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## Development of New Guidelines for Review of Manuscripts

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With the increasing number of submissions of manuscripts using qualitative research methodologies to the *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, the editors thought that it would be helpful for all reviewers to have some guidelines for reviewing these manuscripts. During the last year Anne Cummings, Associate Editor, undertook the project to develop these. She started the project with a set of working guidelines authored by Dr. Robert Elliott, Constance Fischer, and David Rennie from who were in the process of developing guidelines in this area for the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. Dr. Elliott gave permission to the *Canadian Journal of Counselling* to use and adapt his guidelines for our *Journal*.

Dr. Cummings consulted with the Consulting Editors of the *Journal* and other counsellors in Canada known for their involvement in the use of qualitative research methodologies regarding first, the appropriateness of the Elliott guidelines for our *Journal*, and second, any changes that should be made. As a result of this project three new sections of information were added to the Guidelines for Reviewing Manuscripts for the *Canadian Journal of Counselling*. The new sections present the reviewer with information under the following headings: General Guidelines for the Assessment of Research from all Sciences, Specific Guidelines for Quantitative and Qualitative Research, and Guidelines Pertinent to Qualitative Research. The revised guidelines will be available in English and French.

The Editors of the *Journal* would like to thank all those individuals who took the time to contribute thoughtful suggestions in the development of these new guidelines. It was recommended by several of the consultants that these guidelines appear in the *Journal*, because of the educational value for new and established authors, as well as their use by reviewers of manuscripts. Presented below for your information are the revised guidelines for manuscript review.

### GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are intended to help reviewers determine the suitability of manuscripts for publication in the *Canadian Journal of Counselling*. They are also designed to assist authors in the development of studies and preparation of various types of manuscripts. While it is hoped that authors will meet all of these guidelines, it is understood that

there may also be well crafted manuscripts which do not meet one or more of the guidelines that will still be worthy of consideration.

The purpose of submitting manuscripts for blind review is threefold: to benefit from the reviewer's expertise in a particular field of study or practice, to gain the reviewer's critical assessment, and finally, to provide concrete feedback to the authors. The intent of the review process is not only to assist the editors in making decisions about manuscripts for publication, but also to educate authors as to how to improve or strengthen their professional writing.

The guidelines are presented in five sections. In Sections A and B procedures and general guidelines are presented which apply to the review of all manuscripts. Sections C and D present information relevant to the review of research manuscripts from all models of inquiry. Section E presents additional information to aid in the evaluation of qualitative research. Please read all pertinent sections of the guidelines before you begin reviewing the manuscript.

## **A. Procedures for Reviewers**

1. Be critical in the best sense of the word. Evaluate whether the author's aims are worthwhile, and how well these aims are achieved.
2. Be reasonably comprehensive in the review. Comment on specific parts of the manuscript, and not just the manuscript as a whole. The length of the review depends on your judgment of the merit of the manuscript. Reviews tend to run from one to three pages, single spaced, although very good manuscripts may receive briefer reviews. The more you say in the review, the more information the editor has on which to base a decision and the more information the author has to understand the decision made on the manuscript.
3. Be clear and constructive in your feedback to the author. Give specific examples of problems you see with the manuscript, and suggest ways of improving the manuscript. As much as possible, consider the role of the reviewer to be an educational one. Be tactful. Do not derogate the author in the review, even if the manuscript arouses some negative emotions. Do not accuse the author of unethical or unprofessional behaviour (e.g., plagiarism) in the review; instead, raise such concerns on the Review Form, and let the editor handle them.
4. Concern yourself mostly with the substance and style of the manuscript. However, feel free to point out problems with grammar, spelling, etc. If you find the writing style to be a problem, be specific in your comments and include examples.

5. If you need to make comments in the manuscript, please indicate this in your separate review. You are to put all substantive comments in the separate review.
6. Do not state your recommendation regarding publication in the review. Indicate it only on the Review Form. The content of the review should serve as feedback, rather than as justification for a recommendation.
7. Always type (never handwrite) the review.
8. Put the manuscript number at the top of the page. Do not put your name on the review.
9. Keep a copy of the review, in case it gets lost in the mail or in case you are asked to review the manuscript a second time after it is revised.
10. Consider manuscripts under review to be confidential communications. Do not share or discuss them with others, unless such consultation is necessary in developing the review. Do not keep a copy of the manuscript for your own personal use. Please return copy of manuscript with your review.
11. Be on time with your reviews. If you cannot review the manuscript in the time frame indicated on the Review Form, either call the Editor (604-721-7827) or return the manuscript immediately by Priority Post.

