

Образование и Саморазвитие Education and Self Development

Notes for reviewers

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1. Scope

Education and Self-development (E&SD) is now in its 13th year of publication. It aims to be the primary source of research and East-West dialogue regarding the theory and methods, of ways of enabling individuals and communities to develop to their fullest capacity.

Our vision is that the Journal is a bridge between Russian and Eastern Europe on the one hand, and Europe and North America on the other, with articles from other continents (Africa, South America, SE Asia and Australia). We achieve that vision by working from our Russian base, with a strong international editorial board and our unique bilingual approach.

“Education” is taken to include all forms of teaching, learning, instruction and training in schools, colleges, universities, workplaces and non-formal and informal settings for all age groups in the developed and developing world, by means of face-to-face, digital or blended learning.

“Self-development” is taken to include all means of examining learners’ needs, potential and interests and enabling them to discover, enrich and apply new knowledge, skills, attitudes and aspirations that will help them in their lifelong learning. It occurs in formal learning contexts but also involves compensating for gaps in learning and developing new competencies in people throughout their lives.

E&SD is unique in being a *bilingual* (English and Russian) scholarly review of research and vehicle for East-West dialogue on advancing the agenda of education for self-development. It therefore encourages:

- Multi-site, multi-perspective studies by teams of researchers testing promising approaches;
- Longitudinal studies that evidence the benefits of education for self-development initiatives and innovations;
- Reports on interventions that have failed as well as succeeded and why, so that others may learn from these experiences;
- Dialogues between researchers in different fields, institutions, cultures and contexts in order to develop international understanding and collaboration.

Papers for E&SD may include studies in:

- Psychology of learning and communication;
- Pedagogy, androgogy (adult learning) and heutogogy (self-determined learning) for individual or group learning;
- Education for employment, access, equity and social inclusion;
- Design, development and application of learning systems and tools;
- Leadership and management in lifelong learning;
- Curriculum development and course design;
- Open, distance, blended and flipped learning;
- Professional development for educational/organisational change;
- Monitoring and quality assurance;
- Formative and summative evaluation, assessment and research methods;
- Costs, cost effectiveness, cost efficiency.

Reports of work undertaken are expected to be free of jargon; analytical rather than descriptive; critical rather than merely informative; and providing original perspectives and conclusions.

Key words

access and equity	androgogy ¹	aspirations
attributes	career planning	competencies
counselling	creativity	critical thinking
culture	didactics	distance education
education	educational technology	educational psychology
educational research	educational sociology	employment
evaluation and assessment	heutagogy ²	higher education
human capital	human development	informal learning
Innovation in education and training	instructional and learning design	latent talents
leadership and management	learning	lifelong learning
mentoring	motivation	non-formal education
online learning	open learning	Pedagogy
problem-based learning	problem-solving	professional development
quality assurance	self-awareness	self-determination
self-development	self-directed learning	self-esteem
self-fulfillment	self-identity	self-improvement
self-motivation	self-realization	self-study
schooling	teaching	teacher education
tutoring	technical education	vocational education

E&SD is bi-lingual with articles in Russian and English. However, the metadata for each article (the title, author list, keywords, and abstract) appears in both Russian and English. The Editorial team will arrange translation for metadata where necessary.

Special Issues

E&SD publishes occasional Special Issues on 'hot topics' in particular fields of research into educational and self-development that will generating publicity and raise awareness of the topics covered in the journal. These are edited by Guest Editors and must be relevant to a wide international and multidisciplinary readership. The same criteria of quality, originality, and significance apply to the acceptance of proposals for Special Issues and all of the articles in these.

2. Reviewing

Peer reviewing is at the very heart of scholarly publishing. Academic papers are scrutinised by other researchers – peers – who comment on the quality of the work. They assess whether it the methodology is sound, and for papers reporting on empirical research, whether the analysis has been rigorous, and the conclusions follow from the

¹ Adult learning

² The study of self-determined learning

findings. The aim of this quality control is to ensure, as far as possible, that the body of our knowledge of the field is accurate, so that others can build on these foundations.

It is important, not only for other researchers but also for the practitioners who apply the result of our research. This quality control also means that our publications can be relied on by those who provide funding for future research, and the institutions who pay our salaries and grant us tenure.

In becoming a peer reviewer you are joining a community of experts who assess each other's work. Of course, some reviewers are more experienced than others, but as peers all our opinions are valued. As a reviewer you may be asked to assess the work of acknowledged experts in your field and it is your responsibility to make that assessment fairly and to the best of your ability.

While reviewing carries heavy responsibilities, it also gives significant benefits by enabling you to see what others are doing and thinking, long before that information is published in scholarly journals. It also makes you a far better researcher and author!

3. Introduction

While every reader of a journal will judge its quality by what is published, every author of every submission, whether or not these are accepted, will judge the professionalism and quality of the journal by the promptness, fairness and accuracy of the reviewers' comments.

A journal's SSCI Index Impact Factor and other metrics are also heavily dependent on the professionalism of the journal's reviewers. Reviewers make a major contribution to the quality of what is published, and that in turn encourages authors to submit more high quality work. Increased quality leads to better metrics.

