INVITED ARTICLE

The Peer Review Process: Understanding the Process and Strategies for Success

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Peer review is one way scholarly journals can maintain rigor and increase the quality of published manuscripts. The purpose of this article is to describe in detail the peer review process as implemented by the Journal of Research in Technical Careers. Suggestions for successful submissions are provided, including common problems that lead to delays in the peer review and publication process or even rejection. Clarification on topics such as self-plagiarism will be of particular interest to graduate student authors or early career researchers. Questions frequently encountered by the journal editors are also addressed.

Introduction

The current issue marks the eleventh issue of the *Journal of Research in Technical Careers* (JRTC), the preeminent open-access, peer-reviewed scholarly journal in the field of career and technical education. As stated on the Aims and Scope page of the JRTC website, the journal's main objective is to stimulate and disseminate scholarly activity on critical issues in career and post-secondary technical education and related disciplines. Dr. Howard R. D. Gordon, Founding Co-Editor of the journal, identified the need for an additional high-quality scholarly publication in the field of career and post-secondary technical education and committed to making this new journal open-access, such that all articles would be freely available for download around the world without subscription.

JRTC publishes empirical, methodological, and theoretical manuscripts. The overwhelming majority of articles undergo peer review; occasional invited articles are solicited by the editors and are clearly identified as such within an issue when included.

Openness has been a primary goal for the editorial team from the journal's inception, both in terms of the open access format of the journal and with regards to
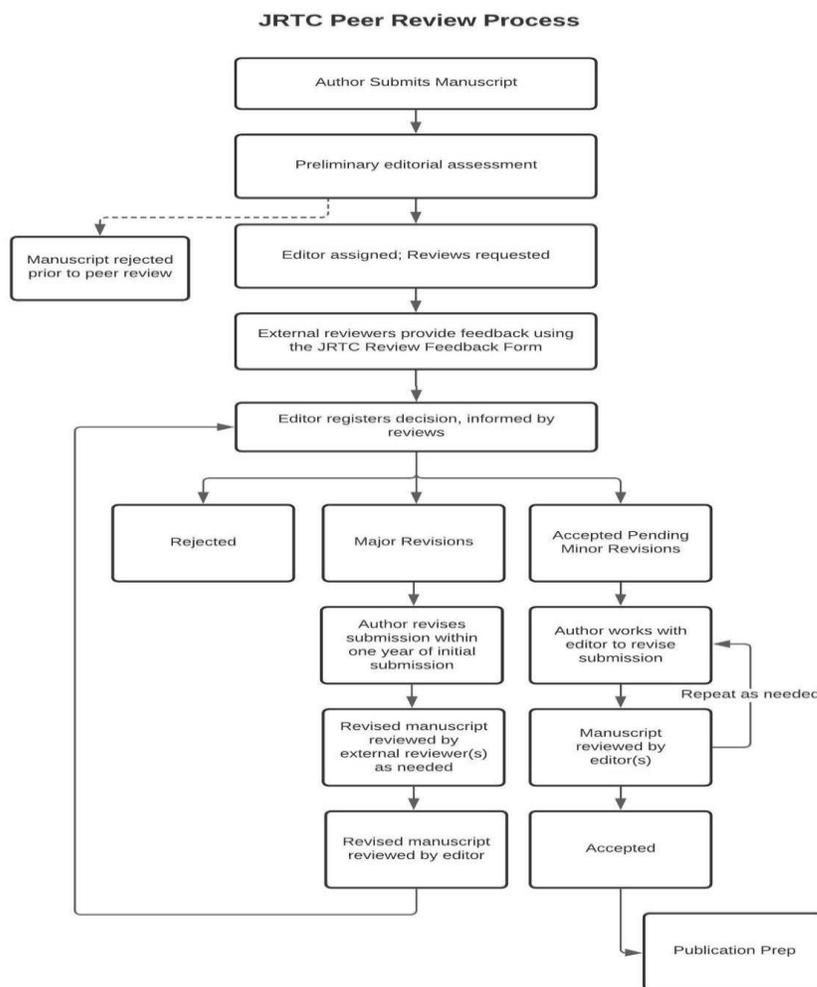
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transparency around components of the peer review process. As examples, the journal provides all reviewer comments to authors, and journal policies are articulated on the public-facing journal website. With this article, we hope to further this openness by explicating the peer review process as implemented by the journal and by providing suggestions for success for future authors.

