

Checklist for FEB Editors

Please remember that the overall goal of the Board is to provide confidential editorial services to our population of fellows at the NIH. The Board only makes recommendations to the authors. It is also important to note that the work being reviewed is very important to the submitter, and our comments need to reflect our sensitivity to that fact. Remember that the author has worked very hard on the manuscript and feels that it is well written and close to being ready for submission. In other words, imagine that you are receiving the review!

Also, remember that the comments on the soft copy and in the electronic report are intended to help the authors learn how to better edit their own work. We are not just here to improve the manuscript at hand; we are also here to teach the authors how to improve themselves!

Lastly, remember to be careful in your own writing for the reports. It sends a very bad message if the reports contain editorial mistakes. Assume that the electronic comments that you send to the associate editors will be used directly in the report sent to the authors and write them in that fashion.

1. Resources for FEB editors:
 - A. FEB website information: “For FEB Members” link, “FEB Editorial Process Guidelines”
 - B. Online writing resource: FEB homepage, click on “Purdue’s Online Writing Lab” aka OWL
 - C. Oftentimes we receive papers outside of our fields of expertise, and it can be difficult to tell if a certain term is being used correctly. I find that a simple, helpful resource is to simply Google such unfamiliar phrases. If it is used in the literature, chances are good that it will turn up. You can also use PubMed or some other academic search engine of your choice, but for speed and reasonable accuracy I have found Google to be helpful enough.
2. Soft copy reports
 - A. Presentation:
 - a. Try not to overwhelm the authors with too many edits. Correct what needs to be corrected, but be careful when correcting the same issue multiple times. Underlining multiple issues will reduce the impact of the most important points. Try to minimize the markings while still making your point clearly.
 - b. Please do not use the highlight function. It works for some versions, but not for all. In some cases, other changes cannot be read when the sentence/word is highlighted. Please use the underline function instead until the issue is fixed in the software.
 - c. Use complete sentences for the ‘sticky notes’. That includes a capital letter for the first word and a period at the end of the sentence.
 - d. Please spell-check the sticky notes.
 - e. When merging different sets of comments, please make sure they still make sense in the merged version. Often, the same sentence is changed in different ways by the primary editors. These changes do not always work at the same time.
 - f. The comments should be rather formal. Please do not use contractions or colloquialisms.

- B. Comments on content:
- a. In order to minimize excessive markings, for repetitive mistakes:
 1. It is acceptable to correct only the first few instances.
 2. Subsequently, to indicate the same corrections need to be made, the editor may underline other examples.
 3. Alternatively, the editors may include a statement on this repeated correction in the electronic report and mention that a couple of examples have been marked.
 4. Please note that exceptions may be made for article usage and more subtle grammatical mistakes.
 - b. Please do not use commands, but instead suggest or explain why the authors should make a change. This helps the authors to understand why the change is necessary and to implement it in other instances as well.
 - c. Please take the time to point out formatting issues, such as the need for spaces in the text, indentation of text, gaps in paragraphs, etc.
 - d. Extensive rewrites of sentences should be confined to the electronic report, but be sure to mark the sentence on the soft copy. Underlining the sentence and putting a note in the margins (“Suggested rewrites can be found in the e-report.”) would probably be the least invasive method.
 - e. Please mark points for breaks in long paragraphs or sentences, particularly if you are pointing out that the paragraph is long.
 - f. Point out areas of the text mentioned in the electronic report that could be deleted or moved to other sections of the manuscript.
 - g. It never hurts to write a nice comment in the soft copy where appropriate. Positive reinforcement often works better than negative reinforcement. This may serve as an example/template for the authors.
 - h. Please ensure that the soft copy is a collection of comments from all of the primary editors.
 - i. Please do not neglect to note corrections/omissions on the title page.
 - j. Please spend the time to write clear statements on the figures- no messy big circles and crazy arrows.
 - k. The soft copy reports sometimes contain “?” signs when the editors do not understand the meaning or construction of a sentence. Please always express such sentiments in words and not in cryptic symbols.
 - l. Please keep in mind that comma usage in the US and UK is not the same. In US English, one would write “x, y, and z”, whereas in British English, one would write “x, y and z”. This may matter depending on where the target journal is published.

