

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide CIL reviewers with a toolkit for reviewing manuscripts, and generally, to guide them through the review process.

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### 1. WRITING THE REPORT

#### *Role of the Reviewer*

The peer reviewer has two basic roles: (1) to determine if the article is suitable for publication in CIL, and (2) to help the authors to improve their manuscript in order to make it “publication ready.” The reviewer will examine the paper in terms of its overall value, the quality of the research and the way it is presented, and the effectiveness of the final product. Benoss, Kirk, and Hall (2003) provided a thorough discussion of the role of the reviewer, outlining several key obligations. These include the following:

- Upholding confidentiality. The reviewer should respect the privacy of the author by keeping the manuscript and its contents confidential. The submission should not be shared or discussed in detail with any third party (p. 49).
- Maintaining objectivity. The reviewer should inform the editor of any potential conflicts of interest before commencing the review. If, for example, the reviewer is able identify the author(s), it may not affect the integrity of the review, but it should be disclosed. The reviewer should decline any review if they feel their objectivity will be compromised (p. 50).
- Having significant knowledge. The manuscript should fall within the reviewer’s area of expertise. If the reviewer believes they lack the expertise to make a thorough evaluation of the manuscript, they should decline the review, explaining the reason (p. 50).

#### *Content & Structure*

The review should be as readable and succinct as possible, while guiding the author(s) toward an effective revision in a constructive manner. The reviewer should keep in mind that they are providing information to guide both the author(s) and the editor. Although it is not necessary to submit separate reviews, the reviewer can also submit supplemental comments to the editor that will not be seen by the author(s) in the final review.

To develop a well-organized and succinct review, the reviewer should have an overall sense of the manuscript before attempting a detailed critique. It may be helpful to begin the process by “pre-reading” the article—reviewing the introduction, conclusion, and major headings—followed by an initial reading of the manuscript, from beginning to end, without annotating the manuscript .

There is no one way to organize a review; the reviewer’s approach will depend largely on the concerns and recommendations associated with that particular manuscript. However, Seals and Tanaka (2000) suggested organizing comments into major concerns “on which the acceptability of the manuscript depends,” and minor “housekeeping” concerns (p. 57). This approach can help the reviewer to decide what should be included in the review and what should be omitted. If a comment does not have a significant impact on whether the article should be accepted, it may be a minor criticism that the reviewer may ultimately choose to omit from the review.

*Tone & Balance*

Above all, the reviewer has a responsibility to treat the author(s) with respect. A little kindness goes a long way. Even if the manuscript is very problematic, the reviewer should try to identify strengths and provide some positive feedback, to motivate and encourage the author(s), and to balance criticism. The value of even the most thorough review will be lost if it is couched in terms that are sarcastic or unhelpfully critical.

The reviewer should not, however, worry unnecessarily if more of the review is devoted to providing constructive criticism than positive feedback, which is common even with strong manuscripts. This is not, in itself, the mark of an unbalanced review, but rather one that adequately and fairly informs the editor and the author(s).

*Dos & Don’ts*

Beyond the above recommendations, there are a number of essential “Dos and Don’ts” that the reviewer should always keep in mind when preparing a review. These fundamentals are listed in the table below:

<i>DON’T</i>	<i>DO</i>
...make vague, general comments about the quality of the manuscript.	...be specific, by giving examples and suggesting solutions.
...take on the role of copy editor. Grammar, spelling, typing edits are outside the scope of the peer review.	...if necessary, mention large-scale problems in these areas, giving just a few examples to show where the problem occurs.
...make disrespectful comments of the “so what?” variety.	...treat the authors with kindness and respect.
...argue with the author. Instead, ask for clarification or suggest ways to strengthening the author’s position (Maner 2001b).	...focus on how effectively the author supports their argument, rather than express an opinion (Maner 2001b).

## *Final Recommendations*

The final task of the peer reviewer is to make a recommendation regarding the manuscript. CIL provides four choices from which the reviewer must choose: Accept Submission, Revisions Required, Resubmit for Review, or Decline Submission.

