PEER REVIEW POLICY AND PROCESS

Albanian Journal of Trauma and Emergency Surgery (AJTES)

Based on COPE Core Practices, COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers, and ICMJE Recommendations

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1. Introduction and Scope

Peer review supports rigorous, fair and evidence-based editorial decisions by evaluating originality, scientific validity, methodology, ethical compliance, clinical relevance and clarity. AJTES subjects Research Articles, Review Articles, Case Reports, Short Reports and Conference Papers to external peer review following an initial editorial assessment. Invited manuscripts, editorials, letters, consensus statements and other article types may follow a tailored assessment process; the applicable procedure must be transparent and documented. No article type is exempt from editorial evaluation for accuracy and publication ethics.

2. Peer Review Model and Anonymisation

AJTES normally uses double-anonymised (double-blind) peer review: reviewers are not informed of author identities and authors are not informed of reviewer identities during assessment. The journal takes reasonable steps to protect anonymity, but anonymity cannot always be guaranteed, including when preprints, trial registries or prior presentations reveal authorship.

- Authors provide a separate title page containing full author details, affiliations, ORCID iDs, funding, acknowledgements and competing-interest statements.
- The main manuscript is anonymised: author names, identifying affiliations, acknowledgements and overt self-identifying wording are removed; references should remain scientifically accurate.
- Identifying properties of submitted files are removed wherever feasible. Editors may seek further anonymisation or document exceptions.

3. Stages of the Peer Review Process

Figure 1 summarises the standard AJTES workflow. Operational roles and target times are defined in the AJTES Editorial Workflow: reviewers are asked to report within 21 days; authors revise within 30 days (minor revision) or 60 days (major revision); appeals are made within 30 days of the decision.

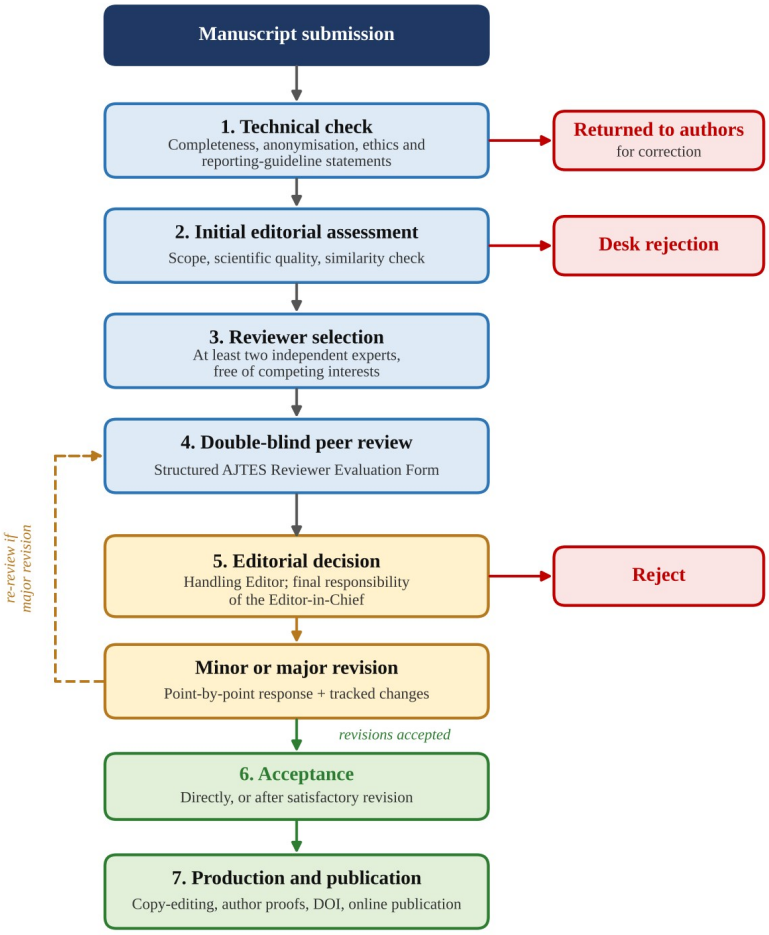

Figure 1. Standard double-anonymised peer review workflow at AJTES.

3.1 Technical check

The editorial office checks completeness, anonymisation, compliance with Author Guidelines, authorship and disclosure forms, ethics approval and informed consent where applicable, trial registration, and appropriate reporting guidelines (e.g., CONSORT, STROBE, PRISMA and CARE). Incomplete submissions are returned for correction.

3.2 Initial editorial assessment

The Editor-in-Chief or a designated Handling Editor assesses suitability for the journal, scientific quality and ethical compliance. All submissions are screened with iThenticate (Crossref Similarity Check) before external review; similarity scores are interpreted in context and do not alone establish plagiarism. Manuscripts outside scope or failing minimum scholarly or ethical standards may be rejected before external review. Suspected misconduct is assessed using relevant COPE guidance.