## **B. General Guidelines for Review of Manuscripts**

Obviously, different kinds of manuscripts are reviewed according to somewhat different criteria. All manuscripts, however, should have the following characteristics:

1. The manuscript should be clearly written and logically developed.
2. The rationale, goals and problem statements should be explicit.
3. The organization should facilitate understanding and should be explicit in the form of headings, advance organizers, and transition statements.
4. Assertions should be well supported, preferably by reference to research or theory. Conclusions should be reasonably drawn, appropriately tentative, and supported by the data or a critical examination of the literature.
5. Concepts should be clearly defined. Procedures and instrumentation that constitute operationalizations of concepts should be clearly explained.

6. The style of writing should be formal and professional, yet accessible to the readership of the *Journal*.
7. Manuscripts should conform in every way to the Guidelines for Authors which are found in each issue of the *Journal*. These Guidelines specify that manuscripts should be prepared according to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (Third Edition). Reviewers should be thoroughly familiar with both documents.

### **C. General Guidelines for the Assessment of Research from All Sciences**

1. The manuscript contributes to the building and elaboration of a discipline's body of knowledge and understanding.
2. The manuscript specifies where the study fits within relevant literature and states the intended purposes or questions of the study.
3. The methods and procedures used are appropriate or responsive to the intended purposes or questions of the study.
4. Methods and procedures are specified clearly so that readers may see how to conduct a similar study themselves, and may judge for themselves how well the reported study was carried out.
5. The research data and findings or results are discussed in terms of their contribution to theory, content, method, and/or practical domains.
6. Limitations of the study are discussed.
7. The manuscript is written clearly, and technical terms are defined.
8. Any speculation is clearly identified as speculation.
9. The manuscript is acceptable to reviewers familiar with its content area and with its methods.

### **D. Specific Guidelines for Quantitative and Qualitative Research**

The following guidelines are important in all research. They often are addressed by adequate instrument development in quantitative studies, but they are sometimes overlooked in qualitative studies. In well-conducted qualitative studies, these guidelines should be addressed. However, reviewers unfamiliar with qualitative traditions often assume that these guidelines do not need to be followed. Therefore, it is important for researchers to address them explicitly in manuscripts that incorporate qualitative methods.

1. *Owning one's perspective.* Authors specify their theoretical orientations. Authors attempt to recognize their values, interests, and assump-

tions and to set them aside or explicitly discuss their relation to the study's findings. This disclosure of values helps readers to interpret the researcher's data and findings, and to consider possible alternatives.

2. *Situating the sample within a context.* Authors describe the research participants and their circumstances to aid readers in judging how typical the data and findings might be for other populations.
3. *Specifying steps.* Authors report all procedures for gathering data, including specific questions posed to participants. Ways of organizing the data and methods of analysis are specified. This information is intended to assist readers in understanding and appraising the researchers' descriptive reports about the form of experience or action under study.
4. *Respecting participants and subject matter.* Researchers are sensitive to participants' human situations, and creatively adapt their procedures and reports to respect both their participants' lives and the complexity and ambiguity of the subject matter. Researchers are careful to protect anonymity of participants' responses.
5. *Demonstrating coherence of findings.* The data and findings are represented in a way that achieves coherence and integration while preserving nuances in the data. The findings fit together to form a data-based story/narrative, "map," framework, or underlying structure for the phenomenon or domain.
6. *Tentativeness of conclusions.* Authors present conclusions and interpretations tentatively and subject both to reflexive, skeptical considerations allowing for the possibility of rival hypotheses and explanations.

## **E. Guidelines Especially Pertinent to Qualitative Research**

1. *Grounding in examples.* Authors illustrate analytic procedures, data, and findings with examples. The examples allow appraisal of the fit between data and findings and allow readers to perceive possible alternate meanings and understandings.
2. *Providing credibility checks.* Researchers should use any of several methods for checking the credibility of their categories, themes, or accounts. Where relevant, these may include (i) checking these findings with the original informants or others similar to them; (ii) using multiple qualitative analysts, an additional analytic "auditor," or the original analyst for a "verification step" of reviewing the data for discrepancies, overstatements, or errors; (iii) comparing multiple, varied qualitative perspectives; or (iv) where appropriate,

“triangulation” with external factors (e.g., outcome or recovery) or quantitative data.

3. *Accomplishing the research focus.* Where a general understanding of a phenomenon is intended, data and findings are based on an appropriate range of instances (informants or situations). Limitations to generalizability are specified in terms of context and informant characteristics. Where understanding one instance or case is the goal, it has been studied and described systematically and comprehensively enough to provide the reader a basis for attaining that understanding. Such case studies also address limitations of generalizability.
4. *Resonating with readers.* Enough data is provided so that readers/reviewers may judge the data and findings to have accurately represented their experience of the subject matter and to have clarified or expanded their appreciation and understanding of it.