- Accept Submission: The overall quality and significance of the manuscript is appropriate for publication in CIL. (Note: Even the very best of manuscripts will require at least some minor revisions.)
- Revisions Required: Revisions are required in order for the manuscript to be appropriate for publication in CIL. The manuscript “should” be accepted for publication, assuming that necessary revisions are made. (Note: Please specify the necessary revisions.)
- Resubmit for Review: The manuscript requires significant changes, such that a revised version will need to undergo the full review process. The author(s) may resubmit the revised manuscript for review, though there is no guarantee of acceptance.
- Decline Submission: Even with significant revisions, the overall quality and significance of the manuscript make it inappropriate for publication in CIL.

In some cases, the recommendation will be obvious to the reviewer after an initial reading of the manuscript, but if the reviewer is unsure, the best strategy is to develop the written review before deciding on the final recommendation. The reviewer’s final recommendation will be based on a number of considerations, including the novelty of the article and interest to the profession, appropriateness for publication in CIL, quality of presentation, and validity of the research.

## **2. REVIEWING THE CONTENT**

### *The Title*

The title provides a first impression regarding the content of an article, and will often have a significant impact on whether or not a reader chooses to look further. The reviewer should consider the following when evaluating the proposed title:

- Does the title “make sense,” and will it give the reader a clear idea of what the article is about?
- Does it accurately reflect the content of the article?
- Is there anything about the title that might mislead the reader?
- Should the title be revised in some way to provide further information? For example, should a key concept, theme, or methodology be mentioned?

### *The Abstract*

The abstract is “a concise but thorough summary of the information presented in a scholarly paper” (Hollister, 2014). A well-written CIL abstract includes the following elements in 150 words or less:

- Topic: Tells what the paper is about
- Purpose: Tells why the paper is necessary
- Method: Tells how the research was conducted

- Results: Tells the results of the research
- Conclusion: Tells the main implications of the results

### *The Introduction*

The introduction lays the foundation for the rest of the paper. If the article is not adequately introduced, the significance and usefulness of its content may be lost on the reader. Likewise, if the introduction does not accurately reflect the content of the article, the reader may feel confused or misled. Consider the following questions when reviewing the introduction:

- Does the introduction include a clear, complete, and concise statement of purpose, thesis, or hypothesis?
- Is there an overview of the goals, methods, and organization of the article (Maner, 2001a)?
- Are the unique or significant aspects of the paper described?
- Is the introduction appropriately succinct? Is there information that should be omitted or moved to another section of the paper?
- Return to the introduction once the whole paper has been read and consider if the body of the paper reflects the purpose, thesis, and goals set out in the introduction?

### *Images & Illustrations*

Images and illustrations should be included only to enhance the reader's understanding of the article. Consider the following when reviewing illustrations:

- Does the image have a direct bearing on the reader's understanding of the article? Does it clarify or illustrate a complicated fact or concept?
- Does the image accurately serve its function as described in the text of the article?
- Have any illustrations been included that are simply decorative, or too simplistic to usefully enhance the reader's understanding of the text?
- Are there places where an illustration would be useful in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the text? If so, what kind of illustration should the author include?
- Are all illustrations properly labelled, both in the text of the article and on the image itself, so that the reader can make the appropriate connections between text and image?

### *Figures & Tables*

As with images and illustrations, figures and tables should only be included to enhance the reader's understanding of the article. Consider the following when reviewing figures and tables:

- Does the figure or table have a direct bearing on the reader's understanding of the article? Is it necessary to demonstrate what is presented in the text of the article?
- Does the figure or table accurately serve its function as described in the text of the article?
- Are any figures or tables included that are unnecessary, too simplistic, or too large to usefully enhance the reader's understanding of the text?
- Are there places where a figure or table would be useful in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the text?

- Are all figures and tables properly labelled, both in the text of the article and on the figures and tables themselves, so that the reader can make the appropriate connections between them and the text?