The JRTC Process

Scholarly rigor is of utmost importance to the journal. The process used to ensure this rigor is illustrated in Figure 1 and described in detail below.

Figure 1

The JRTC Peer Review Process

Table 1

JRTC Publication Process in Detail

Steps in the Review and Publication Process	
Author Submits Manuscript	- Submission is completed on the Journal website. - In addition to the manuscript itself, authors must include a cover letter addressed to the JRTC editors that includes the article title, contact information for all authors, a statement regarding IRB approval, if appropriate, and an acknowledgement of any known conflicts of interest associated with the publication.
Editorial Assessment	- An editor conducts an initial assessment of the submission. - Is the submission a scholarly article? - Does the topic of research fall within the Journal's scope, especially as regards to the career clusters? - If not, manuscript is rejected prior to peer review.
External Review	- Invitations are sent to at least three reviewers, typically two external reviewers, and one member of the JRTC Editorial Board. - Reviews are completed by reviewers and returned to the editor.
Editorial Decision	- Reviews are read and assessed by the editor. Additional reviews are requested if needed. - Editor renders decision: Accept with minor revisions, Major revisions required for acceptance, Rejection - Editor sends decision to author(s) along with specific suggestions for revision and provides access to the reviewer reports.
Publication Prep	- Author prepares manuscript according to the JRTC Final Manuscript Preparation Guidelines. - Author names and institutions should be added to manuscript at this stage and any redacted text updated. - Upon receipt of the final manuscript, the manuscript is sent to the JRTC Copy Editor. - Copy edits are sent to author by assigned editor. - Author revises manuscript accordingly. - Final manuscript is formatted for publication. - After acceptance, JRTC Managing Editor contacts authors re: Article Processing Charge, to be submitted to JRTC prior to publication.
Publication	- Issues are published biannually in the first week of May and December each year.

Preliminary Editorial Assessment. JRTC follows a rigorous peer review process starting with a preliminary editorial assessment. This process begins when the author submits a manuscript along with a cover letter to the editors confirming Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, as appropriate, and stating any known conflicts of interest associated with the publication.

After an author submits a manuscript through the online submission management system on the [journal website](#), an acknowledgment is automatically sent to the author to confirm receipt. At this time, each manuscript is read by an editor in order to conduct a preliminary evaluation of the submission regarding suitability for the journal. The submission may be rejected at this point if the manuscript is 1) incomplete or otherwise of insufficient quality for review, 2) not a scholarly article, or 3) falls outside of the Aims and Scope of the journal, i.e., the manuscript does not align with any of the sixteen career clusters within the National Career Clusters Framework. If so, the editor rejects the submission without external review and notifies the author. If the manuscript aligns with the journal aims and scope, the editor will request a revision from the author if the manuscript includes any information that may interfere with the blind peer review, or if the manuscript exceeds the page limit for the journal (15 single-spaced pages including references).

Manuscripts that pass this initial editorial review proceed to the external review process. The editor who conducted the initial assessment sends invitations to expert reviewers and assigns the submission to a specific editor who will be the primary point of contact for the author throughout the remainder of the review process.

External Review. Following the preliminary evaluation to eliminate submissions unsuitable for JRTC, all remaining papers are sent out for review. The journal's policy is to have manuscripts reviewed by two expert reviewers in addition to a member of the journal's Editorial Board, utilizing a double-blind peer review process, meaning that the identity of both the author and the reviewers is hidden during the peer review process. Reviewer identities for specific manuscripts are never revealed; however, a list of reviewers who have contributed to the journal is published every two years in the December issue. All reviewers have a terminal degree in their fields and relevant subject area and methodological expertise for the topics covered by the journal.

All manuscripts are reviewed as rapidly as possible while maintaining rigor. To facilitate rigor and transparency, reviewers are provided with the JRTC Reviewer Feedback Form (Appendix A) and are informed that the completed form will be shared directly with the author(s). This form draws reviewers' attention to specific aspects related to each of the standard components of a research article; for example, for the literature review, the reviewer is asked to assess the scope of the review, the description of an appropriate theoretical or conceptual framework, and the quality of sources. The reviewer feedback form also includes open response fields for additional comments on specific sections of the article and/or on the manuscript as a whole. Reviewers submit feedback to the author and editor via this form and may also submit separate comments

directly to the editor. The purpose of the review is to provide detailed input to the editors to assist in rendering a publication decision and to provide authors with feedback that will guide revisions as necessary.

