

Manuscript Evaluation Criteria for *Early Childhood Education Journal*

► General Guidelines for Reviewers

Early Childhood Education Journal uses the Editorial Manager® system <http://ecej.edmgr.com/> for electronic submission and anonymous peer review of manuscripts. Reviewers are registered by the editor and receive an e-mail containing their user name and password to access the site. The review process begins when the editor receives manuscripts and screens them to see if they have any potential as an article published in the journal. Manuscripts that are obviously inappropriate for the audience or seriously flawed are rejected at that point. Manuscripts that are too long or not prepared in APA style are rated as “revise before review” and returned to the authors. If a manuscript has some potential and is reasonably close to the proper format, it is sent out for review to persons with specialized expertise matched to the manuscript’s subject matter. General guidelines include the following:

1. **Consider *ECEJ*’s readership.** Read the manuscript critically and consider its appropriateness for an audience of early childhood educators. We seek to publish manuscripts that have appeal and applicability for an *international* community of early childhood professionals that includes teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and professionals in other related fields committed to the care and education of young children, infancy through age eight.
2. **Be aware of *ECEJ*’s page budget.** *ECEJ* is published six times a year and each issue includes, on average, nine articles; therefore, only about 54 articles will be published in a year. If manuscripts are overly long, they diminish the opportunity to publish others’ works. Our page limit is 22 pages of 12-point print with everything double-spaced and one-inch page margins. The 22 page limit includes tables, charts, figures, and references and will result in an article of approximately five two-column pages when typeset. *Please do not forget to paginate your manuscript.*
3. **Take the author’s point of view into account.** Note that the first box on the electronic review form is for comments to the editor that you do not want shared with the author(s). The second box is shared (anonymously) with authors. If the manuscript has merit, offer specific recommendations for improvement. If you reject a manuscript, provide justification for your decision. Remember that the least useful question in reviewing is “How would *I* have written this article?” Assess the manuscript as it was written by that author.
4. **Make your decision clear.** We have many manuscripts awaiting publication. Don’t be reluctant to reject a manuscript if it would require extensive revision or seems poorly suited for *ECEJ*. Please rate the manuscript (on a scale where 100% is a perfect score) in the space provided. Conclude your review with one of four decisions: (1) accept, (2) accept with minor revisions, (3) major revisions (this typically means the manuscript will be reviewed again), or (4) reject.
5. **Please respond promptly.** Our publisher has strict deadlines for delivery of each issue of the journal. We depend on you to respond in a timely fashion (**usually within 20 days**) or to inform us immediately if you cannot complete the review. We appreciate recommendations of alternative reviewers with the specialized expertise on the manuscript topic. Please supply an e-mail address or institutional affiliation so that we can contact the reviewer and determine his or her availability.

Some Points to Ponder as You Review

General Suggestions: Read through the entire manuscript one time before beginning your critique, keeping *ECEJ*'s international audience of early childhood educators in mind. Realize that most manuscripts are rejected, some are "revise and resubmit," and almost none are published as is. Jot down notes of any problem areas you want to address in the review and revisit those sections to reread. Your main purpose is to evaluate the content from your perspective as a professional in the field with specialized expertise related to the topic. If there is anything that would compromise your ability to function as an anonymous peer reviewer (e.g., familiarity with the author's work), decline the invitation to review. As you compose your comments, consider the author's point of view and provide a prompt, thorough, and thoughtful review. If a manuscript is unsalvageable, tactfully explain why it is being rejected. If it has promise, write your review in way that provides specific guidance to the author; strive to be helpful. While it is appropriate to mention any format issues that exist, it is not necessary to take the time to correct the work, line by line; we have professional copyeditors for that level of review. Be certain to proofread the review before you submit it to be shared anonymously with the author.

What follows is a list of manuscript characteristics that might be mentioned in a review. It is not necessary to answer each of these questions, one by one. Think of the items below as a tool for reflection as you evaluate a manuscript for publication in *ECEJ*.

- Does the **title** of the manuscript accurately reflect the content? Could a person read the **abstract** and get a clear sense of what the article will be about? Will the **key words** enable other professionals to locate the work with the search engines commonly used by academic libraries?
- Is there an opening paragraph that **identifies the topic and a clear focus**? Does the author make her or his stance on the issues clear? Could a reader decide, within the first page, if this article is of interest or is there a long and unnecessary preamble?
- Does the opening section **preview** what is to come? Is there a succinct overview of the major parts of the article?
- Is the **type** of manuscript that the author intended to produce clear? Is the manuscript is a good representation of that category (i.e., guest editorial, review of the literature, original research, practical article, report on a successful program)?
- Does the **content** of the article have appeal for the diverse audience of *Early Childhood Education Journal*? Does the work advance knowledge in the field? Does it make an original contribution or provide a fresh perspective on a persistent issue?
- Is the **literature review** accurate, up-to-date, and balanced? Does the review cite leaders in the field and authoritative scholarly sources of support rather than textbooks or internet sources? Are there additional sources that you would recommend?
- What is the **level of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation** in the manuscript? Do you have the sense that the author has delved into the relevant literature and reflected upon the various facets of the topic? Does the manuscript present a clear, logical argument?
- Is the **structure** of the manuscript matched to the article type (e.g., guest editorial, original research, practical article)? For example, it is customary for the structure of a research article to contain a problem statement, background/literature review, research questions, participants, methods/procedures, data collection, data analysis, discussion and recommendations while a

report on a successful project should include the phases of (1) needs assessment, (2) planning, (3) implementation, and (4) evaluation.

- What about **style**? Is the language scholarly, yet accessible, so that readers ranging from college students to professors will understand it? Are unfamiliar terms defined and is excessive jargon avoided? Does the style suit the article type (e.g., practical, theoretical, research)?
- Does the manuscript have **life**? Are general ideas supported by concrete examples that demonstrate the author's concern for young children and commitment to the field? Does the author's voice convey the message that she or he has really lived with these ideas and analyzed the topic thoughtfully?
- What about overall **organization**? Does every paragraph really belong where it is placed? Does one section of the manuscript flow into the next seamlessly? Is each paragraph cohesive? Are there specific headings and subheadings to guide the reader through the manuscript?
- Does the author make effective use of **illustrative material**? Have the tables, figures, and other visual material been used judiciously and are they worthy of the journal space to publish them? Has the author included helpful examples appropriate to the article type, such as young children's words and work in a practical article?
- Is the article **carefully prepared and error free**? Does it adhere to the style requirements of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition? Are all of the references in the proper format? Is it free of spelling and typing errors or does it show signs of haste in preparation?
- Is the manuscript **succinct**? Does it get to the point and stay on the subject? Are there some obvious places where it could be improved by skillful pruning?
- What about the **conclusion**? Does the manuscript give a sense of revisiting the main ideas briefly? Does it give the reader a feeling that all of the ideas have been tied together?
- Does the article have **enduring appeal**? Would you recommend it to a colleague as course material? Can you envision the article in a collection of readings? Based on the quality of work, would you recommend this author to contribute a chapter to one of Springer's edited books on early childhood education?



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