Guidelines for Reviewers

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Role of Reviewers

Peer reviewers play an essential role in maintaining the scientific quality, clinical relevance, ethical integrity, and reliability of the content published by *International Journal of Wound Research* (IJWR).

Reviewers support the Editor by providing an independent, objective, evidence-based, and constructive assessment of the manuscript. Their responsibilities include evaluating:

- scientific originality and relevance;
- methodological rigor;
- accuracy and transparency of reporting;
- ethical compliance;
- clinical significance;
- appropriate interpretation of findings;
- the manuscript's contribution to wound care research, practice, education, organization, or policy.

Reviewers provide recommendations but do not make the final editorial decision. Responsibility for acceptance, revision, or rejection remains with the Editor-in-Chief or an independent handling editor where a conflict of interest exists.

Initial Screening and Editorial Assessment

All submissions undergo an initial technical screening by the Editorial Office to verify:

- completeness of the submission;
- compliance with the journal's submission requirements;
- appropriate anonymization for double-anonymous review;
- presence of ethical, funding, conflict-of-interest, data-availability, and consent statements where applicable;
- compliance with the relevant reporting guidelines;
- textual similarity through Crossref Similarity Check using iThenticate.

Similarity reports are evaluated by editors and are not used as automatic evidence of plagiarism or misconduct.

Eligible manuscripts are then assessed by the Editor-in-Chief or a designated editor for:

- relevance to the journal's aims and scope;
- originality and scientific contribution;
- methodological soundness;
- ethical compliance;
- quality and completeness of reporting;
- potential relevance to wound care research or practice.

The identity, institutional prestige, professional title, nationality, or academic status of the authors must not be used as criteria for determining the scientific merit of a submission.

Manuscripts that do not meet the journal's editorial or scientific requirements may be rejected without external review.

Peer Review Process

IJWR uses a double-anonymous peer-review process. Authors and reviewers remain anonymous to each other throughout the review process. Author and reviewer identities are accessible only to designated members of the Editorial Office and editorial leadership who require access for the management of the submission.

The journal's standard external peer-review process applies to:

- Original Scientific Research;
- Quality Improvement Reports;

- Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses;
- Narrative, Integrative, Rapid, and Scoping Reviews;
- Case Reports and Case Series;
- Study Protocols;
- Brief Reports;
- Procedure Updates.

These submissions are normally evaluated by at least two independent external reviewers with relevant subject or methodological expertise.

Editorials, Commentaries, Letters to the Editor, and Cultural or Educational Articles normally undergo editorial review rather than the journal's standard external peer-review process, unless otherwise stated.

Conference Abstracts are evaluated by the Scientific Committee of the relevant event and do not undergo the journal's standard external peer-review process.

Reviewer reports remain confidential and are not published with the article.

Reviewer Selection and Verification

Reviewers are selected on the basis of:

- subject expertise;
- methodological competence;
- relevant publication record;
- professional or clinical experience where appropriate;
- absence of relevant conflicts of interest;
- ability to complete the review within the requested timeframe.

The journal verifies reviewer identity, institutional affiliation, professional email address, academic or professional profile, publication history, and potential conflicts of interest before or during reviewer selection.

Author-suggested reviewers may be considered but are independently evaluated and are not automatically invited. The journal does not rely exclusively on reviewers suggested by authors.

Reviewers must not:

- use false names, identities, affiliations, qualifications, or email addresses;
- accept an invitation intended for another person;
- transfer or delegate the review without prior authorization from the Editor;
- involve colleagues, trainees, students, or other third parties without written editorial approval;
- permit another person to prepare or submit the review under their name.

Any approved co-reviewer must be identified to the Editor before accessing the manuscript and must agree to the same confidentiality, conflict-of-interest, and ethical obligations as the invited reviewer.

Before Accepting a Review

Before accepting an invitation, reviewers should assess their expertise, availability, independence, and ability to protect the confidentiality of the manuscript.

Expertise

Reviewers should accept an invitation only when they have sufficient expertise to evaluate the principal scientific, methodological, or clinical aspects of the manuscript.

If the reviewer can assess only part of the work, this limitation should be disclosed to the Editor before accepting the assignment.

Availability

Reviewers should accept an invitation only when they can provide a careful and complete evaluation within the requested timeframe.

If unforeseen circumstances cause a delay, the reviewer must notify the Editorial Office promptly rather than submitting a rushed or incomplete report.

Conflicts of Interest

Reviewers must decline the invitation when a financial, personal, professional, institutional, academic, intellectual, or other relationship could influence, or reasonably be perceived to influence, their impartiality.