The external peer review is one of the most time-consuming stages of the review process. Depending on the submission's topic and methodology as well as the time of year the requests are sent, it may take several weeks to get commitments from at least three reviewers. The editors attempt to select reviewers with subject and methodological expertise that aligns with each submission. After a reviewer commits, they are generally asked to complete their review within three weeks if possible.

After at least three reviews are received, the editor reads all reviews in order to render a decision. The reviews are advisory to the editor, and the final decision is made by the assigned editor. If recommendations from reviewers are contradictory, the editor may consult with fellow editors prior to rendering a decision and/or request additional external reviews.

Decision. Finally, the assigned editor renders a decision for the submission: Accept with minor revisions, Major revisions required for acceptance, or Rejection (Table 2). The editor notifies the author of this decision, provides authors access to the reviewer reports, and indicates next steps for the authors, which vary depending on the decision. When revisions are required, whether minor or major, the editor may additionally direct authors to specific reviewer comments that must be addressed prior to acceptance. If a manuscript is accepted, the manuscript is screened using iThenticate plagiarism detection software. The editor generally communicates the iThenticate results with author(s) only if a concerning amount of text has been highlighted. Once accepted and screened for plagiarism, the manuscript proceeds through the final stages of publication preparation, including copyediting.

Table 2

Editorial Decisions in Detail

Editorial Decision	
Accept with minor revisions	- Editor conducts plagiarism check using iThenticate. - Authors proceed with revisions with assigned editor, per guidance provided by the editor and reviewers. - Editor communicates iThenticate results with author(s) only if a concerning amount of text has been highlighted. If authors are unable or unwilling to revise the submission to lower the iThenticate score into an appropriate range, the submission is removed from consideration for publication.
Major revisions required	- Authors have one year from initial submission to revise and resubmit. - Upon receipt of revision, the editor reads and assesses the revised manuscript. - Editor requests a second review from the original reviewers as

	needed. Generally, reviewers who suggested at least major revisions will review the revised manuscript a second time. - Reviews are returned to the editor. - Editor renders decision: Accept with minor revisions, Major revisions required for acceptance, Rejection
Rejection	- The submission is no longer under consideration by the journal. - Authors are welcome to substantially revise their manuscript and submit it as a new submission at a later date. However, authors should note that revisions must be substantial to avoid rejection prior to peer review.

Suggestions for Successful Submissions

This section provides suggestions for successful submissions and addresses some of the most common issues that lead to additional revisions or even rejection from the journal. Many of the following suggestions may be more appropriate for graduate student authors or early career researchers; however, we feel that it is worth articulating these suggestions here to equip authors to engage successfully with the peer-review and, ideally, the publication process.

An Appropriate, Clearly Explained Theoretical Framework. With rare exception, manuscripts should incorporate a theoretical or conceptual framework that is appropriate for the study. Some first submissions lack a theoretical or conceptual framework altogether or provide only a cursory mention of a framework. The framework and its relationship to the study should be clearly articulated. Additionally, the method and/or discussion should refer to this theoretical framework. Questions to consider include, how did this framework influence the development of the study and/or the interpretation of the results?

Thorough Description of Methodology. Authors should consult the Reviewer Feedback Form (Appendix A) for specifics of components that should be addressed in the methodology section, including data collection and sampling procedures, evidence of reliability and validity or trustworthiness and transferability, and data analysis. Descriptions should be detailed and clear such that readers understand what the researcher(s) did and why. Additionally, authors may find the standards provided by the American Educational Research Association (2006) on reporting on empirical research useful as they compose their research reports, in particular the sections on design and logic of a study, sources of evidence, and measurement and classification.

A Current and Comprehensive Literature Review. A common comment from our reviewers is the suggestion that the author(s) update or expand on parts of the literature review. Reviewers may suggest specific authors or research that would likely be included in the literature review. Often, the reviewers encourage authors to incorporate recent publications or noteworthy seminal works from a discipline. In addition to

including a combination of contemporary references and foundational literature, the literature review should primarily refer to scholarly publications such as academic journal articles, scholarly books or book chapters, or government documents. Certain websites may be included for background on a particular topic, especially if scholarly or government resources are unavailable, but authors should avoid or severely limit references to commercial websites.

Informal Peer Review Prior to Submission. The submission to the journal platform should not be the first time a person other than the author has read the manuscript. Authors will increase the likelihood of acceptance if they request a local, informal peer review prior to submission. A person less familiar with the research topic or methodological approach can be especially helpful in identifying aspects of the research description that remain unclear. Articles that lack clarity or are disorganized will likely be rated lower in terms of the overall assessment of the submission.

