INSTRUCTIONS FOR PEER-REVIEWERS

Criteria for publication

McGill Sociological Review (MSR) receives many more submissions than they can publish. For every paper that is accepted, there are others that must also be rejected. Therefore, we ask peer-reviewers to consider each article with care.   To be published in MSR, a paper should meet four general criteria:

- Provides strong evidence for its conclusions.
- Novel (ideas, claims, conclusions, etc. should add to the field of study, not reaffirm).
- Of importance to researchers and social scientists in the specific field.
- Ideally, interesting to researchers in other related disciplines.

In general, to be acceptable, a paper should represent an advance in understanding likely to influence thinking in the field. There should be a discernible reason why the work deserves visibility of publication in MSR.

The review process

The Editorial Board reads all submitted manuscripts. In consideration of time and efficiency for all parties involved, only those papers with the strongest potential of meeting our editorial criteria are sent for formal review. Papers that the editors considered to be of insufficient general interest or otherwise inappropriate are declined promptly without external review (although these decisions may be based on informal advice from specialists in the field).

Typically, two or three reviewers are selected for each manuscript, but sometimes additional reviewers may be required if special advice is needed (for example on statistics or a particular technique). Once selected, the paper and accompanying materials are sent to the reviewers. Based on the reviewers' feedback and advice, the editors then make a decision from among several possibilities:

- **Accept**, with or without editorial revisions
- Invite the authors to **revise their manuscript** to address specific concerns before a final decision is reached
- Reject, but indicate to the authors that **further revision might justify a resubmission**
- **Definitively reject**, typically on the grounds of specialist interest, lack of novelty, insufficient conceptual advance or major technical and/or interpretational problems.

Reviewers are welcome to recommend a particular course of action, but they should bear in mind that other reviewers of a particular paper may have different technical expertise and/or views, and the editors may have to make a decision based on conflicting advice. The most useful reports, therefore, should provide the editors with the information on which a particular decision should be based. Setting out the arguments for and against publication is often more helpful to the editors than a direct recommendation one-way or the other.

Editorial decisions are not a matter of counting votes or numerical rank assessments, and MSR may not always follow the majority recommendation. We try to evaluate the strength of the arguments raised by each reviewer and by the authors, and we may also consider other information not available to either party. Our primary responsibilities are to our readers and to the scientific community at large; in deciding how best to serve them, we must weigh the claims of each paper against the many others also under consideration.

We may return to reviewers for further advice, particularly in cases where they disagree with each other, or where the authors believe they have been misunderstood on points of fact. We therefore ask that reviewers be willing to provide follow-up advice as requested. We are very aware, however, that reviewers are usually reluctant to be drawn into prolonged disputes. Thus we try to keep consultation to the appropriate minimum that we deem necessary to ensure a fair consideration for the authors and their work.

When reviewers agree to assess a paper, we consider this a commitment to review subsequent revisions. However, editors will not send a resubmitted paper back to the reviewers if it seems that the authors have not made a serious attempt to address the criticisms.

We take reviewers' critique seriously; in particular, we are very reluctant to disregard technical criticisms. In cases where one reviewer alone opposes publication, we may consult the other reviewers as to whether s/he is applying an unduly critical standard. We occasionally bring in additional reviewers to resolve disputes, but we prefer to avoid doing so unless there is a specific issue, for example a specialist technical point, on which we feel a need for further advice.

Timing

MSR is committed to rapid editorial decisions and publication, and we believe that an efficient editorial process is a valuable service both to our authors and to the scientific community as a whole. We therefore ask reviewers to respond promptly within the number of days agreed. If reviewers anticipate a longer delay than previously expected, we ask them to let us know so that we can keep the authors informed and, where necessary, find alternatives.

MSR will give reviewers approximately 3 to 4 weeks to complete an initial review, and 2 to 3 weeks for any follow-up advice or subsequent reviews. Precise deadlines will be arranged with the reviewers once they are initially selected and for each follow-up review when necessary. Reviewers should expect to review the article at least twice; one initial review and one follow-up.

Selecting peer-reviewers

Reviewer selection is critical to the publication process, and we base our choice on many factors, including expertise, reputation, specific recommendations and our own previous experience of a reviewer's characteristics. For instance, we avoid recruiting individuals who are slow, careless, or do not provide reasoning for their views, whether harsh or lenient.

We check with potential reviewers before sending them manuscripts to review. Reviewers should keep in mind that these messages contain confidential information and should be treated accordingly as stated in the Peer Reviewer Confidentiality Agreement.

Writing the review

The primary purpose of the review is to provide the editors with the information needed to reach a decision. The review should also instruct the authors on how they can strengthen their paper to the point where it may be acceptable. As much as possible, a negative review should explain to the authors the weaknesses of their manuscript, so that rejected authors can understand the basis for the decision and see in broad terms what needs to be done to improve the manuscript for publication in the future.