Potential conflicts may include:

- current employment at the same institution as an author;
- recent collaboration, co-authorship, supervision, or mentorship involving an author;
- a close personal or professional relationship with an author;
- direct academic competition or a significant professional dispute;
- financial relationships with a company, sponsor, manufacturer, or provider connected to the manuscript;
- involvement in the research, intervention, product, device, software, or dataset being evaluated;
- a strong personal or intellectual position that could prevent an objective evaluation.

Reviewers should not attempt to identify the authors. However, if a reviewer recognizes or reasonably suspects the identity of an author and believes that this creates a conflict, the reviewer must inform the Editor immediately.

When uncertain, reviewers should disclose the situation to the Editor before accepting the assignment.

Confidentiality

Submitted manuscripts and all associated files are confidential documents.

Reviewers must not:

- share the manuscript or supplementary material with colleagues or third parties;
- discuss the manuscript outside the authorized review process;
- retain, reproduce, distribute, photograph, or publicly display manuscript content;
- use unpublished information, ideas, images, data, methods, or findings for personal, professional, commercial, or academic advantage;
- contact the authors directly;
- attempt to identify the authors through internet searches, metadata, references, institutional information, or other methods;
- upload confidential material to public platforms or unauthorized external services.

Confidentiality obligations continue after the review has been completed or the reviewer has declined the invitation.

If a reviewer accidentally receives identifying information or becomes aware of a breach of anonymity, the reviewer must notify the Editorial Office and must not disclose the information further.

Artificial Intelligence

Reviewers must comply with the journal's **Artificial Intelligence Policy**.

Reviewers must not upload manuscripts, supplementary files, clinical images, wound photographs, datasets, review reports, editorial correspondence, or unpublished information into public or external generative AI systems.

Generative AI must not be used to:

- draft or rewrite the review report;
- summarize the manuscript;
- evaluate its scientific or clinical quality;
- generate major or minor comments;
- formulate the reviewer's recommendation;
- replace the reviewer's independent expertise and judgment.

The review report must represent the reviewer's own intellectual work. Reviewers remain fully accountable for every comment and recommendation submitted to the journal.

Criteria for Manuscript Evaluation

The evaluation should be proportionate to the article type, research design, objectives, and intended contribution.

Originality and Relevance

Reviewers should assess whether:

- the research question or scholarly objective is clearly stated;
- the manuscript addresses an important or relevant issue;
- the work adds meaningful knowledge to the existing literature;
- the rationale is supported by appropriate evidence;
- the conclusions are relevant to an international wound care readership;
- the manuscript avoids unsupported claims of novelty or superiority.

Methodology and Scientific Rigor

Reviewers should assess whether:

- the study design is appropriate for the research question;
- the setting, population, eligibility criteria, recruitment, and sampling procedures are adequately described;
- the sample size is justified where applicable;
- the intervention, comparator, exposure, or procedure is described in sufficient detail;
- outcome measures are valid, reliable, clinically relevant, and appropriately timed;
- potential sources of bias and confounding have been considered;
- the methods are sufficiently transparent to permit evaluation and, where possible, replication;
- limitations are acknowledged and discussed appropriately.

Reviewers should not require authors to use a preferred method merely because it is familiar to the reviewer. Suggested methodological changes must be scientifically justified and relevant to the research question.

Statistics, Data, and Results

Reviewers should assess whether:

- the analytical methods are appropriate for the study design and data;
- statistical assumptions and handling of missing data are adequately described;
- effect sizes and confidence intervals are reported where appropriate;
- statistical significance is distinguished from clinical significance;
- results are presented clearly and consistently;
- reported values are consistent across the abstract, text, tables, and figures;
- conclusions are supported by the reported results;
- subgroup, secondary, or exploratory analyses are clearly identified;
- qualitative analyses are transparent and supported by the data;
- data-availability statements are adequate and consistent with ethical and privacy requirements.

Where the reviewer lacks specialist statistical expertise but identifies a possible concern, this should be reported to the Editor rather than presented as a definitive judgment.

Clinical Relevance and Wound Care

For wound-related research, reviewers should consider whether the manuscript adequately reports, where applicable:

- wound type, aetiology, anatomical location, duration, and severity;
- patient population and relevant comorbidities;
- wound classification or staging system;
- baseline wound dimensions and assessment methods;
- measurement instruments and their validity or reliability;
- tissue characteristics, exudate, infection, pain, odour, and periwound skin condition;
- interventions, dressings, devices, frequency of treatment, and duration of follow-up;
- healing outcomes, time to healing, wound-area reduction, recurrence, complications, and adverse events;
- patient-reported outcomes, quality of life, comfort, acceptability, adherence, and burden of care;
- clinical setting and professional competencies required to deliver the intervention;
- relevance and generalizability to clinical practice.