Explanation of Revisions in a Well-Organized Cover Letter. When an author submits a revision, including a well-organized cover letter summarizing their revisions will increase the likelihood of acceptance and shorten the time to decision. As is noted in every decision letter suggesting revisions, authors should address all reviewer concerns and suggestions and provide a summary of any revisions in a blinded cover letter. The editors do not require that authors agree with all of the suggestions provided by the reviewers; however, authors must explain any decisions to not follow the suggested edits. Authors should address all reviewer comments regardless of whether a particular suggestion was incorporated into the revision. Authors may find it helpful to organize their summary of revisions according to sections of the manuscript, such as literature review, method, etc. The cover letter should ideally include some version of what the comment was, what they did, and ideally include the relevant page number of the manuscript.

Ethical Reuse of Previously Published Work. Authors should ensure they are ethically reusing and citing previously published works, including works by the authors themselves. All reused work should be paraphrased or placed in quotation marks and cited properly with an in-text citation. Upon acceptance, the JRTC editors use the plagiarism tool iThenticate to screen all manuscripts. This tool provides a similarity report with highlighted content. There is not an exact percentage of similar text that the editors consider acceptable. In iThenticate reports, common phrases are highlighted even if brief, and even correctly cited direct quotations are highlighted. Scholarly articles necessarily reuse language from existing texts. The journal editors are looking for longer phrase- or sentence-length highlights and/or paragraphs that indicate that text has been improperly reused from previously published work. While composing the manuscript, authors should always place quoted text in quotation marks to avoid inadvertent plagiarism.

Avoid Self-Plagiarism. At JRTC, self-plagiarism is one of the most frequent delays to publication after acceptance. While it is acceptable to publish multiple articles from the same study and/or to reuse data, authors should not reuse exact or close-to-exact language from a previous paper of their own, which can be flagged as self-plagiarism.[1] Many authors find this especially challenging when describing the methods from a previously published study. As is noted in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), duplication of "previously used words without quotation marks or citation" is permissible only when "limited in scope" (p. 256). APA provides additional guidance on how to appropriately incorporate and indicate such duplicated material. For example, where possible all duplicated material should be kept together. While quotation marks are not necessary, authors should identify the duplicated material using a signal phrase such as "as I have previously discussed" and include an appropriate in-text citation (APA, p. 256).

This limitation on reuse of one's own work does not apply to work previously published as a doctoral dissertation or master's thesis. If applicable, authors should notify the editors that a submission is a revision of a published dissertation or thesis prior to the plagiarism screening,

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the acceptance rate for JRTC?

Overall, for the first ten issues of the journal ending in Volume 5, Issue 2, the journal has an acceptance rate of 48%. This includes manuscripts that initially received a decision of major revisions required for acceptance.

What is the reach of the journal?

As of 1/24/2022, the journal download statistics were: 14,224 Downloads from 1,087 institutions in 148 countries worldwide. Our articles are delivered to library discovery platforms including OCLC (Worldcat), Ex Libris (Primo), ProQuest (Serial Solutions / Summon), and EBSCO Discovery. We are also indexed in ERIC and included in the Directory of Open Access Journals.

What is the Article Processing Charge, and why do I have to pay it?

JRTC currently charges an article processing charge (APC) of $150 per published article. There is no fee to submit a manuscript. An APC is a common practice among open-access journals to help defray costs associated with producing these journals, in the absence of subscription fees. This charge is typically paid by the author, or the author's funder, institution, or employer. Upon acceptance, the JRTC Managing Editor contacts the author(s) with details about the APC, which is due prior to publication. Prices vary

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[1] For more information on self-plagiarism, authors may find it helpful to consult the resource "Self-Plagiarism: How to Define It and Why You Should Avoid It" (American Journal Experts, n.d.).

for APCs across journals, with the highest charges coming from professional publishers or disciplines such as biomedicine and earth sciences (Solomon & Björk, 2012).

Why is there a page limit, and why do I have to adhere to it?

Submissions to the journal can be as long as 15 single-spaced pages including references but excluding all figures and tables. Some authors question this page limit due to the online nature of the journal; however, the editors agree that this length is sufficient for the types of scholarly articles published in JRTC. Longer articles increase review time as well as other components of the publishing process including copy editing. Articles longer than 15 single-space pages likely benefit from more concise language in one or more sections of the article. Submissions that exceed this length will be returned to authors prior to external review.