### *Use of Sources*

The reviewer should decide whether sources are used appropriately in the article. Where necessary, the reviewer should locate and examine cited sources to ensure they have been accurately represented. Although the reviewer might make note of any large-scale citation problems, detailed editing of the citations themselves should be left to the copy-editor. Instead, the reviewer should focus on the following questions:

- Is the content appropriately supported using references to other sources?
- Have the cited sources been accurately and fairly represented?
- Are there any statements or arguments that should be substantiated using secondary sources?
- Is the overall quality of the citations themselves acceptable? For example, are there mistakes or stylistic inconsistencies?

### *Style & Organization*

The reviewer should pay attention to the overall style and organization of the paper in order to decide if it is logical and appropriate to the journal. Although the reviewer should not engage in detailed copy-editing, large-scale stylistic problems should be noted. Consider the following questions when reviewing a manuscript for style and organization:

- Does the manuscript follow the basic directions set out in the Author Guidelines for CIL?
- Is the paper clearly written, logically organized, and easy to understand?
- Is the reviewer able to follow the “overall logical structure” throughout the article? If not, at what point does the organization or the argument deteriorate (Cornell 2007)?
- Is the paper clearly divided into logical sections? Are there sections that should be further subdivided, or should some content be relocated to other sections of the paper?
- Is the article appropriately concise? Is there repetitive or extraneous content that should be edited or removed? If so, which sections are they (be specific)?
- Are there gaps in the paper? Have useful or important sections been omitted, or does anything need to be discussed or developed more fully?
- Does the manuscript suffer from poor writing mechanics (grammar, usage, passive narrative voice)? If so, include that information in the review, but leave the corrections to the copy-editors.

## **3. DETERMINING QUALITY & SIGNIFICANCE**

### *Significance of the Article*

The reviewer should consider the article in terms of its significance to readers, as well as its appropriateness for publication in CIL. To help make these judgments, the reviewer may need to do a scan of the literature available on the topic, and review the scope and focus of CIL. When making these judgments, it is also useful to ask the following questions:

- Does the paper present a unique, novel, or newsworthy perspective or finding? Is the subject of the article significant or important to the field? Do you believe that CIL readers will be interested in what it has to offer?
- Does the paper fit within the stated focus, scope, and guidelines of the journal? Does it seem like an appropriate addition to CIL?

### *Quality of research*

Where original research is presented, the reviewer should consider the quality of both the presentation and the methodological approach. The following questions will help with this analysis:

- Have the authors employed suitable methods? For instance, were subjects selected appropriately, and have they employed valid survey, observation, or experimentation strategies?
- Has a rationale been provided for the chosen methodology, and is it reasonable?
- Do the authors present any unnecessary or unexplained data? If so, should it be explained, or omitted from the article?
- Have the authors provided enough information for you to evaluate the accuracy of their conclusions? Are there any gaps in the author's research (primary or secondary) that should be addressed? If so, what additions are needed?
- Are the findings believable? If they are not, what do you find questionable or contradictory?
- Do the authors accurately and logically interpret their own research findings? Can you think of other interpretations besides the ones that have been presented?
- Have the authors presented and discussed the limitations of the study?
- Is the research reproducible?

### *Evidence of Bias*

Closely connected to quality of research is the need for unbiased presentation of the findings. The reviewer should consider the following questions when examining the paper for signs of bias:

- Are the arguments and findings presented in a way that seems objective, even-handed, and fair?
- Do the authors present opinions as though they were factual information (Maner, 2001a)?
- Do the authors appear to make assumptions or jump to conclusions, based on incomplete or inadequate evidence (Maner, 2001a)? Are there unsubstantiated claims?

## **4. INNOVATIVE PRACTICES MANUSCRIPTS**

The following guidelines apply to the review of manuscripts being considered for the Innovative Practices section of CIL. These guidelines are **in addition** to those given above.

