Guidelines for Reviewers

Thank you for your dedication to professional improvement by acting as a reviewer for TESL-EJ!

When a paper is submitted to TESL-EJ, it is checked for basic conformity to the journal guidelines before being allocated to a co-editor or "shepherd" who sees it through the review process. After reading through the paper, the shepherd will ask two or more suitable reviewers to prepare reviews, preferably people with knowledge of the field of the paper (though it is not always possible to find reviewers with a deep knowledge of the specific subject matter of a given paper). In light of the recommendations of the reviewers, the shepherd will contact the writer(s) and supervise the process of revision where appropriate, and a second round of reviews if necessary, before forwarding publishable papers to the editor for final approval. Reviewers can expect that their reviews, or extracts from them, will be forwarded to writers. Reviewers are welcome to correspond with the shepherd if they have questions about reviewing the article in question.

The role of the reviewer is thus to provide an appropriately detailed and informed critique of the paper, and to make a recommendation: "Accept as is" (relatively rare), "request revisions", "not suitable for publication", or "submit for publication elsewhere2. The review should justify the recommendation, and provide the co-editor with the necessary material for action.

If the reviewer finds that the paper is not suitable for publication, this needs to be justified briefly but in sufficient detail for the shepherd to form an opinion (perhaps in the light of a conflicting recommendation from another reviewer) and to give some feedback to the writer. Serious submissions deserve an explanation for rejection, one that will perhaps help the writer in preparing future papers.

If the paper is not suitable for TESL-EJ but is nevertheless potentially publishable elsewhere, the reviewer should, if possible, suggest the (type of) journal to which it could be submitted. Often this will be a national or regional rather than an international journal in the case of papers that seem relevant to teaching/learning in a specific country or area of the world but have little interest for readers outside that area. It is not necessary to review such papers in detail beyond explaining why the subject matter is not suitable for TESL-EJ.

If the recommendation is to accept the paper as it is, the reviewer needs to provide some evidence of its quality for the benefit of the "shepherd" and editor, bearing in mind that they will not be specialists in the field.

The longest and most detailed reviews will usually be for potentially publishable papers that require revision. A recommendation that the writer repeats the data collection in an empirical study in a revised format, for example, is not realistic; it is better to reject the current paper but give a

suggestion for a new study in the same field. Recommendations for revision should be as detailed and specific as possible (without the reviewer actually rewriting the paper).

You might find this article, from Elsevier, useful:
https://www.elsevier.com/connect/reviewersupdate/theyve-got-it-all-wrong!-how-to-give-constructive-feedback-in-peer-review"

Returning your comments

There are three basic ways that you may return your comments and evaluation, 1) use the review form on the submission site, 2) an MS Word text file that you upload using the link at the bottom of the aforementioned form, or 3) A marked up copy of the original manuscript using the "track changes" and/or comments feature. This, too, may be uploaded at the end of review form.

The review form (For those reviewers provided with access to it)

The TESL-EJ submissions site provides a review form with prompts for areas to be covered, but reviewers should use this form constructively to say what they want to say about the paper. Sometimes reviewers put most of their comments in the "Other comments" section, or upload a separate file, specifying "See comments" in most of the blanks of the form. This is acceptable and recommended in many cases. Note that it is possible to indicate that the review should not be forwarded as is to the writer. However, if the writer has private comments that should not be forwarded to the writer, there is a separate section for comments to the editor.

The sections of the review form are:

Relevance: Is the manuscript relevant and of interest to the TESL-EJ readership?

The TESL-EJ readership comprises primarily ESL teachers and teacher trainers, and researchers in the field of Applied Linguistics. Anything relevant to teaching/learning English as a second language, at any level and in any context, may be considered potentially of interest. Most articles published are reports of empirical studies, and these should conform with the norms of valid research. "Opinion" essays / survey articles are also potentially acceptable, though these should always be well-informed. Reviews of specific teaching materials and other single publications have their own places in the journal, but should not be considered for acceptance as full-length articles in the main section of the journal. Articles relating to the administration or organisation of teaching will not usually be acceptable if they relate solely to a specific local setting, since they are unlikely to be applicable more widely.

Please note that TESL-EJ has an international readership. It is our hope that whatever findings there are in the manuscript will be applicable beyond the culture where the study was conducted. If the findings are only relevant to a specific country, then no matter how well the article may be written, it should be submitted to a local or regional journal, not to TESL-EJ.

