Guidelines for reviewers

The editorial team of the European Journal of Immunology has formulated the following guidelines for reviewers to ensure that the peer-review process offered by EJI is as fair and thorough as possible, without being unnecessarily demanding of both reviewers and authors. The primary aim of the guidelines is to ensure that reviewers know their responsibilities and can prepare constructive critiques that will assist authors in their scientific research regardless of the outcome (acceptance/rejection) of the peer-review process.

Reviewers should remember to focus on the 'bigger picture' i.e. **is the study interesting and worthy of publication in EJI?** Reviewers should not request unnecessary experiments. For example, experiments that would have been nice to have been included but that do not actually advance the study beyond the conclusions drawn should not be requested. Similarly, reviewers assessing revised manuscript should not raise issues that could have been noted in the original assessment of the manuscript.

The guidelines are distilled into 10 essential points, followed by a more detailed description of each of the points raised; we hope you find them useful. This is a new initiative of EJI and the editorial team (ejied@wiley-vch.de) welcomes any feedback and suggestions for improvements.

Essential points

1. Critically evaluate each manuscript regarding
    - its suitability for EJI, a broad immunology journal
    - its novelty and general interest for EJI readers
    - the validity of the experiments described
    - the statistical analysis: is it included, complete and have appropriate tests been used?
    - the conclusions drawn: are they warranted?
    - whether the literature has been adequately cited and discussed
2. Provide specific, constructive criticism that gives clear guidance to the authors, especially if recommending revision i.e. it should be clear to the authors precisely what experiments/revisions need to be undertaken to satisfy the reviewer's concerns
3. Do not be overly demanding, remember the revision timeframe is only 3 months (6 months if especially time consuming experiments have been requested)
4. Make a clear recommendation: is the manuscript worth revising?
5. Comment on whether the presentation/language hinders/confuses an otherwise potentially good paper
6. Treat all information as confidential
7. Declare all conflicts of interest
8. Provide the names of all involved in reviewing the manuscript
9. Detail any scientific misconduct detected
10. For revised manuscripts, do not raise any new issues that could have been commented on in the original review

Detailed guidelines

1. Issues to be considered prior to/during the review process

a) Conflict of interest

To ensure that the peer review process is impartial and objective, reviewers should only accept an invitation to review a manuscript if there is no conflict of interest. Conflict of interest can include, but is not limited to, commercial (competing commercial applications/potential applications etc.), financial (financial gains/hindrance for the author/reviewer etc.), personal (close personal or professional friend/collaborator, person with whom one has an unresolved dispute etc.), and intellectual (work highly competitive of one's own or negating one's own work that you cannot review in an unbiased manner, work that you have previously reviewed for another journal etc.). Potential conflict should be assessed with regard to every author listed and not only the corresponding author.

It may be that a conflict of interest comes to light only once a reviewer starts the review process. In such cases, the reviewer should seek advice from the editorial office (ejied@wiley-vch.de) and ensure that any conflict is noted in the 'Confidential comments to the Editor' section of the report form.

b) Delegating the review process

The editorial team of EJI believe that peer-review training is an essential part of a scientist's career development and, in this regard, senior scientists (i.e. heads of laboratories) may delegate part of the review process to members of their laboratory. The delegated reviewer must have expertise in the study being considered and must be at a suitable stage in his/her career (i.e. senior postdoc) to undertake this highly responsible activity without considerable input from the senior scientist. More junior members of the laboratory may also assist in the peer review process but, in this instance, the senior scientist must actively help the junior member throughout the process. Regardless of the delegated reviewer's career stage, the senior scientist must approve the report prepared by the delegated reviewer prior to submission, ensuring that the report is of an appropriate standard and that any critiques raised are fair, valid and not too demanding as it is appreciated that junior scientists tend to be tougher reviewers. The names of all people involved in the peer review process must be detailed in the 'Confidential comments to the Editor' section of the report form.

c) Confidentiality

All information contained within a manuscript must be treated as confidential. Reviewers may not use data from the manuscripts for their own personal research/financial gain. Once a reviewer has submitted his/her report, any electronic/print copies of the manuscript in the reviewer's possession must be destroyed.

2. Assessing manuscripts for publication in EJI

Many aspects need to be critically evaluated by the reviewer (relevance of the manuscript to EJI's readership, novelty of the study, technical aspects, discussion of the field under investigation and appropriate reference citation, language and presentation etc). These are discussed in the following sections.

a) Suitability

EJI is a general, broad, primary immunology journal, covering the fields of antigen processing, cellular immune responses, immunity to infection, innate immunity, molecular

and clinical immunology, and new technologies. Emphasis is placed on mechanistic insight into the regulation, coordination, monitoring and control of immune processes in health and disease.

Reviewers should comment on the scope of a manuscript with regard to its interest for the readers of EJI. Niche/limited-interest studies with low appeal for EJI readers should be recommended for publication in more specialised journals. Reviewers should detail the reasons for such a recommendation. As an example, vaccine studies that merely detail a new vaccine formulation without investigating to some extent the mechanisms responsible for the improved response seen with the formulation would be more suited to a journal specialising in vaccine research than EJI. Similarly, purely descriptive studies or those reporting new epitopes etc. are not suitable for publication in EJI unless they raise questions/concepts that are of significant interest to EJI readers and will stimulate research in a previously unconsidered direction/approach.

b) Novelty
Reviewers should comment on the importance and originality of the study. The strengths and weaknesses should be specified and presented in comparison with current published knowledge. Importantly, the review should note whether or not the study moves the field forward in a significant manner.

c) Validity of experiments
Reviewers should comment on the validity of the experiments performed and the statistical methods used; any flaws (in logic, methods used etc.) should be noted. Reviewers should also detail whether the flaws preclude publication in EJI or suggest ways to overcome the issues, thereby improving the manuscript to an acceptable standard.