Reviewers should evaluate whether the Clinical Implications are supported by the findings and whether the manuscript avoids overstating efficacy, safety, causality, or generalizability.

Products, Devices, and Commercial Claims

Where a manuscript evaluates or discusses a commercial dressing, device, pharmaceutical product, biomaterial, biological therapy, diagnostic system, software application, wound-imaging technology, or proprietary algorithm, reviewers should assess whether:

- the product and manufacturer are identified where necessary for reproducibility;
- generic or descriptive terminology is used where possible;
- the intervention is described in sufficient detail;
- claims are supported by the study design and results;
- comparisons with competing products are fair and evidence-based;
- promotional or marketing language has been avoided;

- funding, free products, discounted products, services, and material support are disclosed;
- relationships with manufacturers, sponsors, or providers are declared;
- the funder's role in the study and manuscript is reported;
- relevant regulatory status is accurately described without implying endorsement by the journal.

Reviewers must not allow personal or commercial preferences for particular products, manufacturers, therapeutic approaches, or technologies to influence their assessment.

Clinical Images and Wound Photography

Clinical wound images must be evaluated for scientific necessity, accuracy, consistency, and ethical appropriateness.

Reviewers should consider whether:

- the images are relevant to the study or clinical report;
- image acquisition is sufficiently standardized across time points;
- an anatomical site, measurement scale, calibration method, orientation, and study time point are provided where relevant;
- lighting, camera angle, distance, patient position, and background allow meaningful comparison;
- the images correspond to the reported patient, intervention, and outcome;
- the sequence of images is complete and not selectively presented;
- cropping or enhancement could affect clinical interpretation;
- original unmodified files may be required for verification;
- written consent for publication has been obtained where the patient may be identifiable;
- AI-assisted processing has been appropriately disclosed.

Generative AI must not be used to create, reconstruct, simulate, or materially alter wound images presented as records of actual patients, treatments, or outcomes.

Suspected image manipulation, duplication, inappropriate enhancement, inconsistency, or misrepresentation must be reported confidentially to the Editor.

Ethics, Consent, and Confidentiality

Reviewers should verify, where applicable, that the manuscript includes:

- the name of the ethics committee or institutional review board;
- the approval number or reference code;
- a statement concerning informed consent to participate;
- written consent for publication of identifiable patient information or images;
- clinical trial registration information;
- appropriate protection of confidential or identifiable information;
- ethical approval or exemption for the use of human biological materials;
- animal ethics approval and relevant reporting standards;
- funding and conflict-of-interest statements.

Consent to participate in research is distinct from consent to publish identifiable clinical information or images.

Removing names or covering the eyes may not be sufficient to protect anonymity where a patient could be recognized from a wound, tattoo, anatomical feature, rare condition, treatment sequence, date, location, or contextual information.

Reviewers should raise ethical concerns with the Editor and should not contact an ethics committee, institution, participant, or author directly.

Reporting Guidelines

Reviewers should assess compliance with the reporting guideline appropriate to the study design, including, where relevant:

- CONSORT for randomized trials;
- STROBE for observational studies;
- PRISMA for systematic reviews and meta-analyses;
- PRISMA-ScR for scoping reviews;
- CARE for case reports;
- SQUIRE for quality improvement reports;
- SPIRIT for clinical trial protocols;
- COREQ or SRQR for qualitative research;
- STARD for diagnostic accuracy studies;
- TRIPOD for prediction-model studies;
- TIDieR for detailed intervention descriptions;
- ARRIVE for animal research.

Reporting checklists should support transparent reporting and should not be treated as substitutes for scientific judgment.

References and Citations

Reviewers should assess whether:

- the reference list is relevant, balanced, and sufficiently current;
- major evidence supporting or challenging the manuscript has been considered;
- references are accurately represented in the text;
- citations are not fabricated, unverifiable, excessive, irrelevant, or misleading;
- self-citation is proportionate and scientifically justified;
- the manuscript avoids citation manipulation;
- references are generally consistent with APA Style, 7th edition.

Reviewers should not request citation of their own work, articles from IJWR, or publications from a particular author, institution, journal, or sponsor unless the suggested reference is genuinely necessary to improve the accuracy or completeness of the manuscript.

Reviewers are not expected to correct every formatting detail. Minor APA 7 inconsistencies may be identified collectively rather than listed individually.