3. Electronic reports

A. Comments on content and presentation:

- a. Please do not preach! While we are providing general guidelines to authors, journal expectations differ, presentation differs across fields, and the authors most likely know more about their subject matter than we do.
 1. Do not use words such as “must” and “should”. Never give commands or make demands (see these statements as examples).
 2. Please use softer words to portray the same meaning, leaving room for flexibility. For example, rather than “there IS a problem with X” consider stating that “there SEEMS to be a problem”. Remember to suggest corrections and persuade the

- author to make them by explaining the reasoning behind the suggestions.
3. Use phrases like “The authors might consider...”, “Perhaps the authors could...”, and “This might be improved/made clearer if the authors did...” Never tire of using “please”, “consider”, and “may”.
- b. Please do not qualify corrections using words like “again” or “another”. This shows impatience. Take a break towards the end of the report, especially when you get to the point of writing “Yet another stupid mistake was found on page 20...” (exaggeration added for emphasis).
- c. In general, remember that
1. Legends should not contain methods or results.
 2. Results should not contain discussions.
 3. Abstracts should be a certain length.
 4. Published literature should be discussed in the present tense.
- d. Please check the spelling of the first author and the exact title of the manuscript.
- e. Always include a “General Comments” section that begins with a summary of the submission and the editors’ evaluation (i.e., “This manuscript details a procedure for blah-blah. In general the manuscript was well-written, but could benefit from some reorganization...”).
- f. For those comments not open to interpretation (e.g., journal formatting requirements), gently, but firmly, remind the authors that these corrections need to be made. We are negligent if we give the authors the impression that these are mere suggestions.
- g. Please be clear about the problems, and take the time to clarify issues. The authors will not improve in their writing if they are merely corrected without explanation or comment. This is particularly helpful if the author repeatedly makes the same mistake throughout a manuscript: you can make a detailed correction first, and then simply mark the other instances in the soft copy so that the author can correct them personally, applying the new knowledge.
1. If a sentence is confusing, take the time to state what it is that is unclear. The best way to express criticism is to cite a specific example, explain the grammatical/organizational convention that is being violated, and explain how to correct/change it. Avoid generic, blanket statements such as “the grammar is incorrect” or “articles are misused”.
 2. If there is a comment being made about a sentence or the title, please consider including an alternative sentence/title to make your point.
- h. Please write things out in full. This is particularly true for comments on figures. Rather than saying “Fig. 5A. Change X-axis label”, write “Please change the label for the X-axis in Figure 5A because ...”
- i. Please check for colloquial language in your reports and always write like the authors are reading YOUR comments- or even better, that the author is sitting IN FRONT of you reading YOUR comments. Often people send in comments such as “Tell the authors to cut out all the interpretation”, which is not an appropriate tone or style.

- j. The reports should overall be as concise as possible, without eliminating any important points. The urge to ramble on about bad writing should be avoided, as it is not constructive criticism.
 - k. Please make a conscious effort to write something positive about the manuscript overall. It is always nice for the authors to hear that they are doing something right, even if they themselves acknowledge that they are not the best writers. After all of the work that goes into writing a manuscript, the authors' efforts should undoubtedly be appreciated.
 - l. When quoting a statement or phrase from the manuscript, please offset it in quotation marks and italics.
4. Final comments
- A. When writing your comments, be aware that the electronic report and the soft copy need to match. They should not seem inconsistent or unrelated.
 - B. The electronic report should complement the soft copy, but should obviously go further. While the soft copy might be marked to move the first paragraph of the Discussion to the Introduction, the electronic report should clearly give the reasons for the suggestion.

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