Peer review is a very important task and involves significant responsibilities – to the Journal, to the authors and to the learning technology community in general. The aim of this guide is to:

- Improve the accuracy and consistency of the reviewing process and thus
- Provide more helpful feedback to authors on the reasons for rejection or requirements for revision
- Improve the quality of the Journal for which you are reviewing
- Contribute to your professional development.

Submissions to *E&SD* are typically reviewed by two or three people. We share the comments from other reviewers for each submission you review. Your comments will probably differ in detail from the others. It would be suspicious if they were identical! You need to read them in the light of the editor's decision and remember that there may be reasons why that decision doesn't always follow the reviewers' recommendations.

You are unique – just like every other reviewer. You bring your own unique blend of experience and views and add your own value to the process.

4. What is peer review?

When a paper is submitted to a peer reviewed journal, the editor will usually send it to one or more people who are expert in the field and ask them for their comments on the contents and on its suitability for publication. This process of submitting an author's work, research, or ideas to the scrutiny of the author's 'peers' is known as 'peer review.'

Peer review is one of the characteristics of a learned journal which distinguishes it from other periodicals such as magazines or trade journals

4.1 What are the benefits?

For the editor

The prime benefit for the Journal editor is that s/he does not have to rely on his or her sole judgement in making editorial decisions. This is definitely a situation where two (or three, four or even five) heads are better than one.

We can only read and comment on submissions from our own experience. The comments and recommendations from reviewers can ensure that the editor is not adding an unconscious bias to the publishing decisions and can also be invaluable in identifying issues (such as faulty methodology or plagiarism) that may not be apparent to a single reader.

Although the reviewers' comments help the editor, it is the editor who has the final decision and takes responsibility for what is said to the author and what ultimately appears in the Journal

For the author

The reviewers' comments are fed back to the authors - whether the editorial decision is that the paper should be accepted, rejected or revised. If the paper is being rejected then the author deserves to know why: if we are asking for revisions then those comments form the basis of our advice to the authors as to how they should improve the work.

Very few papers are right first time. Some authors will ensure that they seek feedback from their colleagues before they submit a paper to a journal. Some departments insist that nothing goes until it has been extensively reviewed. It is, after all, the institution's reputation that is at stake here! Peer review of a submission is another step in the improvement process.

This means that the reviewer needs to be specific in his or her comments. Within reason, the more help and detail you can give the author, the more chance they have to improve the paper – whether it will be resubmitted to *E&SD* or sent to another journal.

For the Journal

Better publishing decisions result in better contributions in the Journal. The Journal enhances its reputation for publishing high quality and readable papers that take us beyond what is already known.

The reviewers' experience also helps to protect the Journal from publishing inaccurate or misleading papers. This is perhaps more important in life sciences where there have been a number of high profile cases in which major errors (in some cases involving falsified results) have appeared in print and resulted in real harm to the academic community - and the wider public.

For the reviewer

Lastly, we should not forget the benefits to you, the reviewer. The opportunity to review submissions well before they appear in the Journal (as well as seeing those that do not make it), gives the reviewer the ability to see 'over the horizon' and identify those trends and issues that are coming up in the future.

It also provides the opportunity to learn from the mistakes and shortcomings of others in preparing papers for submission to journals.

In a survey of the wants and needs of reviewers for the *British Journal of Educational Technology* carried out in 2009, the respondents were asked to list two things that they liked or valued about reviewing for that journal. The overwhelming majority of responses were to do with personal development – keeping abreast of the field and giving something back to the community (Rushby, 2009).

4.2 What are the problems?

Bias

When the Editor asks someone to carry out a peer review of a submission to the Journal is trusting that reviewer to give a fair and expert opinion on the paper. The comments and the recommendation should be unbiased.

There are possibilities of bias resulting from the prestige of the author and their institution, their gender and where they live and work. The submission itself may introduce bias – most obviously as a result of the quality of English. Most indexed journals are in English but many authors are working in English as a second or third language. As a result the grammar and idiom in the paper may leave much to be desired. A paper that is difficult to read tends to be regarded more harshly in other respects.

More subtle is a common preference for positive results. However, papers that report failure are just as important as those that describe success. Indeed it can be argued that we can learn more from failure than from success.

Consistency

The strength of peer review is that it brings together the view of several experts and so it can help to identify issues that may not be apparent to a single reader.

We can only read and comment on submissions from our own experience and so the comments from different reviewers with different experiences will inevitably differ. Their recommendation will also differ. A reviewer who works in an academic environment where research papers follow a strict methodology may not be comfortable with a submission that is not grounded in statistical comparisons. As in the marking of examinations, some reviewers apply different criteria and are more or less harsh in their judgements.

Thus it is often the case that two or three reviewers will give quite contradictory recommendations. Ingelfinger (1974) found that “Expert reviewers frequently disagree. Thus, concurrence between two reviewers of each of some 500 papers submitted to the *New England Journal of Medicine* was only moderately better than a chance result.”

It is the Editor’s job to resolve these differing views and, by careful reading of the comments (and often, re-reading the submission itself) come to a final decision as to whether the submission should be accepted, rejected or revised by the authors. These inconsistencies in the comments can sometimes be confusing for the author who read them from *their* own experience, sometimes with English as a second language, and have difficulty in understanding why their paper has not been accepted.

4.3 Single blind, double blind and open reviewing?

We noted earlier that reviewers should not allow any personal bias in their comments and recommendations. Similarly, reviewers need to be protected from any recriminations by authors on comments that they perceive to be unfair.