Presentation, Tables, and Figures

Reviewers should assess whether:

- the title accurately reflects the content;
- the abstract is consistent with the main manuscript;
- the manuscript is logically organized;
- the discussion does not repeat the results unnecessarily;
- tables and figures are necessary, clear, and appropriately labelled;
- information is not duplicated unnecessarily across text, tables, and figures;
- abbreviations, units, symbols, and statistical indicators are defined;
- supplementary files support the manuscript and do not contain confidential or identifying information;
- language problems prevent, or do not prevent, adequate scientific evaluation.

Article-Specific Considerations

Reviewers should adapt their evaluation to the article type.

Original Scientific Research: assess the research question, study design, sampling, measurements, analysis, results, ethics, and clinical implications.

Quality Improvement Reports: assess the local problem, context, intervention, measures, implementation, sustainability, unintended effects, and compliance with SQUIRE.

Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: assess protocol registration, search strategy, eligibility criteria, study selection, risk-of-bias assessment, synthesis methods, certainty of evidence, and compliance with PRISMA.

Narrative, Integrative, Rapid, and Scoping Reviews: assess the rationale for the chosen methodology, transparency of searching and selection, balance of interpretation, limitations, and the relevant reporting guidance.

Case Reports and Case Series: assess educational or clinical relevance, completeness of the clinical timeline, diagnostic reasoning, intervention, outcomes, consent for publication, clinical images, and compliance with CARE.

Study Protocols: assess whether the research question, design, outcomes, analysis plan, ethics, registration, and dissemination strategy are sufficiently developed before completion of the study.

Brief Reports: apply the same scientific standards as for full Original Research Articles while considering the intentionally concise format.

Procedure Updates: assess the evidence base, indications, contraindications, materials, sequence, safety considerations, competencies, monitoring, outcomes, and reproducibility of the procedure.

Ethical and Research-Integrity Concerns

Reviewers must alert the Editor confidentially if they suspect:

- plagiarism or inappropriate text reuse;
- duplicate or redundant publication;
- fabrication or falsification of data;
- inappropriate image manipulation or duplicated images;
- fabricated, inaccurate, or irrelevant references;
- undisclosed conflicts of interest or funding;
- authorship manipulation;
- citation manipulation;
- peer-review manipulation;
- paper-mill involvement or undisclosed third-party manuscript preparation;
- absence or misrepresentation of ethical approval;
- absence of required informed consent;
- breaches of patient confidentiality;
- undisclosed or inappropriate use of artificial intelligence;
- other serious departures from accepted research or publication practices.

Concerns should be described factually and supported with available evidence, such as citations, duplicated passages, inconsistent values, or specific image locations.

Reviewers should not investigate suspected misconduct independently, contact the authors, notify institutions, or make accusations in comments visible to the authors. Investigation and any subsequent action are the responsibility of the journal.

For further information, please refer to the journal's **Editorial Policies**.

Structure and Tone of the Review

A useful review report should normally contain:

1. **Brief summary:** a concise description of the manuscript's objective, design, and principal contribution.
2. **Overall assessment:** the manuscript's main strengths, relevance, and principal limitations.
3. **Major comments:** issues affecting validity, interpretation, methodology, ethics, reproducibility, or clinical relevance.
4. **Minor comments:** issues involving clarity, presentation, terminology, references, tables, figures, or limited corrections.

Comments should be:

- specific;
- constructive;
- actionable;
- evidence-based;
- proportionate to the importance of the issue;
- written in a professional and respectful tone.

Reviewers should explain why a change is necessary rather than simply instructing the authors to make it.

Requests for additional experiments, analyses, data, references, or extensive rewriting should be limited to what is necessary to assess or improve the manuscript.

Reviewers must not:

- make personal, insulting, discriminatory, hostile, or dismissive comments;
- comment on an author's presumed identity, nationality, institution, seniority, or language background;
- rewrite the manuscript according to personal stylistic preferences;
- request unnecessary expansion of the manuscript;
- use the review process to promote their own work, products, methods, or professional interests.

Confidential Comments to the Editor

Confidential comments may be used to:

- explain the basis of the reviewer's recommendation;
- report ethical, confidentiality, authorship, image, data, or misconduct concerns;
- disclose limitations in the reviewer's expertise;
- identify a potential conflict of interest discovered during review;
- recommend specialist statistical, methodological, technical, or ethical evaluation.

Confidential comments should not contradict the principal scientific concerns communicated to the authors unless disclosure could compromise an investigation, reveal confidential information, or create an ethical or legal risk.

The recommendation to the Editor must not be stated in comments addressed to the authors.

