

## Checklist for FEB Editors

Please remember that the overall goal of the Board is to provide confidential editorial services to our postdoctoral population at 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 hard copy and in the electronic report are intended to help the authors learn how to better edit their own work. We are here to teach the authors as well as make the manuscript at hand better.

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.

- I. Resources for FEB editors:
  - a. Copyediting course- after 1 month with FEB
  - b. FEB website information: “For FEB Members” link, “FEB Editorial Process Guidelines”
  - c. Online writing resource: FEB homepage, click on “Purdue’s Online Writing Lab” aka OWL
  
- II. Hard copy reports
  - a. Presentation:
    - i. 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. Circling or underlining multiple issues will reduce the impact of the most important points. Try to minimize the markings while still making your point clearly.
    - ii. Please use black pen, as the manuscript needs to be faxed once, even twice in some cases and avoid highlighter pens and markers.
    - iii. Please keep the writing as neat as possible. Printing is the safest presentation, and it is best to avoid “joined-up” writing.
    - iv. Keep the writing small so that corrections can be made near the words/statements being addressed; however, do not make the writing so small that it becomes difficult to read.
    - v. Please keep the pages clean and fresh. No dog-eared pages, please. When dropping the hard copy off to the Associate Editor, please place it in some kind of folder for protection.
    - vi. Please do not staple the pages together because they often need to be faxed or, in some cases, pages need to be replaced.
    - vii. If possible, scan rather than fax the hard copies. If you are faxing the report, please block out the sender’s identifying information.
  
  - b. Comments on content:
    - i. 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 or circle 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.
- ii. 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.
  - iii. Please mark points for breaks in long paragraphs or sentences, particularly if you are pointing out that the paragraph is long.
  - iv. Point out areas of the text mentioned in the electronic report that could be deleted or moved to other sections of the manuscript.
  - v. It never hurts to write a nice comment in the hard copy where appropriate. Positive reinforcement often works better than negative reinforcement. This may serve as an example/template for the authors.
  - vi. Please ensure that the hard copy is a collection of comments from all of the primary editors.
  - vii. Please do not neglect to note corrections/omissions on the title page.
  - viii. Please spend the time to write clear statements on the figures- no messy big circles and crazy arrows.
  - ix. The hard copy reports often 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, which are uninformative and may be offensive.
  - x. Please keep in mind that comma usage in 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".

### III. Electronic reports

#### a. Comments on content and presentation:

- i. 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. Don't 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, e.g. 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...", "This might be improved/made clearer if the authors did...". Never tire of using "please" and "consider" and "may".
- ii. 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).
- iii. 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.
- iv. Please check the spelling of the first author and the exact title of the manuscript.
- v. Always include a “General Comments” section that begins with a summary of the submission.
- vi. 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.
- vii. Please be clear about the problems: take the time to clarify issues. The authors will not improve in their writing if they are merely corrected without explanation or comment.
  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 site a specific example and to explain how to correct/change it, so please avoid blanket statements such as "the grammar is incorrect" or "articles are misused".
  2. If there is a comment being made about the title, please consider including an alternative title to make your point.
- viii. 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 ...”
- ix. 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 appropriate tone or style.
- x. 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.
- xi. 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 self 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.
- xii. When quoting a statement or phrase from the manuscript, please offset it in quotation marks and italics.

#### IV. Final comments

- a. When writing your comments, be aware that the electronic report and the hard copy need to match. They should not seem inconsistent or unrelated.
- b. The electronic report should complement the hard copy but should obviously go further. While the hard 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.