One way of achieving this (in theory) is through the anonymity of double blind reviewing. Under this system, the submission is stripped of the information that identifies the authors and their institution before it is sent to the reviewers. Similarly, the identity of the reviewers is not given to the authors. In practice, a good reviewer can often make very accurate guesses as to the author's identity by clues in the submission, such as the list of references and the way in which earlier work is cited. Controlled trials have found that reviewers can guess author identity in about 50% of cases and that making the authors' identity known does not affect the quality of recommendations (van Rooyen, Godlee, Evans, Smith and Black, 1998).

The single blind reviewing process retains the anonymity of the reviewer but makes the authors' identity apparent. In fact, other research (Godlee, 2002) suggests that single blinding does not improve the quality of reviews. Godlee suggests that open peer review is preferable because:

- It is more ethical as there is greater accountability for both editors and reviewers and less scope for bias or the misappropriation of ideas and/or data by reviewers or undue or deliberate delays in them returning their reviews.
- There don't seem to be any adverse effects on the quality of the reviews or the usefulness of the reviewers' comments.
- Reviewers can be given public credit for their work. Their name can be published with the papers and with the actual reviews if the journal has extended open review to include their publication. The opportunity is presented for editors to grade reviews and for the best to be highlighted, thus reflecting positively on those reviewers. (Godlee, 2002)

(It should be noted that this research focused on papers in medical journals and that the results might not hold for the field of educational research.)

5. What makes a good review?

What the editor wants to see in published papers is:

- Importance
- Originality
- Relevance and usefulness to readers
- Truth
- Excitement (the wow factor)
- Clear and engaging writing.

A good review should address these criteria and comment on how well the submission meets (or fails to meet) them.

What author is looking for from the review is a review that is fair and unbiased, and which helps them to improve on what they have written. Researching and writing the papers you review represents a considerable amount of time and effort by the authors. You should therefore take time and care over your critique and we would recommend that your comments run to minimum of 500 words.

It is the responsibility of the author(s) to convince you that their work is significant and "moves forward the boundaries" in the field. If you are not convinced that their work

does do this, it is your responsibility to criticize the accuracy and completeness of their paper in ways that will stand up to close scrutiny.

Most submissions will go through at least one revision: it is rare for an author to get it absolutely right the first time! It is unusual for a submission to go through more than three revisions before it is either accepted or rejected as a hopeless case!

6. Ethical policy

6.1 A commitment to ethical behavior

Education & Self Development has an absolute commitment to the highest standards of publication ethics. The Journal observes the codes of conduct set out by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) for the ethical behaviour of editors, authors, reviewers, the members of the editorial board and the Journal's publisher. The following sections set out what we as editors expect of you - and what you have a right to expect of us, the Editorial Team.

6.2 The Editorial Team

As Editors we take full responsibility for everything that is published in *Education & Self Development*. We will:

- a. Strive to meet the needs of readers and authors by actively seeking the views of authors, reviewers, readers and members of the editorial board on ways of improving our processes.
- b. Strive to constantly improve the journal. We will encourage and be aware of research into peer review and publishing;
- c. Put in place processes that will ensure the quality of the material we publish, and review these processes from time to time to improve them;
- d. Support initiatives to educate researchers about publication ethics and those designed to reduce research and publication misconduct. We will assess the effect of our journal policies on author and reviewer behaviour and revise those policies, as required, to encourage responsible behaviour and discourage misconduct;
- e. Adopt systems that promote good practice for authors or contributors (i.e. so that author listings accurately reflect who did the work) and discourage misconduct (e.g. ghost and guest authors)
- f. Champion freedom of expression. Our decisions will not be affected by the origins of the manuscript, including the nationality, ethnicity, political beliefs, race, or religion of the authors. Decisions to edit and publish will not be determined by the policies of governments or other agencies outside of the journal itself;
- g. Encourage and be willing to consider cogent criticisms of work published in *E&SD*. Authors of criticised material will be given the opportunity to respond.
- h. Be open to studies reporting negative results.
- i. Maintain the integrity of the academic record;
- j. Not permit our standards to be compromised by business needs;
- k. Always be willing to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions and apologies when needed.
- l. Inform readers about the steps taken to ensure that submissions from members of the journal's staff or editorial board have received an objective and unbiased evaluation;
- m. Include submission and acceptance dates with published articles.
- n. Base our decisions about journal house style on relevant evidence of factors that raise the quality of reporting rather than simply on aesthetic grounds or personal preference

- o. Ensure that any press releases issued by the journal reflect the message of the reported article and put it into context.
- p. Ensure that any complaints about the Journal are investigated in accordance with the guidelines set out by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). If you wish to make a complaint, please contact the Editor, a member of the Editorial Council or a member of the Editorial Board. Their names and addresses can be found on the Journal website at the 'Editorial Team' tab.
- q. Investigate concerns about potential misconduct as follows:
 - We will first seek a response from those suspected of misconduct. If we are not satisfied with the response, we will ask the relevant employers, or institution, or some appropriate body (perhaps a regulatory body or national research integrity organization) to investigate.
 - We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a proper investigation into alleged misconduct is conducted; if this does not happen, we will make all reasonable attempts to persist in obtaining a resolution to the problem.
- r. Have systems for managing our own conflicts of interest as well as those of our staff, authors, reviewers and editorial board members
- s. Full details of the Journal's procedures for handling allegations of misconduct, complaints and appeals can be found in our Ethical Policy on the website.