Reviewing Revised Manuscripts

When reviewing a revised manuscript, reviewers should assess:

- the clean revised manuscript;
- the marked or tracked-changes version;
- the authors' point-by-point response;

- whether each major and minor concern has been addressed;
- whether new analyses, text, tables, figures, or interpretations introduce additional concerns;
- whether unresolved issues remain sufficiently important to affect publication.

Authors are not required to accept every reviewer suggestion, but they should provide a reasoned and evidence-based explanation when a requested change has not been made.

Reviewers should not introduce substantial new requirements during a later review round unless the revisions reveal a new scientific, ethical, methodological, or interpretive concern.

A second or subsequent round of review should focus primarily on whether the original concerns were addressed adequately.

Timeline and Communication

Reviewers normally have:

- 7 days to accept or decline the invitation;
- 2–4 weeks from acceptance of the invitation to submit the review.

The deadline specified in the invitation should be followed where it differs from these general timeframes.

Reviewers should inform the Editorial Office promptly when:

- they need a reasonable extension;
- they can no longer complete the review;
- the manuscript is outside their expertise;
- a conflict of interest becomes apparent;
- they encounter a technical problem;
- they identify an urgent ethical or confidentiality concern.

Reviewers should not delay the editorial process by accepting an assignment they are unlikely to complete.

Submitting the Review

Reviews must be submitted through the journal's online manuscript-management system.

The review form normally includes:

- comments to the authors;
- confidential comments to the Editor;
- evaluation questions or manuscript ratings;
- a final editorial recommendation;
- an optional area for uploading an annotated file.

Reviewers are not required to edit the manuscript directly. Comments may be provided through the review form or in a separate anonymized document.

Where an annotated manuscript is uploaded, reviewers must ensure that:

- their name, initials, institution, email address, and other identifying metadata have been removed;
- comments are professional and suitable for transmission to the authors;
- the file does not contain confidential comments intended only for the Editor;
- Track Changes and document properties do not reveal reviewer identity.

Editorial Recommendations

Reviewers may select one of the recommendations available in the journal's submission system:

- **Accept Submission:** the manuscript is suitable for publication without substantive revision.
- **Revisions Required:** the manuscript may be suitable after clearly defined minor or moderate revisions.
- **Resubmit for Review:** substantial revision is required and the manuscript should undergo a new evaluation.
- **Resubmit Elsewhere:** the work may have merit but is not sufficiently aligned with the journal's scope or readership.
- **Decline Submission:** the manuscript has fundamental scientific, methodological, ethical, reporting, or relevance-related limitations that cannot reasonably be resolved through revision.

The recommendation must be consistent with the substantive comments in the review report.

Reviewers should distinguish between:

- correctable weaknesses;
- limitations that should be acknowledged;
- fundamental problems that invalidate the findings or prevent reliable interpretation.

Editorial Decision

The final editorial decision is made by the Editor-in-Chief or an independent handling editor where the Editor-in-Chief or another member of the editorial team has a conflict of interest.

The decision may take into account:

- reviewer reports;
- authors' responses and revisions;
- methodological and statistical considerations;
- ethical compliance;
- reporting quality;
- clinical relevance;
- the overall scientific contribution of the manuscript.

The Editor is not required to follow the numerical majority of reviewer recommendations and may seek additional specialist opinions where reports conflict or further expertise is required.

Reviewers must not communicate an acceptance or rejection decision directly to the authors.

Advertising, sponsorship, funding relationships, commercial interests, institutional partnerships, and other financial considerations do not influence reviewer selection, peer review, or editorial decisions.

Professional Conduct

Reviewers should remember that the purpose of peer review is both evaluative and constructive.

A recommendation for rejection does not justify a brief, hostile, or dismissive report. Authors should receive sufficient explanation to understand the principal scientific

or editorial reasons for the recommendation.

Manuscripts written by authors whose first language is not English should be evaluated primarily on their scientific and clinical content, provided that the language permits reliable interpretation.

Reviewers may identify passages that are unclear or require substantial language revision, but they are not expected to provide comprehensive copyediting or language correction.

Repeated failure to protect confidentiality, disclose conflicts, provide an independent review, meet professional standards, or comply with the journal's policies may result in removal from the reviewer database and further action where appropriate.

Editorial Office Contact

Questions concerning a review assignment, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, technical problems, deadlines, or ethical concerns should be addressed to:

Editorial Office
International Journal of Wound Research
Email: **ijwr@ieditore.com**

Reviewers are also encouraged to consult the journal's:

- **Guidelines for Authors**;
- **Editorial Policies**;
- **Artificial Intelligence Policy**.

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