Research: Is the research original, valid, and appropriate?

These are areas where the expert knowledge of the reviewer of the specific field of the paper will be especially valuable. However, not all articles can be sent to reviewers who are experts in the relevant field; some internet research by the reviewer may be necessary. For empirical research

articles, a careful examination of the research methods and the interpretation of the results will be particularly important.

Ethical Standards: Are ethical standards in research and citation followed? If no, explain.

For citations, please look out for anything that might be categorised as plagiarism, such as paraphrasing the words of another writer without acknowledgement.

Ethical standards in research include maintaining appropriate confidentiality. Research subjects should not be identified by name. Normally it is acceptable to identify institutions, but reviewers should form an opinion on this where appropriate.

Where the research involves some kind of intervention – trialling a teaching technique, for example – every effort should be made to ensure that students are not disadvantaged in their learning by their participation in the research. If they are to be inconvenienced in some way – for example, by having to do extra work over and above that normally expected – then it should be with their explicit consent, and normally with this consent signalled by signing a consent form. It should be possible for students to opt out of research study participation if such participation might inconvenience them, or involve them in any activity against their wishes. Finally, while it is recognised that the nature of some research treatments means that subjects cannot be informed of what is being done, students should be given as much information as possible about any research in which they are involved.

It should be evident from the paper what steps were taken to comply with reasonable ethical standards in empirical research.

Writing Quality: Is the writing style accessible and of high quality? If not, what specific areas need improvement? Most contributions come from professionals who themselves are 2nd language users of English, so if there are local errors in the grammar or vocabulary these may be fixable at a later point. More important is the quality of the content of the paper.

Note that there is no specific "TESL-EJ style" of writing but we hope that authors will be able to get a general sense of appropriate style by reading other relevant articles in TESL-EJ. The search function within the EJ site is a convenient way to do this.

References: Are the references relevant and current? Do they represent a good grasp of the current literature in the field? Are they cited appropriately in APA format?

Here again the reviewer's expert knowledge – or some appropriate checking – is important. There is nothing wrong with including old references if they are still relevant, but it should be clear that the writer has taken the most recent research in the appropriate field into account, and has taken time to update their reading if, for example, the paper is based on research conducted some time ago. Note that it may sometimes happen that a writer includes *too many* references – a vast number of tangential works can be unhelpful.

Other comments for revision

Reviewers should make free use of this section to ensure that they have included everything they feel is relevant. The authors will see anything you write here.

Other comments for the editor

Only the editor will see what you write here.

Providing feedback via "Track changes" and/or comments

If you would like to point out specific issues with the content, please do take advantage of MS Word's "track changes" and/or comment features. You may use the "Protect Document"/"Privacy" checkbox under the "Review" heading to remove all mentions of your name from the properties as well as any "track changes" or "comments" entries that you have made before you save and upload your feedback.

Formatting Guidelines

Another task for the reviewer is to ascertain whether the manuscript follows the basic "TESL-EJ Style Guidelines". If you do not have a copy, you may download it from tesl-ej.org or click on the link in the previous sentence. Strict adherence is not required since these issues may be addressed in a future rewrite, but both the editorial staff and the author(s) would appreciate it if you could mention any divergences, and perhaps mark up some of them if you elect to return a marked up copy of the manuscript with your comments.

Reviewers' Checklist Concerning the paper

☐ Does the abstract adequately reflect the content of the paper? Does it conform with the 200-word limit?
☐ Is there a clear presentation of the problem/issue that the paper is addressing?
☐ Is the article clearly structured, using sections with headings and sub-headings as appropriate?
☐ Are any statistics clearly explained so that those unfamiliar with their purpose and terminology can easily understand their significance to the study?
☐ If the paper is a research study, is there a list of research questions or hypotheses? Are the results discussed in a way that deals with each of these research questions/hypotheses separately?
☐ Are any limitations to the study mentioned in the conclusion? Are there suggestions for future research to overcome these limitations?

Concerning your review

☐ Have you done a Google search to see if any recent, relevant publications exist that might have enhanced the study?
☐ Have you removed your own name from MS Word's "properties" in any Word file you submit as part of the review in addition to the standard review form?
☐ Do the comments in your review adequately justify your recommendation, whether positive or negative?