6.3 The reviewers

We promise our reviewers that we will:

- a. Provide reviewers with a set of notes detailing everything that is expected of them including the need to handle submitted material in confidence. This guidance will be regularly updated;
- b. Send you, from time to time, information on best reviewing practice and findings of the latest research on peer review, so that you can keep yourself up to date.
- c. Keep your identity confidential and, in particular, not disclose it to the authors of submissions you are reviewing.
- d. Monitor the peer review processes used by *E&SD* to see if any improvement is possible.
- e. Monitor your performance and ensure that it maintains a high standard.
- f. Thank you publicly for your valuable contribution on the Journal website from time to time and will encourage your institution to recognise peer review activities as part of the scholarly process;
- g. Investigate any concerns about troubling cases or suspected misconduct, following the guidance in the COPE flowcharts (<http://publicationethics.org/flowcharts>)

In return we ask our reviewers to:

- a. Advise the editors if you feel that, either you are not competent to undertake the review in a timely manner (for example, because of unfamiliarity with the statistics), because you have a conflict of interest (which may, for example, be personal, financial, intellectual, professional, political or religious) whether this is apparent before starting the review or during its preparation.
- b. Decline to review if:
 - you do not feel that they can provide a fair and unbiased review.
 - you have been involved with any of the work in the manuscript or its reporting.
 - the manuscript that is very similar to one you have in preparation or under consideration at another journal
- c. Declare any potentially conflicting or competing interests, seeking advice from the journal if you are unsure whether something constitutes a relevant interest. To inform the Editors if:
 - you work at the same institution as any of the authors (or will be joining that institution or are applying for a job there);

- you are or have been recent (e.g. within the past 3 years) mentors, mentees, close collaborators or joint grant holders;
 - you have a close personal relationship with any of the authors.
- d. Not allow your reviews to be influenced by the origins of a manuscript, by the nationality, religious or political beliefs, gender or other characteristics of the authors, or by commercial considerations.
 - e. Ensure that suggestions for alternative reviewers are based on suitability and not influenced by personal considerations or made with the intention of the manuscript receiving a specific outcome (either positive or negative).
 - f. Not involve anyone else in the review of a manuscript, including junior researchers you are mentoring, without first obtaining permission from the journal; the names of any individuals who have helped you with the review should be included with the returned review so that they are associated with the manuscript in the journal's records and can also receive due credit for their efforts.
 - g. Not intentionally prolong the review process, either by delaying the submission of your review or by requesting unnecessary additional information from the journal or author.
 - h. Read the manuscript, ancillary material (e.g. reviewer instructions, required ethics and policy statements, supplemental data files) and journal instructions thoroughly, getting back to the journal if anything is not clear and requesting any missing or incomplete items you need to carry out a full review
 - i. Keep your comments confidential and not share them with anyone except the editors dealing with the submission. The editors will share the anonymised comments with the other reviewers of your submission as part of the reviewer moderating process.
 - j. Not contact the authors without express permission from the Editors.
 - k. Not use information obtained during the peer-review process for your own or any other person's or organization's advantage, or to disadvantage or discredit others. Not agree to review a manuscript just to gain sight of it with no intention of submitting a review.
 - l. Bear in mind that the editor is looking to you for subject knowledge, good judgement, and an honest and fair assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the work and the manuscript.
 - m. Make clear at the start of your review if you have been asked to address only specific parts or aspects of a manuscript and indicate which these are.
 - n. Not prepare your report in such a way or include comments that suggest the review has been done by another person, or in a way that reflects badly or unfairly on another person (for example by making unfair negative comments or include unjustified criticisms of any competitors' work that is mentioned in the manuscript).
 - o. Be specific in your criticisms, and provide evidence with appropriate references to substantiate general statements such as, 'this work has been done before', to help editors in their evaluation and decision and in fairness to the authors. Make it clear which suggested additional investigations are essential to support claims made in the manuscript under consideration and which will just strengthen or extend the work.
 - p. Remember that it is the authors' paper and not attempt to rewrite it to their own preferred style if it is basically sound and clear. Suggestions for changes that improve clarity are, however, important.
 - q. Be sensitive to issues surrounding language issues that are due to the authors writing in a language that is not their own, and phrase the feedback appropriately and with due respect.
 - r. Comment on:
 - ethical questions and possible research and publication misconduct raised by submissions (e.g. unethical research design, insufficient detail on patient consent or protection of research subjects (including animals), inappropriate data manipulation and presentation);

- the originality of submissions and to be alert to redundant publication and plagiarism.