3.3 Selection of independent reviewers

Manuscripts proceeding to external review are ordinarily evaluated by at least two independent experts with appropriate methodological and subject expertise. Editors assess conflicts before invitation. Reviewers disclose relevant financial, institutional, personal and professional relationships, including recent collaborations, co-authorships or rivalries. A three-year collaboration period can inform assessment but is not the sole criterion. Authors may suggest or request exclusion of reviewers with reasons; editor selection remains independent.

3.4 Review and reviewer report

Reviewers use the structured AJTES Reviewer Evaluation Form, assessing study design, methodology, data analysis, interpretation, novelty, reporting completeness, ethical compliance, clinical relevance and limitations as applicable. Reviews should be impartial, constructive, evidence-based and timely (normally within 21 days); comments for authors are distinguished from confidential communications to editors.

3.5 Editorial decisions

The Handling Editor considers reviewer reports and recommends acceptance, minor revision, major revision or rejection. Disagreement may warrant further review or editorial adjudication. Reviewer recommendations inform, but do not determine, the editorial decision. Final responsibility rests with the Editor-in-Chief unless a conflict requires delegation to an independent editor. Decisions are based on merit and are documented in the editorial system.

3.6 Revision and reassessment

Authors submit a revised manuscript with tracked changes and a point-by-point response within 30 days (minor revision) or 60 days (major revision). Major revisions are ordinarily reconsidered by the original reviewers when appropriate. Further review may be requested. Extensions may be granted upon reasoned request; a delayed revision may be treated as a new submission when communicated to the authors.

3.7 Acceptance, proofs and publication

Accepted manuscripts undergo copyediting, typesetting, author proof review, DOI assignment and online publication. Authors must promptly correct typographical and factual errors in proofs. Material scientific changes after acceptance require editorial approval and may necessitate further assessment. Acceptance does not remove the journal's duty to address concerns raised before or after publication.

4. Responsibilities, Confidentiality and AI Use

- Reviewers accept invitations only when competent and able to meet the requested deadline; they immediately disclose competing interests and decline or seek guidance if impartiality may be compromised.
- Submitted material and reviewer communications are confidential. Reviewers may not share, cite, exploit or circulate unpublished content, and must not seek to identify authors.
- Reviewers must not upload confidential manuscripts, supplementary files or review comments to external generative AI systems. Any exceptional AI-assisted activity requires advance written editorial approval, suitable confidentiality safeguards and disclosure of the technology and purpose. Reviewers remain fully accountable for their reports.
- Reviewers provide respectful, objective and substantiated feedback; suspected fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, redundant publication or other concerns are communicated confidentially to the editor.
- Editors protect review records and personal information, limit access to authorised personnel, and document the review history in accordance with applicable privacy and retention requirements.

5. Editorial Independence and Conflicts of Interest

Editorial decisions are made without undue influence from authors, sponsors, advertisers, institutional leaders, editorial appointments or professional relationships. Manuscripts submitted by the Editor-in-Chief, editors, board members, journal personnel or their close associates are assigned to a suitable independent editor with no relevant competing interest. The conflicted individual is excluded from reviewer selection, access to confidential reviews where feasible, recommendations and final decision-making. Conflict management and assignment decisions are recorded in the editorial system.

Submissions involving the Editor-in-Chief are assigned by the Chair of the Editorial Board to an independent editor. Relevant funding, personal and professional relationships of reviewers and editors must be disclosed and managed in line with the AJTES Conflicts of Interest and Disclosure Policy.

6. Appeals, Complaints and Publication Ethics

Authors may appeal a decision by submitting a reasoned written request within 30 days of the decision. Appeals are examined by an editor not involved in the original decision, with additional external assessment where appropriate. Complaints concerning the Editor-in-Chief are referred to an external adjudicator appointed by the Chair of the Editorial Board, as set out in the AJTES Editorial Independence and Governance policy. Editorial decisions on appeals are documented and communicated with reasons.

Allegations of research or publication misconduct are assessed fairly, confidentially and proportionately using relevant COPE guidance, with an opportunity for appropriate responses and institutional referral when warranted. Post-publication action may include clarification, correction, expression of concern or retraction, depending on the evidence.

7. Value and Transparency of Peer Review

Constructive peer review aims to improve methodological robustness, interpretive accuracy, transparent reporting and clinical relevance. The journal publicly describes its review model, ordinary reviewer number, responsibilities and exceptions for special manuscript types. Its operational timelines, reviewer evaluation form, author instructions and related policies should be consistent with this document.

References and Related Policies

- COPE. Core Practices. https://publicationethics.org/core-practices
- COPE. Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers. https://publicationethics.org/guidance
- ICMJE. Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals. https://www.icmje.org/recommendations/
- WAME. Publication ethics resources. https://wame.org
- AJTES Editorial Workflow; AJTES Author Guidelines; AJTES Conflicts of Interest and Disclosure Policy; AJTES Reviewer Evaluation Form.