

Australian Journal of Human Rights Peer Review Policy and Practice

1. The *AJHR* subscribes to the Committee on Publication Ethics' statement on the ethical responsibilities of peer reviewers: https://publicationethics.org/files/cope-ethical-guidelines-peer-reviewers-v2_0.pdf
2. The *AJHR* acknowledges that the work peer reviewers perform for the journal is crucial to maintaining rigorous scholarly standards and also for mentoring and developing human rights scholars. The *AJHR* does this by: publishing the names of peer reviewers in a calendar year in the last issue of the journal for that year; publishing (where an author indicates) specific acknowledgments in article notes; and, awarding the annual Peer Review Prize.
3. The Peer Review prize is awarded to the best example of peer review for the journal in a calendar year. All peer reviewers are automatically eligible for the prize, which is awarded by a committee constituted by the Editor-in-Chief, a member of the Editorial Board, and a member of the Editorial Advisory Board. The Prize recognises: willingness to review for the journal; timeliness; and, most importantly, depth and quality of critical engagement with the scholarship.
4. The *AJHR* has a practice of double-blind peer review for research articles. Each submission is peer reviewed by two scholars. Final publication decisions rest with the Editor-in-Chief. Book Reviews, Notes and Current Perspectives are peer reviewed, but not double-blind. Review essays, however, can be double-blind peer reviewed.
5. In peer reviewing research articles, the *AJHR* endeavours as a general practice to send each submission to a disciplinary or sub-disciplinary specialist and to a generalist reader. Peer reviewers are selected and invited on this basis. Each type of peer reviewer is expected to maintain general standards of peer review but each is given a specific reading brief.
6. A disciplinary or sub-disciplinary specialist is encouraged to comment on whether the piece makes a compelling and novel intervention in terms of the particular discipline or sub-discipline in which it is inscribed. A specialist reader asks herself: how does this piece resonate with a community of specialist readers? And how does it advance knowledge within this field?
7. A general reader is encouraged to comment on whether the piece makes a compelling and novel intervention in terms of the wider body of human rights scholarship. A generalist reader asks herself: why might a non-specialist reader of this piece interested in human rights read this piece? What might they learn from it that would affect their own understanding of human rights?
8. Both generalist and specialist readers are encouraged to read critically yet generously. The journal values rigorous engagement with article submissions. Reading critically does not mean reading pedantically and reading for what is wrong with a piece. The journal expects its readers to point out errors, inaccuracies and inconsistencies. But peer review aspires to a deeper engagement with the submitted piece. As a reading practice, peer reviewers are expected to 'read with' the piece rather than against it. By this we mean we want peer reviewers to try to ask themselves what the piece is trying to achieve and how it might best

do this. If the peer reviewer genuinely thinks the project is misconceived, then we want to hear (constructively) why this is the case. This kind of feedback can in the long-run be the most valuable kind of feedback for authors, as difficult as it might be to receive in the short-term. But we do not want peer reviewers to attempt to rewrite the piece as they would have written it themselves, nor to point out everything that is wrong with the piece or how else the author might have gone about their task.

9. Some extra advice and guidance: The journal wants reviewers to aim for a one A4-page set of comments on the piece as a minimum. Consider starting your review with a brief explanation of what you think the submission is arguing and why. (Why? This is because it helps a Editor-in-Chief grasp how you have understood the piece. Different reviewers may read pieces in discrepant ways and in order to be fair to the author it is best to articulate this clearly.) If you recommend adding particular material think about making suggestions for where the author might seek to cut material. If you recommend cutting material, consider making suggestions for where an author might like to add or deepen their analysis.
10. The Editor-in-Chief makes the final decision on whether research articles will be accepted for publication without any changes, with minor changes, with major changes, or sent back to the author either to revise substantially and resubmit as a new submission or as a straight rejection.
11. It follows from the above that peer review reports, to be most helpful to the Editor in making decisions on publication, should be written as advice to the Editor. The Journal shares peer review reports with authors (subject to the comments below in #12) and with other peer reviewers (see #13 below) but the initial and most determinative audience for the report is the Editor-in-Chief. Peer review reports are invited to make recommendations about publication but the Editor-in-Chief is free to disregard these recommendations in favour of the substantive comments made in a peer review. Explanations for a particular view are more useful than the statement of the view itself. (Telling the Editor-in-Chief *why* you think the piece is particularly strong and should be published without any changes will be a more compelling report than one that simply says that the piece should be rejected, and vice versa.) Note that there are separate boxes for confidential advice to the Editor-in-Chief and general advice that can be shared with the author. The recommendation to the Editor-in-Chief can appear in either one, with the difference that the former will not be shared with the author.
12. The anonymity of peer review is not a license for rudeness or disrespect. The *AJHR* has a zero-tolerance policy for sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism or any other form of hate speech. Beyond this, the journal has no tolerance for general rudeness and disrespect in the writing of peer review reports. The Editor-in-Chief will excise any offensive text before sending reports to authors and reserves the right to send a report back to a peer reviewer to be rewritten (or to send a review to a new reviewer).
13. The *AJHR* shares peer reviews with other peer reviewers at the conclusion of the publication process. The journal does this in order to explain to peer reviewers why their views may or may not have been accepted by the Editor-in-Chief, but it also does this as a collegial practice in order to educate peer reviewers and share best practice.