

The American Journal of Semiotics

Peer Review Guidelines

1. PREAMBLE

Many factors contribute to the reputation and long-term viability of a scholarly journal. They include the competence and conscientiousness of the editorial team in charge of its production, publication regularity, print quality, journal accessibility, and so on—but first and foremost the excellence of its contents. That excellence results from a varying combination of attributes such as integrity, originality, insightfulness, informativeness, erudition, learnedness, methodicalness, logicity, clarity, rigor, and thoroughness.

A journal's scholarly success, in terms of the contribution it makes to the advancement of the field that defines it, depends as much on the quality of the submissions it receives as on that of the assessment made of that quality by independent reviewers. The aim of the present document is to provide TAJIS reviewers a few guidelines to help them conduct their examination of submitted articles in ways that best help the editorial team to decide whether or not to accept them for publication.

2. POLICY

It is TAJIS's policy that all papers vying for publication in the journal be double-blind reviewed to the extent that that is possible. This policy applies therefore as much to articles submitted by individual authors or groups of authors as to those that are brought together as a topical collection by a guest-editor or on the initiative of some member of TAJIS's own editorial team. A double-blind review seeks to ensure that neither authors nor reviewers are to learn the identity of involved parties. Submissions are therefore anonymized before being sent to reviewers, and reviewer comments are anonymized before being shared with authors. This may not of course prevent either parties from guessing the identity of their counterparts, but safeguards are established to maximize the integrity of the reviewing process.

3. PEER REVIEWERS

TAJIS's regular peer reviewers are the members of its editorial board. In case the topic of a submission requires for its fair evaluation a competence or expertise not present among the editorial board, external peer reviewers are then solicited to perform the assessment. Guest-edited issues go through the same process, the only difference being that guest editors are consulted on the selection of peer reviewers. These guidelines apply to all peer reviewers.

Peer reviewers are to understand that their recommendations are advisory and do not bind TAJIS's editorial team. The ultimate decision to accept or reject papers rests solely with journal editors whose own assessment may differ and whose decision may also depend on factors not dependent on the assessment, such as space, scheduling, technical, or economic considerations.

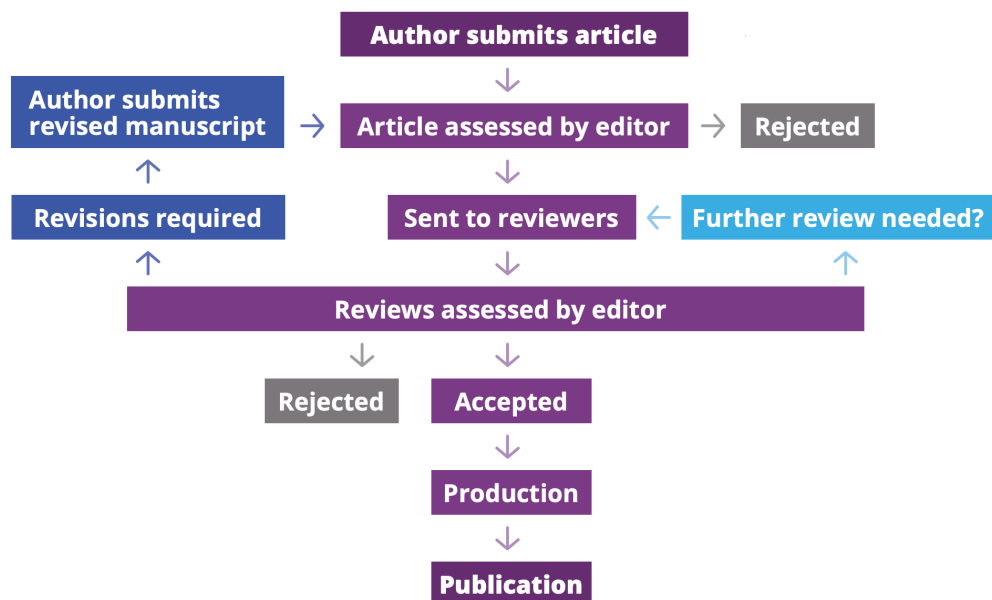
4. REVIEW PROCESS

Not all submissions enter the reviewing process. Journal editors first screen the manuscripts and decide whether or not to send them for full peer review, mindful not to impose on peer reviewers' time with submissions that do not fall within the scope of the journal or are unambiguously subpar due to a lack of

originality, serious scholarly flaws, or excessively poor command of English. Guest editors must ensure that their contributors' manuscripts meet the bar before including them in the package sent to TAJ's editorial team.

