having to do extra work over and above that normally expected – then it should be with their explicit consent, and normally with this consent signalled by signing a consent form. It should be possible for students to opt out of research study participation if such participation might inconvenience them, or involve them in any activity against their wishes. Finally, while it is recognised that the nature of some research treatments means that subjects cannot be informed of what is being done, students should be given as much information as possible about any research in which they are involved.

Writing Quality: *Is the writing style accessible and of high quality? If not, what specific areas need improvement?*

Most contributions come from professionals who themselves are second language users of English, and who may make minor local errors in grammar and vocabulary. **These will be fixable at a later point,** and reviewers are not expected to make detailed corrections of such language errors. While it would be useful to alert the author to this issue by citing a few of the errors, please devote most of your time to the content.

There is no specific "TESL-EJ style" of writing, but we hope that authors will be able to get a general sense of appropriate style by reading other relevant articles in TESL-EJ. The search function within the EJ site is a convenient way to do this.

TESL-EJ has no specific length limitation on papers, but it is expected that the length of the paper will be appropriate for the content. Some writers take advantage of the lack of a word limit to write in an over-verbose style, or to include unnecessary content; this is particularly the case when a paper is based on a longer document, such as a PhD thesis. Other writers may have prepared their paper with the 6,000 word limit imposed by many print journals in mind, and have cut important information to get within that limit.

References: Are the references relevant and current? Are they all used in one or more citations, and vice versa? Do they represent a good grasp of the current literature in the field? Are they cited appropriately in APA format and properly alphabeticised?

Here again the reviewer's expert knowledge – or some appropriate checking – is important. There is nothing wrong with including old references if they are still relevant, but it should be clear that the writer has taken the most recent research in the appropriate field into account, and has taken time to update their reading if, for example, the paper is based on research conducted some time ago. Note that it may sometimes happen that a writer includes too many references – a vast number of tangential works can be unhelpful.

Formatting Guidelines

Another task for the reviewer is to ascertain whether the manuscript follows the basic "TESL-EJ Style Sheet." If you do not have a copy, you may download it from tesl-ej.org or click on the link in the previous sentence. Divergences from the formatting guidelines are not a major problem at this stage, since these issues can be addressed later if the paper is accepted for publication, but it would help both the editorial staff and the author(s) if you could point out in general terms any issues in this respect that will need to be addressed.

Anonymizing your document.

First, make sure that you do not use your own name as part of the file name.

Microsoft Word 2010 (version 14):
1. Open the Word document that contains comments and edits. Under File, click on the "Info" tab.
2. In "Prepare for Sharing" click the arrow next to "Check for issues". Select "Inspect document" from the menu.
3. In the Document Inspector window, be sure that the "Document properties and personal information" box is checked. Click "Inspect".
4. Click "Remove All" next to the Document properties and personal information. Important: do NOT click Remove All next to the Comments, revisions, versions and annotations since this will permanently delete all of the comments from the document.
5. Click Reinspect and then Save the document. When the document is opened again, all comments will appear without the author names or initials.

Microsoft Word (older versions):
- Access the Document Information Panel through the Microsoft Office Button > Prepare > Properties.
- Change the Author Name. Note that earlier versions of Word will not accept a blank box for Name.
- Under Tools, select Options. Select Security. Under Privacy Options, check the box "Remove personal information from file properties on save".
- Click OK. Then Save.

YouTube for MS Word 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2qMcFJgcig
YouTube for MS Word 365 (Win): https://youtu.be/uN2iJrkQXvE

Macintosh
In the tabs at top of the screen (i.e. "Home", etc.), click "Review -> Protect -> Protect Document". At the bottom you will see:
    "Remove personal information from this file on save"
Check this box and then click "OK". Then save the document and reopen it. Your comments will now be labeled as "Author" instead.

YouTube for MS Word 365 (Mac): https://youtu.be/GPt6PdU5EAY