Reviewers should however, keep their concerns confidential and not personally investigate further unless the journal asks for further information or advice

- s. Be objective and constructive in your reviews, refraining from being hostile or inflammatory and from making libellous or derogatory personal comments. We will stop using reviewers who consistently produce discourteous, poor quality or late reviews.
- t. Not suggest that authors include citations to the reviewer's (or their associates') work merely to increase the reviewer's (or their associates') citation count or to enhance the visibility of their or their associates' work. Suggestions must be based on valid academic or technological reasons.
- u. Ensure your comments and recommendations for the editor are consistent with your report for the authors; most feedback should be put in the report for the authors. Confidential comments to the editor should not be a place for denigration or false accusation, done in the knowledge that the authors will not see these comments
- v. Review afresh any manuscript you have previously reviewed for another journal as it may have changed between the two submissions and the journals' criteria for evaluation and acceptance may be different.
- w. Acknowledge that peer review is largely a reciprocal endeavour and undertake to carry out your fair share of reviewing and in a timely manner.
- x. Provide the Editors with personal and professional information that is accurate and a true representation of your expertise.
- y. Recognise that impersonation of another individual during the review process is considered serious misconduct.
- z. Read the reviews from the other reviewers, to improve your own understanding of the topic or the decision reached
- aa. Contact the journal if anything relevant comes to light after you have submitted your review that might affect their original feedback and recommendations.
- bb. Try to accommodate requests from The Journal to review revisions or resubmissions of manuscripts you have reviewed.

7. The workflow for *E&SD*

7.1 The initial reading

The first step in the editorial process is a (usually quick) read through by the editor or one of the assistant editors. In some journals this will be undertaken by a member of the editorial board. Typically, up to half of the submissions are rejected at this stage, either because they do not offer anything new, because they are outside the journal's scope and should be submitted to a different journal, or because they are clearly below the required standard.

This initial pass to reject submissions that are clearly unsuitable greatly reduces the workload on the reviewer panel.

Sometimes it is clear at this initial reading that some revision is needed before the submission is sent out for review. For example:

- The submission is longer than the journal's word limit. *E&SD* has a target length of about 4000 words equivalent.
- The quality of the English or Russian is unacceptable so that it is difficult to read. It is unreasonable to make the reviewers' task even more difficult and time-consuming by asking them to work through incomprehensible text!
- The references are not in the required format (for *E&SD* this is APA). This can be an indication that it is also being submitted to another journal. Journal

editors do not like multiple submissions! In the event that two or more journals accept the paper for publication there can be serious intellectual property rights (IPR) issues. This will usually result in the paper being rejected by both journals and a note added to the author's record that editors must take care with future submissions!

- There is an unacceptable level of overlap with previously published work. *E&SD* checks all submissions using iThenticate for English language articles and Антиплагиат for Russian language articles. This provides the editor with a report on material within the submission that has previously been published elsewhere - by the author(s) or by others. Submissions that have an unacceptable level of plagiarism are either rejected or are sent back to the author to be revised so as to reduce the overlap with other published work. Plagiarism (whether from others or self-plagiarism) is a growing problem and responsible journal editors are committed to eliminating it from the work they publish.

7.2 Comments and recommendations

Typically, submissions are read by two or three reviewers: if one of the reviewers is new to the panel then that number may be increased to ensure that the submission receives a fair reading and to help the new reviewer with more feedback from colleagues.

Some reviewers will complete their task within a few days: others take two or three weeks. If the review is not completed within four weeks then the editor will issue a series of reminders before assigning the task to someone else!

7.3 Decision, decisions

When all the reviews have been received the editor considers the comments and recommendations and makes a decision often in consultation with the appropriate corresponding editor. The decision is one of three alternatives:

- *Accept*. It is very unusual that a submission is accepted without going through any revisions – but it does happen. More typically a revised article will have been judged to have reached the standard required for publication.
- *Accept with revisions*. The reviewers have identified a number of issues that require the submission to be revised and then reviewed again. It will usually be reviewed by the same readers as before.
- *Reject*. If the consensus of the reviewers is that the paper cannot be revised to meet the required standard then it will be rejected.

We then send a 'thank you' email to all of the reviewers. This summarises the editor's decision and gives some reasons if these are not clear. It also includes the comments for each of the reviewers. This is an opportunity for each reviewer to see what the others thought of the submission, and to check how they are 'marking' compared with others.

In due course, most authors who are invited to revise their work do so and submit the revised version. The revised submission will be assigned to the same reviewers who then read it again, comment and make their recommendations. There is usually no guarantee that revised submissions will be accepted. Sometimes authors cannot seem to revise their work to an acceptable standard – even after several attempts!

Accepted papers are then sent to the Journal production department where they are copy edited and typeset. The proofs are sent to the authors and the editor for checking, and the final 'version of record' goes online. This stage typically takes around six weeks – depending largely on how quickly the author returns the corrected proofs.

8. Your comments and recommendations

8.1 Comments for the editor

Most journals will ask you to make two sets of comments:

- I. Confidential comments to be read by the editor and not to be seen by the author(s)
- II. Comments that are for both the editor and the author(s)

There are a number of comments that you might not want the author(s) to see. Examples might include:

- Concerns about possible plagiarism
- Observations that this submission is very similar to papers published by the author(s) elsewhere and that it includes significant passages that are the same in both works.
- Concerns about ethical procedures
- A note that, the research supervisor (whose name appears in the list of authors) does not appear to have checked the quality of the work before it was submitted!

Include your recommendation. This will be one of:

- Accept
- Revision
- Reject

Remember that this is **your** recommendation – the editor's decision will take all of the reviewers' recommendations into account.

8.2 Comments for the author

The text that you say is for the editor **and** the author will usually be included in the decision letter to the author and is intended as feedback to them on how the paper can be improved. The editor will also read these comments to see whether there are some common concerns among the reviewers. If there is disagreement between the reviewers, these comments help the editor to come to an informed decision.