Confidential comments to the editor are welcome, but it is helpful if the main points are stated in the comments for transmission to the authors. Reviewers are asked to consider the following criteria:

General
- Who will be interested in reading the paper, and why?
- How does the paper stand out from others in its field?
- How does the paper contribute new knowledge to its field? Does it offer any original claims?
- Are the claims appropriately discussed in the context of previous literature?

Subject Treatment
- Does the paper meet its stated objectives?
- Is there sufficient evidence to support the author's thesis?
- Is the information accurate and consistent?
- What are the main claims of the paper and how significant are they?
- Are the claims convincing? If not, what further evidence is needed? Are there other experiments or work that would strengthen the paper further?
- Should the authors be asked to provide supplementary methods or data to accompany the paper online? (Such data might include coding methodology studies, detailed experimental protocols or mathematical derivations.)
- Have the authors done themselves justice without overselling their claims?
- Have they been fair in their treatment of previous literature?
- Have they provided sufficient methodological detail that the experiments could be reproduced?
- Is the statistical analysis of the data sound, and does it conform to the journal's guidelines?
- Are there any special ethical concerns arising from the use of human or other animal subjects?
- If the manuscript is unacceptable but promising, what specific work is needed to make it acceptable? How difficult would this work be, and how long would it take?

Presentation
- Is the manuscript clearly written and organized logically?
- If not, how could it be made more clear or accessible to non-specialists?
- Would readers outside the discipline benefit from a schematic of the main result to accompany publication?
- Should the text be expanded or condensed to avoid redundancy?
- If applicable, are figures and diagrams used appropriately to illustrate the text?
- Are the references accurate and do they conform to the citation standards required from the journal?
- Is the language or syntax appropriate and clear? Is the grammar and punctuation correct?

Anonymity

We do not release reviewers' identities to authors or to other reviewers, except when reviewers specifically ask to be identified. Unless they feel strongly, however, we prefer that reviewers should remain anonymous throughout the review process and beyond. Before revealing their identities, reviewers should consider the possibility that they may be asked to comment on the criticisms of other reviewers and on further revisions of the manuscript; identified reviewers may find it more difficult to be objective in such circumstances.

We ask reviewers not to identify themselves to authors without the editor's knowledge. If they wish to reveal their identities while the manuscript is under consideration, this should be done via the editor. In cases where the reviewer has unintentionally or unknowingly revealed his or her identity to the author, we ask both parties to inform the editor as soon as possible.

We deplore any attempt by authors to confront reviewers or determine their identities. Our own policy is to neither confirm nor deny any speculation about reviewers' identities, and we encourage reviewers to adopt a similar policy.

Editing referees' reports

As a matter of policy, we do not suppress reviewers' reports; any comments that were intended for the authors are transmitted, regardless of what we may think of the content. On rare occasions, we may edit a report to remove offensive language or comments that reveal confidential information about other matters. We ask reviewers to avoid statements that may cause needless offence; conversely, we strongly encourage reviewers to state plainly their opinion of a paper. Authors should recognize that criticisms are not necessarily unfair simply because they are expressed in robust language.

Peer-review publication policies

All contributions submitted to MSR that have been selected for peer-review are sent to at least one, but usually two or more, independent reviewers, selected by the editors. As a condition of agreeing to assess the manuscript, all reviewers undertake to keep submitted manuscripts and associated data confidential, and not to redistribute them without permission from the journal. MSR endeavours to keep the content of all submissions confidential until the publication date other than in the specific case of its embargoed press release available to registered journalists. While MSR takes all necessary measures to uphold the reviewers' agreement of confidentiality, we are not responsible for their choice of conduct throughout the peer-reviewing process.

Reviewers should be aware that it is our policy to keep their names confidential, and that we do our utmost to ensure this confidentiality. Under normal circumstances, blind peer-review is protected from legislation. We cannot, however, guarantee to maintain this confidentiality in the face of a successful legal action to disclose identity in the event of a reviewer having written personally derogatory comments about the authors in his or her reports. For this reason as well as for reasons of standard professional courtesy, we request reviewers to refrain from personally negative comments about the authors of submitted manuscripts. Frank comments about the content of the manuscripts, however, are strongly encouraged by the editors.

Ethics and security

MSR editors may seek advice about submitted papers not only from technical reviewers but also on any aspect of a paper that raises concerns. These may include, for example, ethical issues or issues of data or materials access. Very occasionally, concerns may also relate to the implications to society of publishing a paper, including threats to security. In such circumstances, advice will usually be sought simultaneously with the technical peer-review process. As in all publishing decisions, the ultimate decision whether to publish is the responsibility of the editor of the journal concerned.