### *General Guidelines*

This section of CIL presents peer-reviewed case studies that report on innovative information literacy instruction practices that are relevant to higher education contexts. The primary audiences for this section are academic librarians and other library personnel and educators who are engaged in information literacy instruction. Submissions for this section should therefore foreground information literacy innovations and their actual or potential contributions to professional practice and to teaching and learning.

Innovations that are explored in this section may occur in a wide range of higher education contexts, including but also extending beyond in-person, classroom-based information literacy instruction. When articulating innovative practices, authors are encouraged to consider librarians' evolving instructional roles. The section editors are particularly interested in innovation approaches that reflect the authors' sensitivity and responsiveness to local contexts. Authors are invited to be critically reflective about the impact, the possibilities, and the challenges that they experience with their innovative projects at the local level, as well as how their experiences might help to inform reflective and innovative practices in other environments.

Manuscripts should not exceed 5000 words, including abstracts and references and excluding tables and figures, and will ideally include the following:

- Explanation of what makes the reported project/practice innovative
- Reflection on practice and on lessons learned
- Description of the context of the innovative practice (e.g., instructional environment or institution, target population, project purpose, collaborators)
- Significance that the innovation may have to academic librarians and other library personnel and educators
- Reference to related practices or discussions that help to situate the relevance of the innovative approach (e.g., publications, online discussions, conferences)
- Considerations for readers who might adapt the project to other contexts
- Assessment of the project and/or possible approaches to future assessment. (While submissions will ideally include clear evidence of the impact of the project, articles that discuss less formal assessment modes or plans for future assessment are also welcome.)
- If appropriate, indication that an Institutional/Ethical Review Board has reviewed and approved the publication of data or findings

### *The Title*

Authors are encouraged to avoid using the words "innovative" or "innovation" in the title, given the CIL section title.

### *The Abstract*

The abstract should give a clear overview of the article and highlight the following points, all of which will be more fully explored in the body of the manuscript (the order of these points may vary):

- Nature of the innovative project or practice;
- The context in which the innovation took place (e.g. instructional environment, target population, etc.), and
- The significance that the innovation might have to academic librarians and other library personnel and educators.

### *The Introduction*

Ideally, the introduction will address the points highlighted in the abstract, as well as additional points of particular significance. In sum:

- What innovative project or practice is reported;
- In what context did it take place (e.g. instructional environment, target population, etc.);
- The significance that the innovation might have to academic librarians and other library personnel and educators; and
- Indication that the manuscript includes reflection on practice/lessons learned, considerations for readers who might adapt the project to other contexts, and either assessment of the project/practice or discussion of possible approaches for future assessment.

### *Use of Sources*

Reviewers are asked to bear in mind that a reported innovative project/practice may not necessarily be discussed in the existing published literature. Robust literature reviews are not required for Innovative Practices manuscripts. However, references to related literature, including theoretical work or reports on related projects/practices, are likely to strengthen a manuscript and should be included as appropriate. If there is significant literature on the issues or approaches that are central to the innovative practice, some discussion of that scholarship is expected.

### *Significance of the Article*

Peer reviewers are asked to bear in mind that the editors will only advance a manuscript to peer review if they feel that it reports a sufficiently innovative practice/project. In some cases the innovation may be reflected in particular elements of a projects, while the project as a whole might not be considered an innovation. With this context in mind, peer reviewers are nonetheless encouraged to apply their expertise and experience to considering whether, and to what extent, a practice/project is innovative and how the project's/practice's innovative quality may be contextualized for readers.

### *Quality of Research*

The practice/project reported may be experimental, a pilot effort, or in ongoing development. The practice/project should be described in enough detail that a reader can understand the author's/authors' overall pedagogical approach.

Peer reviewers are also asked to keep in mind that a report of an innovative practice/project that evidences underdeveloped methods or assessment may still make a valuable contribution by including robust reflection on and discussion of such issues as lessons learned, considerations for individuals who pursue a similar project, and possible approaches for future assessment. Innovative Practices manuscripts should nonetheless include explicit discussions of students' responses to the instructional approach and evidence-based reflection on student learning.

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#### **Document History**

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