You should not include comments on your recommendation. It is embarrassing for everyone if you tell the author that you recommend their work should be accepted if the other reviewers take an opposite view and the submission is returned to the author for revisions.

You are not expected to copy edit the submission: that's the author's job (and perhaps our in-house copy editors if the paper is finally accepted), but it is helpful for the editor to know if the submission is full of silly errors, and helpful feedback to the authors indicating that they need to take greater care in the preparation of their work for submission.

It is helpful if your comments on gaps in the literature review, on problems with the methodology, on unsubstantiated assertions, missing or incorrect references, and flaws in the argument.

Please include a comment about the timeliness of the article. Is this a piece that needs to be published quickly if it is to be relevant – or can we and the authors take more time and give more consideration to getting the content right?

The journal gives guidelines in its Scope statement (see section 1).

Ideally an article would also be well written, clearly structured, novel, well supported and of importance and interest to a majority of the readers. Clearly that is challenging, and some flexibility may be needed, especially if the article has some redeeming qualities of a different kind.

It is difficult to give firm indications as to the length of an effective review, but it usually takes around 500 words to cover all of the points that need to be made. A two or three line review is usually unhelpful to both the editor and the authors.

There is a reviewer's checklist in 13.Appendix A.

8.3 Giving sensitive and constructive feedback

Authors differ in their reaction to critical feedback. Everyone likes their work to be praised: few of us like to hear that it is less than perfect. More experienced authors will take a professional view of critical feedback. Even if it is expressed clumsily, they will realise that the reviewer is raising issues that, in their professional view, need to be addressed. Less experienced authors can be hurt by comments that they perceive as destructive rather than helpful. In part this is a cultural issue: reviewers from different countries may be more or less direct in their comments, and more or less sympathetic to the authors' efforts.

Whether the final decision is or revision or rejection, the feedback is valuable to the authors. It can help them, either to improve the paper for publication this journal or submission to another journal. Try to mention good points as well as the shortcomings and make your feedback constructive rather than destructive. Think back to the first time you submitted a paper for review, the kind of feedback that you received and how you felt when you read the feedback.

8.4 Revised submissions

In most cases, where the editor's decision is for revisions, the author(s) will submit a revised version within two or three months. Unless the issues raised by the reviewers are very minor, the paper will need to be reviewed again – usually by the same reviewers who read the previous version.

It is helpful for the authors and reduces the possibility of confusing and contradictory comments if the revision is read by the same reviewers. So, unless there are very good reasons why you are unwilling to review the revision (for example, you believe that it would be impossible to bring it up to the standard required for publication) please agree to review the revised version.

8.5 Feedback to reviewers

When all of the reviews are completed and the editor has made a decision, you should receive an email thanking you for your work and summarising the decision. The email will include the comments that you made to the author and the comments from the other reviewer(s). This will enable you to compare your views with those of other reviewers and, over a number of reviews, to ensure that you are applying similar standards to other members of the panel.

9. A checklist

9.1 Before you start...

Ensure that you are familiar with *E&SD's* notes for authors. These set out the rules for the task of writing for the journal and thus, how submissions are to be judged.

Read the entire submission through first. Get an overview of the content and the style before you start your detailed evaluation. Then read it through again taking notes so that you can remember your comments, suggestions, issues and ideas. You need to be able to back up your comments with specific suggestions. The detailed checklist starts on the following page.

Not all of the questions will be relevant for every submission. Because papers published may take a number of different forms – for example, literature reviews, reviews of developing fields, reports of experimental work, theoretical overviews – the checklist cannot deal with every possible aspect. Neither should it be a substitute for your own professional judgement. We ask you to review submissions because we value that judgement: we do not want to constrain it with rigorous checklists!

Remember please, in your comments to the author(s):

- Do not include the submission title and the authors' names. (This information will be added to the decision letter by the editorial system.)
- Do not include comments on your recommendation. It is embarrassing for everyone if you tell the author that you recommend their work should be rejected if the other reviewers take an opposite view and the submission is returned to the author for revisions.

There follows a set of questions that you should consider in your review, together with some discussion to amplify and clarify. Appendix A sets out the questions in a form that you can print out as a job aid.

- Scope: Is the subject within the journal's published scope?
- Originality: Is the paper a new, original and valuable contribution to the field? You might find it helpful to summarise in one or two sentences the main contribution and novelty (if any) of the paper.
- Implications: Is the broader context clear?
- Timeliness: Is this a piece that needs to be published quickly if it is to be relevant? Can the journal and the authors take more time and give more consideration to getting the content right?
- Value: Is the paper of sufficiently wide interest to merit publication in a high quality international journal?
- Title: Does the title reflect the content, focus and results of the work? Is it suitable? Is it too long? Can it be improved? Sometimes the title does not, in fact, accurately describe the focus and results of the work. For example, if the title says achievement, then the study must actually measure achievement and not just opinions of subjects.
- Abstract: Are the approach, results and conclusions understandable from the abstract alone?
- Keywords: If these are used, do the key words reflect the content and outcomes of the paper?
- Introduction: Are the aims of the paper clear?
- Literature review: Are there any gaps in the literature review?
- Methodology: Is the methodology appropriate? Is the paper technically sound and free of errors of fact or logic?