Each article that survives initial screening is submitted to at least two peer reviewers deemed to have sufficient relevant subject-matter expertise. In some cases, identifying appropriate and willing reviewers may take some time. On rare occasions an author may be asked to provide the names of independent experts. The normal reviewing deadline is one month from the day of request; this deadline may sometimes be shortened or extended depending on scheduling issues.

The graph below (from Wiley) charts the normal reviewing process from initial submission to final acceptance and publication. The process is recursive. Rare are submissions that don't require editing corrections or more substantial revisions. A manuscript that goes through revise-and-resubmit may occasionally be peer-reviewed a second time through the same peer-reviewers to ensure that substantial corrections satisfy specialists.



5. REVIEWERS' DUTIES

Upon receiving a request, reviewers need

- (1) to inform the requesting editor immediately if not able to meet the deadline;
- (2) to declare any reason for declining reviewing the submission (lack of competence, conflict of interest, close personal or professional or pedagogical relationship to the author)
- (3) to check specific questions and expectations that might accompany the request and ask for any clarification to prevent misunderstanding.

While proceeding with the review, reviewers need

- (1) to strictly observe confidentiality in perpetuity and not share or discuss the content of papers they are reviewing with anyone;
- (2) if suspecting author misconduct (plagiarism, work already published or submitted elsewhere), to discuss the matter only with the editor in charge;
- (3) if coming to discover the identity of the author through any means before being done with the review (such as reading a preprint or seeing a paper presented at a conference), to inform the editor in charge immediately;
- (4) to ask the editor in charge if they wish to collaborate on a review with some other recognized specialist;
- (5) to be careful not to make judgments about the paper based on personal, financial, intellectual, social, gender, biases or any considerations other than the quality of the research, the logic of reasonings, the evidence adduced, and written presentation of the paper;
- (6) to refrain from suggesting that authors include citations of the reviewers' own work.

6. EVALUATION AND REPORT

The peer review is completed once all the reviewers send the journal a detailed report with their comments on the manuscript and their recommendation.

Core guideline: the assessment of the submission must aim, principally, to help authors improve their paper in the interest of the scholarship and, secondarily, to enlighten editors so that they make the best decision.

Referees are asked to evaluate whether the manuscript

- is original
- is methodologically sound
- has a structure appropriate to the discussion
- has results which are clearly presented and support the conclusions
- fulfills the plan or promises made in its introduction
- follows appropriate ethical guidelines
- correctly references relevant work
- compellingly articulates its lines of reasoning; this entails gauging
 - the soundness of textual interpretations
 - the thoroughness of the author's investigation
 - the logicity of the argumentation
 - the justice done to the primary and secondary literature
 - the general consistency and continuity of the article as a whole

Reviewers' substantial objections need to be well supported. Recommendations for revisions need to be precise so that one can assess fairly whether resulting revisions are successful.

NB: Language correction is not normally part of the peer review process, but reviewers should feel free to suggest corrections to the manuscript, preferably using the review tracking system in Microsoft Word when available, or listing corrections with page and line references. Likewise, though not required, reviewers should feel free to point out quotations that might be inaccurate, misdated, or ill referenced.

7. FINAL DECISION

Once reviewers have filed their reports, editors consider their feedback and make one of the following decisions:

1. accept without any changes (outright acceptance): the journal will publish the paper in its original form
2. accept with minor revisions (acceptance): the journal will publish the paper and asks the author to make small corrections
3. accept after major revisions (conditional acceptance): the journal will publish the paper provided the authors make the changes suggested by the reviewers and/or editors
4. revise and resubmit (qualified nonacceptance): the journal is willing to reconsider the paper in another round of decision making after the authors make major changes
5. reject the paper (outright rejection): the journal will not publish the paper or reconsider it even if the authors make major revisions

While reviewers and editors easily agree on what is clearly not acceptable for publication, deciding what is worth bringing through the editorial process toward publication may be a challenge. Peer reviewers often provide conflicting feedback on the same manuscript. In such a situation, the journal editor may choose to send the paper to an additional reviewer, and the author may have to wait longer for the peer review process to be completed. Ultimately, however, TAJIS editors make decisions to accept or reject papers based on their combined opinions of the papers' publication worthiness and reviewers' comments.

Revision recommendations are not necessarily limited to those made by the reviewers. Other issues regarding form, style, and content may be noticed and anonymously pointed out by members of the editorial team in the course of their own minute reading of submissions. Editors may therefore supplement revision requests from reviewers with their own, a process that may sometimes delay the response. Once a paper has reached outright acceptance, any back and forth between authors and editors or typesetters is limited to minor editorial matters.