

Providing review and feedback as a co-author



MACQUARIE
University
SYDNEY · AUSTRALIA

▶ A guide for healthcare consumers

Healthcare research helps us to learn more about patients' health conditions, their treatment, ways of understanding health and well-being, and develop better ways to deliver health services. As researchers develop their ideas and find new ways of doing things, they try to share that information as widely as possible. One way they do this is through publishing articles that report the research idea or results in books and scientific magazines often described as journals. Journal articles are usually about 10-15 pages long and written by one researcher or a team of up to 10 researchers.

Increasingly, people with lived experience of a health condition, care process, service or setting are being invited to join researchers in developing new ideas and knowledge about their health condition as well as the care or service they have received. They can therefore be described as 'experts by experience' (or 'experiential experts' or 'lived experience researchers') and we will use the term 'experts by experience' for the rest of this document. When experts by experience are included as part of the research team, they have some ownership of the research ideas and knowledge that results from the project. Because of their involvement, they may be invited to provide review and feedback as a co-author on a journal article with the rest of the research team.

This resource was developed by Nyan Thit Tieu, Bronwyn Newman, Laurel Mimmo, Ashfaq Chauhan and Reema Harrison in consultation with the CanEngage team. For more information please contact Reema Harrison: reema.harrison@mq.edu.au

To be listed as a co-author requires:³

1. a significant contribution of your ideas and thoughts to the research described,
2. contributions to the writing and reviewing of drafts of the article,
3. approving the final version of the article and
4. agreeing to take responsibility for the integrity, or trustworthiness, of the article

Where you have not met all of the criteria for being a co-author, the authors can recognise your contribution at the end of the article in the Acknowledgements section. This shows that you gave inputs to the idea and/or article but do not have any ownership of the article.

We will first set out some points to consider before you accept the role, then describe some techniques that you can use when reading the article and making comments. We have also developed a checklist that you can use to think about different parts of the article. Every person has a different style of reading and giving feedback and this guide aims to provide a good starting point to develop yours.

1. Before you accept the invitation to be an author or reviewer

There are some key questions to discuss with the lead researcher and consider before you commit to being an author/reviewer: ¹

a) When is the deadline for contributing?

Check with the team when they need your contribution – this can vary depending on the urgency of the work; it's okay to ask for more time if you need it or say no if you can't contribute to the article within the time given.

b) What is the expected time commitment?

For some articles you may be asked to review and contribute to the same article several times as it is reworked and refined before submission; other times you may just need to review and contribute to a single draft. It's worth checking how much of your time you will need to give to contribute to the article.

c) Be clear on why you have been asked to contribute.

Check with the team what they are expecting from you and your expertise, and that you are comfortable with these expectations and to be involved. Do they want you to write a few sentences, a paragraph, or even a section of the article, and how long should this be? Or are they looking for your feedback and comments only?

d) Find out what kind of feedback is being expected from you.

The type of feedback being sought will depend on the nature of the article and your relevant expertise. For example, the lead researcher might ask for your thoughts about a specific part of the article or to comment on the whole article. If your role within the project is as a person with lived experience of a condition, service or system, it is not likely that you would be asked to give feedback on technical, statistical or methods sections.²

e) **Ask how your contribution will be recognised.**³

Are you being invited as:

- i) a listed co-author
- ii) a person who will receive an acknowledgement

Accept the invitation to be involved only if you have the time to commit, you are comfortable with the level of involvement this requires and the way in which your contribution is being recognised.

2. Reading and reviewing

Once you have decided you would like to accept the invitation to contribute to the article, you can approach this in three steps: first read through, second read through and thirdly, using a checklist to guide you through the different sections of the article.

a) **First read through**

Look through the whole article/report/manuscript. This doesn't need to be a thorough read, just enough to give you a 'feel' for the article and think - does it make sense to me?

If it doesn't make sense, or you're not sure why you've been asked to be involved contact the researcher who invited you to contribute and talk with them about your concerns.

b) **Second read through**

If the article makes sense to you on the initial look through, take some time to have a thorough read of the article. This time have some questions in mind:⁴

- ▶ Does it still make sense to you?
- ▶ Who is it written for?
- ▶ What are the main ideas?
- ▶ Do you think the reasoning or ideas are logical and make sense in light of your experience?
- ▶ Are the issues discussed important to you as an expert by experience?
- ▶ Are there things that have been left out that you think should be included?
- ▶ Do you feel you have the right experience in the area to review the article?
- ▶ Is there anything in the article that you are concerned about?
- ▶ Do you have suggestions for the author to take into account; for example, the language and terminology used?
- ▶ Any terms or concepts that you might want to learn more about?

3. Review Checklist⁵

The checklist (over the page) has been designed as a structure for more detailed feedback, and may be useful as a framework for you to give detailed input to other authors. The checklist can be used to guide the review process and used to suit your personal style, and any requirements you have discussed with the research team. You may choose to add comments to a document electronically, print the article and write on it or note comments on the checklist only.