Carefully consider the research design, and/or the type of study selected. Determine if the design is confounded by the definition of the variables, by the selection of the criterion measures, by the assignment of groups to conditions or subjects to groups, or by the level of control. Is the design confounded by the materials or criterion measures? Is the type of study (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, case study) appropriate to the variables under investigation?

Determine if the criterion measures are appropriate to the subjects, the design, the variables, and the objective of the study. Are the measures aligned with the stated goal of the research (do the measures assess effectiveness or achievement rather than opinions, for example). Are the measures both reliable and valid?

Determine if the appropriate statistical analyses were run and if the data is reported correctly for those analyses.

9.1.1 Are the data of appropriate quality?

Considering the topic, determine if the sample size is appropriate to get reliable results and for the research to have meaning. Determine if the subjects are, in fact, representative of the population, and if they are selected and assigned to groups / conditions properly. For single case studies, determine if the subject(s) are selected appropriately. Of course, for literature reviews or other forms of research manuscripts, this item does not apply.

In many submissions, the sample size is too small for the statistics to endorse the significance of an emerging difference. We should encourage authors not to submit until they have figures from appropriate sample sizes to possibly reach the conclusion which the small numbers often imply but do not justify?

9.1.2 Are the assumptions and the analysis valid and adequately justified?

9.2 Results

9.2.1 Does the section appropriately and accurately describe the actual outcomes of the study or experiment?

9.2.2 Are the interpretations and conclusions sound, and justified by the data?

9.3 Discussion

9.3.1 Is there sufficient depth?

9.3.2 Are the basic claims and assumptions supported by the empirical data?

9.3.3 Does the discussion cover the main limitations and weaknesses of the study?

Authors can sometimes display bias or just inexperience by making sweeping statements and leaving them unsupported. Typical examples refer to the 'well-known benefits' of technology in the classroom or 'effectiveness of online student interactions' which may be accurate statements in a specific context but which are certainly not true overall. It is possible to bore students nearly to death with inept uses of expensive technology in the classroom, and not all forms of online interactions have positive outcomes or effects on achievement. The bias of the author(s) shows up in language choices, overly broad statements, and unsupported statements. This is not a fatal flaw, as a design flaw usually is, but it requires revisions. Often authors take for granted that 'everyone knows' certain things, when the responsibility lies with the author to support such contentions with references to high-quality, refereed research. Too often the contentions left unsupported are not accurate as stated, and that is damaging to the author's credibility and undermines the arguments for the quality of the design and the data.

9.4 Conclusions

9.4.1 Do the conclusions follow from the evidence presented?

9.5 References

9.5.1 Are the references adequate, up to date and relevant?

There should have already been a check (by the editor) to ensure that references and citations are in APA format. If however, you find one that has slipped past that check, please let the editor know.

Determine whether or not the majority of the references are from top-tier and refereed journals. Have the appropriate seminal works been cited for the topic under investigation or study?

Determine if most or all of the citations are single source citations. Overuse of single citations suggests a weakness in the data or in the empirical basis of a statement, or of an entire literature review. Using low-quality sources is an indicator of the overall quality of the work in general. Authors and researchers should be reading the best journals and texts, and shouldn't often cite low-quality or lower-tier sources. The references list tells readers (and reviewers) a great deal about the preparation, expertise, and judgment, and discipline of the author(s). It is a critical credibility issue.

9.5.2 Are all of the citations included in the list of references?

9.6 Language

9.6.1 Is the quality of the language (grammar, idiom) satisfactory?

Papers accepted for publication will go through a copy editing process that will correct minor errors in grammar and spelling, but the copy editors cannot work miracles! Does the paper reach a satisfactory standard of written Russian or English? Does it appear that the author(s) have checked grammar and spelling, and followed APA style for citations and references?

9.6.2 How easy was the paper for you to understand?

Difficulties in readability indicate a need for better writing or presentation. Please identify and particular sentences or paragraphs which are unclear or ambiguous.

9.7 Organisation

9.7.1 Is the paper well organised?

9.8 Length

9.8.1 Could the paper be shortened without detriment to the argument?

E&SD has a target length of 4000 words (equivalent). This is not an absolute limit (most of the papers we publish are rather longer than this) – a paper needs to be the length it needs to be. But we do need to be convinced that there is a good reason for papers being significantly longer than the target. Is there poor, irrelevant, excessive or redundant material that could be removed? Are all of the figures and tables needed? Alternatively, could the information in the paper be presented more concisely by the use of figures and/or tables?

9.9 Tables and figures

9.9.1 Are the illustrations of adequate quality, legible and understandable?

9.9.2 Are the tables and figures well labelled and properly titled?

9.10 Concerns

9.10.1 Do you have any concerns about the originality of sections of this work?

In many cases it is fairly easy to spot plagiarism. You may have encountered work from other authors that appears familiar in this context. Consider the content of the paper and determine if the style is consistent throughout for the author(s) in this manuscript. Usually the prose, style, word choices or complexity will change in a noticeable way and if those paragraphs are not cited or quoted as the work of others it should raise concern.

Consider also the issue of 'text recycling' where the author quotes extensively from his or her own previously published work.

