



## Peer Review Components and Processes

Revised August 2024

The peer review process at *Academic Emergency Medicine Education and Training (AEM E&T)* strives to be transparent, fair, thorough, and objective. AEM E&T follows the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' [Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals](#).

### Confidentiality

Manuscripts submitted to AEM E&T are privileged communications that are authors' private, confidential property, and authors may be harmed by premature disclosure of any or all of a manuscript's details.

AEM E&T's editors are instructed not to share information about manuscripts, including whether they have been received and are under review, their content and status in the review process, criticism by reviewers, and their ultimate fate, to anyone other than the authors and reviewers. Editors should be aware that using AI technology in the processing of manuscripts may violate confidentiality. Requests from third parties to use manuscripts and reviews for legal proceedings should be politely refused, and editors should do their best not to provide such confidential material should it be subpoenaed.

Editors must also make clear that reviewers should keep manuscripts, associated material, and the information they contain strictly confidential. Instructions to reviewers should include guidance about AI use. Reviewers and editorial staff members must not publicly discuss the authors' work, and reviewers must not appropriate authors' ideas before the manuscript is published. Reviewers must not retain the manuscript for their personal use and should destroy paper copies of manuscripts and delete electronic copies after submitting their reviews.

When a manuscript is rejected, AEM E&T deletes copies of it from access to all except administration and the EIC. When a manuscript is published, journals should keep copies of the original submission, reviews, revisions, and correspondence for at least three years and possibly in perpetuity, depending on local regulations, to help answer future questions about the work should they arise.

Editors are told not to publish or publicize peer reviewers' comments without permission of the reviewer and author. If journal policy is to anonymize authors to reviewer identity and comments are not signed,

that identity must not be revealed to the author or anyone else without the reviewers' expressed written permission.

Confidentiality may have to be breached if dishonesty or fraud is alleged, but editors should notify authors or reviewers if they intend to do so, and confidentiality must otherwise be honored.

### **Timeliness**

AEM E&T's editors should do all they can to ensure timely processing of manuscripts with the resources available to them. If editors intend to publish a manuscript, they should attempt to do so in a timely manner and any planned delays should be negotiated with the authors. If a journal has no intention of proceeding with a manuscript, editors should endeavor to reject the manuscript as soon as possible to allow authors to submit to a different journal.

### **Peer Review**

Peer review is the critical assessment of manuscripts submitted to journals by experts who are usually not part of the editorial staff. Because unbiased, independent, critical assessment is an intrinsic part of all scholarly work, including scientific research, peer review is an important extension of the scientific process.

The actual value of peer review is widely debated, but the process facilitates a fair hearing for a manuscript among members of the scientific community. More practically, it helps editors decide which manuscripts are suitable for their journals. Peer review often helps authors and editors improve the quality of reporting.

It is the responsibility of AEM E&T's editors to ensure that systems are in place for selection of appropriate reviewers. It is the responsibility of the editor to ensure that reviewers have access to all materials that may be relevant to the evaluation of the manuscript, including supplementary material for e-only publication, and to ensure that reviewer comments are properly assessed and interpreted in the context of their declared relationships and activities.

AEM E&T is under no obligation to send submitted manuscripts for review, and under no obligation to follow reviewer recommendations, favorable or negative. The AEM E&T editor-in-chief is ultimately responsible for the selection of all its content, and editorial decisions may be informed by issues unrelated to the quality of a manuscript, such as suitability for the journal. An editor can reject any article at any time before publication, including after acceptance if concerns arise about the integrity of the work.

AEM E&T notifies reviewers of the ultimate decision to accept or reject a paper and should acknowledge the contribution of peer reviewers to their journal. Editors are encouraged to share reviewers' comments with co-reviewers of the same paper, so reviewers can learn from each other in the review process.

As part of peer review, editors are encouraged to review research protocols, plans for statistical analysis if separate from the protocol, and/or contracts associated with project-specific studies. Editors should encourage authors to make such documents publicly available at the time of or after publication, before accepting such studies for publication. Some journals may require public posting of these documents as a condition of acceptance for publication.

Journal requirements for independent data analysis and for public data availability vary, reflecting evolving views of the importance of data availability for pre- and post-publication peer review. Some journal editors currently request a statistical analysis of trial data by an independent biostatistician before accepting studies for publication. Others ask authors to say whether the study data are available to third parties to view and/or use/reanalyze, while still others encourage or require authors to share their data with others for review or reanalysis. Each journal should establish and publish their specific requirements for data analysis and posting in a place which potential authors can easily access.

Some people believe that true scientific peer review begins only on the date a paper is published. In that spirit, medical journals should have a mechanism for readers to submit comments, questions, or criticisms about published articles, and authors have a responsibility to respond appropriately and cooperate with any requests from the journal for data or additional information should questions about the paper arise after publication (see Section III).

AEM E&T believes investigators have a duty to maintain the primary data and analytic procedures underpinning the published results for at least 10 years. AEM E&T encourages the preservation of these data in a data repository to ensure their longer-term availability.

### **Integrity**

Editorial decisions are based on the relevance of a manuscript to the journal and on the manuscript's originality, quality, and contribution to evidence about important questions. Those decisions should not be influenced by commercial interests, personal relationships or agendas, or findings that are negative or that credibly challenge accepted wisdom. In addition, authors should submit for publication or otherwise make publicly available, and editors should not exclude from consideration for publication, studies with findings that are not statistically significant or that have inconclusive findings. Such studies may provide evidence that combined with that from other studies through meta-analysis might still help answer important questions, and a public record of such negative or inconclusive findings may prevent unwarranted replication of effort or otherwise be valuable for other researchers considering similar work.