All experiments reported should contain the following information:

- the number of samples used in each experiment, noting the number of replicates
- reproducibility (i.e. the number of times the experiment has been reproduced with similar results)
- what the error bars refer to (e.g. SD or SEM of *n* replicates/samples)
- statistical analysis (the tests used, the comparisons made and the significance i.e. *p* values should be provided); wherever feasible, statistical analysis should be performed across all data sets obtained from independent experiments rather than replicates of a single representative experiments because the former gives an indication of experimental reproducibility whereas the latter indicates technical reproducibility (e.g. pipetting accuracy).

Reviewers should note when experiments do not meet these minimal data requirements or when statistical analysis is completely lacking.

d) Validity of the Conclusions
Reviewers should comment on whether the data presented support the conclusions drawn. In addition, reviewers should note when alternative hypotheses/conclusions have been overlooked.

e) Discussion of current literature
Reviewers should comment on whether the references cited are relevant, appropriate and up-to-date. Suggestions for revising the reference list can be made, noting when significant papers have been overlooked and why they should be included. Although reviewers can

suggest their own papers for inclusion in the reference list, the reasons for such a request should be clearly detailed to ensure that there is no bias in the request.

f) Language and presentation
Reviewers should comment on the presentation/ease of comprehension of the manuscript, including the quality and clarity of the figures. Reviewers are not expected to edit manuscripts but should state when the experiments/results/concepts/conclusions cannot be understood or may be misinterpreted due to poor writing. Reviewers should note and distinguish between (i) good scientific studies that suffer from rectifiable language/presentation problems and (ii) weak studies whose problems go beyond language/presentation issues.

Reviewers should also comment on

- the title of the manuscript: does it accurately reflects the contents of the manuscript?
- the length of a manuscript: should the manuscript be shortened or expanded?
- whether additional Figures (including explanatory schematic diagrams) or supplementary information should be included?

g) Scientific misconduct
Reviewers should note when they suspect scientific misconduct has taken place, including but not limited to plagiarism, duplicate publication, and image manipulation beyond standard accepted practices. Suspicion of 'salami' publishing i.e. publishing several very 'thin' studies containing only minimal data/ subsets of data rather than one very comprehensive and significant study should also be noted.

3) Writing a good report
a) Identify the key findings of the study
The overall goal(s) and key finding(s) of the study, together with its strengths and weaknesses, should be briefly summarised in a few sentences.

b) Be comprehensive
All the issues raised in points 2a-g of the detailed instructions should be covered in the report.

c) Be objective
The report should be objective. In addition, reviewers should respect the intellectual independence of the authors, and not insist on a hypothesis driven approach.

c) Provide a clear recommendation
The report should clearly indicate whether or not revising the manuscript in accordance with their reviewer's comments will result in a manuscript of a standard acceptable for publication in EJI.

d) Provide specific, constructive criticism
Reviewers' comments should enable the authors to improve their work. When weaknesses are identified, reviewers should offer concrete suggestions to overcome the flaws. If major revision has been requested, vague sentences such as "further mechanistic insight into X" without qualifying the level of insight required or detailing experiments to address the concerns is not very helpful.

e**) Do not be unnecessarily demanding**
While it is important and helpful to point out minor technical/presentation issues in the report, reviewers should remember to focus on the 'bigger picture' i.e. is the study interesting and worthy of publication in EJI? Reviewers should not request unnecessary experiments. For example, experiments that would have been nice to have been included but that do not actually advance the study beyond the conclusions drawn should not be requested. Reviewers should also bear in mind that the usual timeframe for a revision is three months (six months if time-consuming experiments have been requested) and be realistic in the level of additional experimentation that can be requested if recommending a manuscript for revision.

f) Do not be offensive
It may be necessary to provide a very negative report if a study is particularly weak but, in such cases, reviewers should avoid being offensive or unnecessarily critical. Reviewers should stick to the facts and not launch very personal attacks. If a reviewer wishes to "let off steam" about a very poor study, these comments should be included in the 'Confidential comments to the Editor' section of the report form.

f) Disclose any conflicts of interest
See point 1.a of the detailed instructions for more information.

g) State who reviewed the paper
This information should be included in the "Confidential comments to editors"
See point 1.b of the detailed instructions for information on delegating the peer review.

4. Reviewing revised manuscripts
The following additional points need to be considered when reviewing revised manuscripts

a) Do not raise new issues
Reviewers should not raise issues that could have been noted in the original assessment of the manuscript; however, new concerns arising following the assessment of new data added during the revision are permitted.

b) Is the manuscript still up-to-date?
Several months can elapse during the process of the revision. Reviewers should comment on whether any relevant work has been published during this time has been overlooked, and whether the manuscript, including the reference list, is as up-to-date as possible.