When can I expect a decision? / If accepted, when will my article be published?

For many journals, the publication cycle is such that research may take years between submission and publication. Our online-only format helps with shortening the time from submission to publication; we also work with our reviewers to ensure timely feedback. Authors can expect an initial decision on average within five to six weeks. However, depending on the research topic and methodology, getting commitments from at least three qualified reviewers may delay the review process. Authors should also note that editors do not send any new manuscripts out for review between May 15 and August 15 of each year. Once accepted, the assigned editor will communicate with authors the likely publication date. Most often this is the upcoming issue; however, publication may be delayed until the following issue. Most successful authors see their work published within six to nine months of their initial submission.

Conclusion

The JRTC editorial team is committed to publishing high-quality, timely research. The team strives for efficiency in our review process so that authors can publish quality research in a timely manner, thereby allowing the field to benefit from this work as soon as possible. For authors who are willing to put in the work in revising their work, the peer review process need not be daunting; this process serves as an indicator of quality and more importantly helps authors improve their work.

The goal of the peer review process after all is to improve the quality of our scholarly work. Not only does review by fellow experts in the field help to ensure the rigor of the publication process and help the editorial team to identify high-quality research, reviewer comments encourage authors to engage more deeply with their work. Of course, sometimes the peer review process serves to intervene prior to the publication of truly flawed research, and peer review cannot and should not change the specifics of a study or the central argument of a theoretical paper. Most of the time, reviewer comments help to improve the clarity and quality of manuscripts through recommendations such as improvements to the literature review or by asking clarifying questions about aspects of the methodology.

It is our hope that with the suggestions included here, authors will feel encouraged to consider the *Journal of Research in Technical Careers* as a publication venue for their next research article related to career and post-secondary technical education.

Samantha Godbey is Education Librarian and Associate Professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Along with Dr. Howard R. D. Gordon, she served as Founding Co-Editor of *Journal of Research in Technical Careers* for the journal's first five volumes. In 2021, she transitioned to a new role with the journal and now advises the editors on issues related to scholarly publishing, including advising on policies around ethics and transparency in publishing, indexing the journal, and creating reports related to scholarly metrics.

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Appendix A

Reviewer Feedback Form

J——R——T——C

REVIEWER FEEDBACK FORM

Thank you for reviewing for the *Journal of Research in Technical Careers*. Please use this form to provide feedback on each manuscript. Upload this document as an attachment along with your decision on the JRTC site. Please contact the Co-editors at jrtc@unlv.edu with any questions.

Manuscript Title: _____

Manuscript #: _____

1. Title, Abstract & Keywords	
a. Title is appropriate for the manuscript.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
b. Abstract is appropriate and concise.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
c. Appropriate keywords are provided.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
d. Comments to the author(s) re: Title, Abstract & Keywords:	
2. Introduction	
a. The statement of the problem is addressed.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
b. The purpose of the study is addressed.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
c. Research question(s), objectives, or hypotheses are clearly articulated (if applicable).	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
d. Comments to the author(s) re: Introduction:	
3. Literature Review	
a. Overall, scope of literature review is appropriate (not too broad or too narrow).	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
b. Theoretical/Conceptual frameworks are adequately addressed.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
c. Sources cited are pertinent to the study.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
d. Includes appropriate in-text citations.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
e. Comments to the author(s) re: Literature Review:	

4. Methodology & Analysis	
a. Data collection methods were appropriate, including sampling procedures.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
b. Evidence of reliability and validity or trustworthiness and transferability were adequately addressed.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
c. Data were appropriately analyzed and consistent with stated research questions/objectives/hypotheses.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
d. Comments to the author(s) re: Methodology and Analysis:	
5. Discussion & Conclusion	
a. Conclusions are carefully drawn, supported, and explained.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
b. Implications of results are appropriately addressed.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
c. Appropriate recommendations for future research are made.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
d. Comments to the author(s) re: Discussion & Conclusion:	
6. Overall Assessment	
□Accept □Accept with minor revisions □Major revisions required for acceptance □Reject	
a. Manuscript is well-written.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
b. Manuscript represents a worthwhile contribution to knowledge about postsecondary programs and issues.	□ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □ N/A
c. Please provide any additional feedback for the author(s).	

**Note: This form will be shared with the author(s). If needed, there is a space for confidential feedback to the editors on the JRTC site when you submit your decision.

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