The Checklist

| General Questions - about the article as a whole | Yes | Partial | No | Notes/Comments |
|--|------------|----------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Does the title tell you what is in the article? | | | | |
| Are the ideas organised in a way that makes sense? | | | | |
| Do headings in the paper describe the content? | | | | |
| Abstract - the abstract is a summary of the article | | | | |
| Does the abstract give an overview of the article? | | | | |
| Does the abstract have all the important ideas in it? | | | | |
| Is the structure of the abstract the same as the article? | | | | |
| Introduction/Background - tells you about the problem or gap in what we know to show why the research is needed | | | | |
| Does the background tell you in a logical way why the research is needed? | | | | |
| Are important terms or concepts defined? | | | | |
| Is the research question or purpose clear? | | | | |
| Methods - explains what the researchers did and why | | | | |
| Do the authors explain how they are doing their research? | | | | |
| Have the authors provided detail about the data ie. How many, where from, who or what? | | | | |
| Have the authors stated why the data is being collected in the ways that they described? | | | | |
| Results/Findings - tells you what the researchers found | | | | |
| Do the findings answer the research question/purpose in a logical way? | | | | |
| Is there enough detail for you to be convinced by the answer? | | | | |
| Are there parts of the project described in the methods missing from the results? | | | | |
| Discussion - how this research fits in with what we already know about the topic | | | | |
| Does the discussion section link the results to other ideas, other research or new topics? | | | | |
| Do the authors discuss the strengths and limitations of the project ? | | | | |
| Conclusion - tells you why the research is important and what needs to happen next | | | | |
| Does the conclusion summarise how the questions/aims of the research have been answered? | | | | |
| Is there a clear idea of what needs to happen as a result of the research? | | | | |

4. Providing your feedback^{6,7}

The first step is to check with the lead author how they would like to receive your feedback and let them know your preference so that they can work with you in the way that enables you to provide your contribution most readily. You can provide feedback on an article by annotating or making notes in the document (electronically or by hand), or by providing verbal feedback to the lead author and other authors in the team.

Reading and commenting about the content of an article may feel daunting for experts by experience, especially if the article describes terms or methods that are not familiar. Below we provide 4 tips that can help you to present and deliver your feedback:

1. Outline or note down anything that is unclear to you.
2. Describe what you liked or found helpful about the content or structure of the article.
3. Provide clear feedback about ways in which you think the article can be improved. For example – ‘can you explain what this word or phrase means more clearly?’ or ‘can you explain why this point is important to the article?’.
4. Write down your feedback either on a paper printout of the document, or using the comments function in the tracked changes icon in Microsoft Word if you feel comfortable to do this. Re-read your comments after a day or two before returning the article to the lead researcher. This reflection time can help you to ensure that your comments are clear, constructive and positive. It may also give you time to develop additional thoughts.

If you have any questions about the review process, authorship or providing feedback, contact the researcher who invited you to be part of writing or reviewing the article. As an expert by experience, your contribution is unique and valuable, but may also vary from one article to another so open communication with your co-authors is essential.

Resource Links:

Guide to Editing in MS Word:

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/word-for-windows-training-7bcd85e6-2c3d-4c3c-a2a5-5ed8847eae73>

Guide for Consumer Reviews:

<https://www.bmj.com/about-bmj/resources-reviewers/guidance-patient-reviewers>

Framing Feedback:

<https://www.elsevier.com/connect/reviewers-update/theyve-got-it-all-wrong!-how-to-give-constructive-feedback-in-peer-review2>

-
1. Dr Helen Kara, A simple guide to ethical co-authorship[*internet*]. London School of Economics and Political Science; [updated 29 March 2021;cited 15 October 2021] Available from: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2021/03/29/a-simple-guide-to-ethical-co-authorship/>
 2. Marieke A. Frassl ,David P. Hamilton,Blaize A. Denfeld,Elvira de Eyto,Stephanie E. Hampton,Philipp S. Keller,Sapna Sharma,Abigail S. L. Lewis,Gesa A. Weyhenmeyer,Catherine M. O'Reilly,Mary E. Lofton,Núria Catalán. Ten simple rules for collaboratively writing a multi-authored paper. *PLoS Computational Biology* [*internet*]. 15 November 2018 [cited: 15 October 2021] Available from: <https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1006508>
 3. BMJ Author Hub [*internet*]. Authorship and contributorship. London, United Kingdom. [updated July 2021, cited 15 October 2021] Available from: <https://authors.bmj.com/policies/bmj-policy-on-authorship/>
 4. The BMJ [*internet*]. Guidance for BMJ Patient and Public Reviewers. London, United Kingdom. [updated 2021, cited 15 October 2021] Available from: <https://www.bmj.com/about-bmj/resources-reviewers/guidance-patient-reviewers>
 5. Kurt Heppard checklist , Appendix C in Huff, A. S. (1999). *Writing for scholarly publication*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
 6. José Stoop, "They've got it all wrong!" How to give constructive feedback in peer review : Exploring how to frame your advice to authors [*internet*] Elsevier, United Kingdom. [updated 17 July 2018, cited 15 October 2021] Available from : <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/reviewers-update/theyve-got-it-all-wrong!-how-to-give-constructive-feedback-in-peer-review2>
 7. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors [*online*]. American College of Physicians. Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors. [updated 2021 , cited 15 October 2021] Available from: <http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html>



MACQUARIE
University
SYDNEY · AUSTRALIA

Acknowledgments:

This resource is funded through the NHMRC IDEAs grant (1180925).

This resource is funded through Cancer Australia's Supporting people with cancer Grant initiative (CA-ITA1819/01).

The content is solely the responsibility of the grant recipient and does not necessarily represent the official views of Cancer Australia.

For further information about this resource please contact CanEngage team [here](#).