9.10.2 Do you have any ethical concerns about the methodology?

We ask authors of articles reporting empirical research to include a statement (most appropriately located at the end of the text with the Acknowledgements) describing the ethical guidelines under which their research was carried out and the approval from the relevant institutional ethics committee. Alternatively, they need to state how they dealt with the issues of protecting their subjects, ensuring that they were not disadvantaged and how the data has been anonymised etc. It may be helpful for you to read a typical set of ethical guidelines such as those from BERA which can be downloaded from their website at www.bera.ac.uk

9.10.3 Have any possible conflicts of interest been declared?

We ask authors to include a statement describing any potential conflict of interest in the work they are reporting. If there is no conflict of interest, then they should state that explicitly.

10. Using Open Journal System (OJS)

Education & Self Development uses Open Journal Systems (OJS) for handling submissions and reviews. As a reviewer you should be registered on the system with reviewer status. If you are not registered please contact the Journal Administrator Nick Rushby.

As you may know, *E&SD* has a relatively unusual refereeing procedure. Instead of the editor allocating articles received to referees who are known to have specific interests in that topic, members of the refereeing panel are invited to 'bid' for articles recently received. Once or twice each month, the list of outstanding articles is circulated to the panel who respond with those that they think will be of interest and are in areas where they are familiar with the topic.

This has two interesting consequences. Firstly, it provides a rapid turn-round for those submissions which are perceived to be of interest. But conversely, there are some articles that do not attract any bidders. We have a number of experienced referees who then volunteer to deal with the 'orphans' so they are not left for ever in a publishing purgatory. However, if we make the (possibly questionable) assumption that the interests of the refereeing panel are representative of the Journal's readership, then we

have an interesting and perhaps revealing question as to why some articles are not as attractive as others.

If you bid for a submission then you will receive a further email asking you to confirm that you are still willing and able to carry out the review and then an email with details of how to access the submission itself. If you need instructions on how to use the OJS reviewing system, in registering, logging in or submitting your review please contact Nick Rushby (nick.rushby@conation-technologies.co.uk)

11. Editorial strategy and aspirations

The Editorial strategy can be described simply as a search for ever increasing quality. To do that we need to attract more good submissions – which will be a consequence of the quality of the Journal. We need to attract papers from key authors - but still find room for new/younger authors.

Quality is hard to quantify. One, but only one, measure of quality is the Impact Factor. The impact factor (IF) is “a measure of the frequency with which the ‘average article’ in a journal has been cited in a particular year or period. The annual IF (published in Journal Citation Reports) is a ratio between citations and recent citable items published. Thus, the impact factor of a journal is calculated by dividing the number of current year citations to the source items published in that journal during the previous two years.” (see http://thomsonreuters.com/products_services/science/free/essays/impact_factor/ for a more detailed explanation.)

There is a key editorial aspiration - to be included as an indexed in Scopus and in Web of Science. The vital contribution that reviewers can help with this is to help improve the quality of accepted submissions that are:

- interesting to the majority of readers,
- accurate, and
- accessible to researchers and practitioners.

As a reviewer you can also help us to market the Journal by telling your colleagues and those in your professional network about it.

12. Acknowledgements

I am indebted to JennyLynn Werner of SixSigma Performance for her personal checklist for reviewers. JennyLynn was a long time reviewer for *BJET* and was also a member of the Journal's Critical Friend programme. Thanks are also due to Colin Latchem, for his continuing input to the Reviewer Development Programme.

13. References and further reading

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Appendix A Printable checklist

General

	No	Possibly	Yes	Comments
Is the subject within the scope of <i>E&SD</i> ?				
Is the paper a new, original and valuable contribution to the field of learning technology?				
Is the broader context clear?				
Is this a piece that needs to be published quickly if it is to be relevant?				
Is the paper of sufficiently wide interest to merit publication in a high quality international journal?				
Please summarise in one or two sentences the main contribution and novelty (if any) of the paper.				



The body of the paper

	No	Possibly	Yes	Comments
Does the title reflect the content, focus and results of the work? Is it suitable? Can it be improved?				
Are the approach, results and conclusions understandable from the abstract alone?				
Do the key words reflect the content and outcomes of the paper?				
Does the introduction make the aims of the paper clear?				
Are there any gaps in the literature review?				
Is the paper technically sound and free of errors of fact or logic?				
Is the methodology appropriate?				
Are the data of appropriate quality?				
Are the assumptions and the analysis valid and adequately justified?				
Does the results section appropriately and accurately describe the actual outcomes of the study or experiment?				
Are the interpretations and conclusions sound, and justified by the data?				
Does the discussion go into sufficient depth?				
Are the basic claims and assumptions supported by the empirical data?				



Does the discussion cover the main limitations and weaknesses of the study?				
Do the conclusions follow from the evidence presented?				
Are the references adequate, up to date and relevant? Are all of the citations included in the list of references?				
Is the quality of the language (grammar, idiom) satisfactory?				
How easy was the paper for you to understand?				
Is the paper well organised?				
Could the paper be shortened without detriment to the argument?				
Are the illustrations of adequate quality, legible and understandable?				
Are the tables and figures well labelled and properly titled?				

Concerns

	No	Possibly	Yes	Comments
Do you have any concerns about the originality of sections of this work?				
Do you have any ethical concerns about the methodology?				
Have any possible conflicts of interest been declared?				