AEM E&T has a clearly defined appeals process and system for responding to appeals and complaints.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

To improve academic culture, AEM E&T seeks to engage a broad and diverse array of authors, reviewers, editorial staff, editorial board members, and readers.

### **Peer Reviewers**

Manuscripts submitted to AEM E&T are privileged communications that are authors' private, confidential property, and authors may be harmed by premature disclosure of any or all of a manuscript's details.

Reviewers are told to keep manuscripts and the information they contain strictly confidential. Reviewers must not publicly discuss authors' work and must not appropriate authors' ideas before the manuscript is published. Reviewers must not retain the manuscript for their personal use and should destroy copies of manuscripts after submitting their reviews.

Reviewers who seek assistance from a trainee or colleague in the performance of a review should acknowledge these individuals' contributions in the written comments submitted to the editor. Reviewers must maintain the confidentiality of the manuscript as outlined above, which may prohibit the

uploading of the manuscript to software or other AI technologies where confidentiality cannot be assured. Reviewers must request permission from the journal prior to using AI technology to facilitate their review. Reviewers should be aware that AI can generate authoritative-sounding output that can be incorrect, incomplete, or biased.

Reviewers are expected to respond promptly to requests to review and to submit reviews within the time agreed. Reviewers' comments should be constructive, honest, and polite.

### **Editorial Freedom**

AEM E&T adopts the [World Association of Medical Editors' definition of editorial freedom](#), which holds that editors-in-chief have full authority over the entire editorial content of their journal and the timing of publication of that content. Journal owners should not interfere in the evaluation, selection, scheduling, or editing of individual articles either directly or by creating an environment that strongly influences decisions. Editors should base editorial decisions on the validity of the work and its importance to the journal's readers, not on the commercial implications for the journal, and editors should be free to express critical but responsible views about all aspects of medicine without fear of retribution, even if these views conflict with the commercial goals of the publisher.

AEM E&T's editor-in-chief should also have the final say in decisions about which advertisements or sponsored content, including supplements, the journal will and will not carry, and they should have final say in use of the journal brand and in overall policy regarding commercial use of journal content. AEM E&T has a diverse editorial advisory board to help the editor establish and maintain editorial policy. To support editorial decisions and potentially controversial expressions of opinion, owners should ensure that appropriate insurance is obtained in the event of legal action against the editors, and should ensure that legal advice is available when necessary. If legal problems arise, the editor should inform their legal adviser and their owner and/or publisher as soon as possible. Editors should defend the confidentiality of authors and peer reviewers (names and reviewer comments) in accordance with ICMJE policy (see Section II.C.2.a). Editors should take all reasonable steps to check the facts in journal commentary, including that in news sections and social media postings, and should ensure that staff working for the journal adhere to best journalistic practices including contemporaneous note-taking and seeking a response from all parties when possible before publication. Such practices in support of truth and public interest may be particularly relevant in defense against legal allegations of libel.

To secure editorial freedom in practice, AEM E&T's editor-in-chief has direct access to the highest level of ownership of AEM E&T, not to a delegated manager or administrative officer.

### **Protection of Research Participants**

AEM E&T requires that all investigators demonstrate that the planning, conduct, and reporting of human research are in accordance with the [Helsinki Declaration](#) as revised in 2013. All authors must show evidence of review and approval from an independent local, regional or national review body (e.g., ethics committee, institutional review board), and be prepared to provide documentation when requested by editors. If doubt exists whether the research was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration, the authors must explain the rationale for their approach and demonstrate that the local, regional or national review body explicitly approved the doubtful aspects of the study. Approval by a responsible review body does not preclude editors from forming their own judgment whether the conduct of the research was appropriate.

### **Disclosure of Financial and Non-Financial Relationships and Activities, and Conflicts of Interest**

All participants in the AEM E&T peer-review and publication process—not only authors but also peer reviewers, editors, and editorial board members of journals—must consider and disclose their relationships and activities when fulfilling their roles in the process of article review and publication.

Public trust in the scientific process and the credibility of published articles depend in part on how transparently an author's relationships and activities, directly or topically related to a work, are handled during the planning, implementation, writing, peer review, editing, and publication of scientific work. The potential for conflict of interest and bias exists when professional judgment concerning a primary interest (such as patients' welfare or the validity of research) may be influenced by a secondary interest (such as financial gain). Perceptions of conflict of interest are as important as actual conflicts of interest. Individuals may disagree on whether an author's relationships or activities represent conflicts. Although the presence of a relationship or activity does not always indicate a problematic influence on a paper's content, perceptions of conflict may erode trust in science as much as actual conflicts of interest. Ultimately, readers must be able to make their own judgments regarding whether an author's relationships and activities are pertinent to a paper's content. These judgments require transparent disclosures. An author's complete disclosure demonstrates a commitment to transparency and helps to maintain trust in the scientific process.

Financial relationships (such as employment, consultancies, stock ownership or options, honoraria, patents, and paid expert testimony) are the most easily identifiable, the ones most often judged to represent potential conflicts of interest and thus the most likely to undermine the credibility of the journal, the authors, and of science itself. Other interests may also represent or be perceived as conflicts, such as personal relationships or rivalries, academic competition, and intellectual beliefs.

Purposeful failure to report those relationships or activities specified on the journal's disclosure form is a form of misconduct.

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest is distinct and extends beyond direct support for this work. Within a manuscript, the funding statement should include only direct support of the work described. Support for an individual's contribution for the work should be reported as such. General institutional support for an author's time on the work should be distinguished from direct overall funding of the work. An appropriate funding statement might be: "This study was funded by A; Dr. F's time on the work was supported by B."