ALCOHOL RESEARCH
Current Reviews

Instructions for Reviewers

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Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to review a manuscript submitted to *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews* (*ARCR*). Your expertise is vital in helping the journal maintain the quality of reviews spanning the field of alcohol research.

Types of Reviews

All *ARCR* articles are by invitation only, and authors may choose to submit either a narrative or scoping review. Reviewers will see the article type when they log into Editorial Manager as a reviewer and click on their assignment(s). In addition, scoping reviews will be indicated as such in the title of the manuscript.

Narrative Reviews

Narrative reviews provide a synthesis of primary research done in a field, identify gaps, and suggest areas of future research. For this article type, authors must follow guidelines outlined in the downloadable *ARCR checklist for narrative reviews*.

Scoping Reviews

Scoping reviews map evidence to identify main concepts, theories, sources, and knowledge gaps in a topic area. Scoping reviews often set the stage for systematic reviews by confirming the relevance of potential questions and criteria for inclusion or exclusion. For this article type, authors must follow the guidelines outlined by Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA).

Other Types of Reviews

ARCR does not accept original research articles or other types of reviews that address a precise clinical question. Therefore, reviewers should not evaluate articles based on criteria for systematic reviews or meta-analyses.

Roles of the Reviewer

Peer review is vital to ensuring the scientific integrity of *ARCR* submissions as published articles become permanent works within the scientific literature. All articles are open access and free to view and download. Reviewer roles include:

- Recommending whether an article should be accepted, revised, or rejected.
- Providing constructive and sufficiently detailed narrative appraisals to the editorial staff, who provide this information to the authors in an anonymized form. Feedback should include recommendations to improve manuscript quality, when necessary.
- If needed, determining whether authors have adequately addressed peer review feedback.

Peer Review Process

Prior to peer review, manuscripts undergo a technical check by the editorial staff to ensure they follow *ARCR* checklists for narrative reviews or scoping reviews. A manuscript that fails to comply with the relevant checklist is returned to the author for correction.

After passing the technical check, manuscripts are appraised by independent reviewers with expertise in the subject matter covered in the paper. Reviewers are asked to return their feedback within 2 weeks of manuscript receipt.

Based on reviewer recommendations, authors may be asked to revise their manuscript. To preserve uniformity throughout the peer review process, reviewers may be asked to reevaluate the revised manuscript to determine whether review comments were adequately addressed. However, every effort will be made to address revisions editorially, thereby reducing unwarranted reassessments.

After evaluating feedback from the peer reviewers, an *ARCR* editor will make the final decision as to whether the manuscript is accepted.

Who May Review *ARCR* Manuscripts

ARCR reviewers are invited to evaluate manuscripts because they are recognized subject matter experts in alcohol research. Their input is vital in ensuring that only the highest quality manuscripts are published in the journal.

ARCR strongly encourages and supports the training of early-career researchers, including their involvement in mentored peer review. If you wish to collaborate with a mentee to complete your review, you should accept the invitation from Editorial Manager and note the name of the mentee in your comments to the editor.

As the invited reviewer, you are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the review.

Confidentiality

During the peer review process, reviewers know the identities of the authors, but the authors do not know the identities of the reviewers. Reviewers should avoid overtly identifying themselves or providing information that may reveal their identities to the authors.

By accepting the invitation to review, you agree to keep the content of the submitted manuscript and all comments made by reviewers and editors confidential.

If you wish to collaborate with a mentee to complete your review, you may share the manuscript with the mentee. As the invited reviewer, you are ultimately responsible for ensuring confidentiality of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

All reviewers will complete a disclosure form in Editorial Manager as part of the process to submit their peer review recommendation.

If a conflict of interest (COI) may preclude you from providing an objective evaluation of the manuscript, please decline the invitation to review and note "potential COI" in the remarks field. Competing interests may be personal, financial, intellectual, professional, political, or religious. If you have been a mentor, mentee, close collaborator, or co-grantee with the author(s) within the last 3 years, you should not agree to review. You also should not agree to review a manuscript if you have a close relationship with an author (personal or familial), to gain more information about the article content without intending to review it, or if the paper is similar to one you have in preparation or under consideration at another journal.

If you are unsure whether you have a conflict, you may reply to the invitation email to request that the editorial staff contact you to discuss whether you can objectively evaluate the manuscript.

Timeliness

Timeliness in peer review is important to avoid delay in article publication. Please respond to the peer review invitation within 3 business days, even if you cannot undertake the review, and only agree to review if you can return feedback within the proposed time frame, which is 2 weeks. Always inform the journal promptly if your circumstances change and you cannot fulfill your original agreement, or if you require an extension.

If you cannot review, please suggest alternative reviewers, based on their expertise and without any personal consideration or intention of the manuscript receiving a specific outcome (either positive or negative).

Evaluating *ARCR* Manuscripts

Criteria for Evaluating Initial Submissions

ARCR publishes high-quality reviews that significantly advance the field of alcohol research. All submissions are by invitation only.

As mentioned previously in these Instructions, the journal currently accepts only two article types: narrative reviews and scoping reviews.

Unlike systematic reviews, narrative reviews and scoping reviews do not answer a precise clinical question. Therefore, reviewers should *not* evaluate *ARCR* articles based on criteria for systematic reviews or meta-analyses.

To help *ARCR* maintain a high level of excellence, reviewers are asked to evaluate manuscripts for the following:

- Does the topic add to the subject area? Is it relevant and interesting?
- Is the search strategy clear, transparent, and appropriate for addressing the topic?
- Are the conclusions clearly stated and supported by relevant references? Do they address the topic? Are there any missing references?
- If the paper includes tables or figures, do they aid understanding or are they superfluous?
- Is the paper well written? Is it understandable to most alcohol researchers, including graduate-level students, who may not have a background in the specific topic covered?
- Do the authors avoid stigmatizing language? (See NIAAA language guidelines: www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/reducing-alcohol-related-stigma.) *ARCR* also follows the American Psychological Association's "Bias-Free Language" guidelines and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Preferred Terms for Select Population Groups & Communities."

Scoping reviews have additional criteria that are described in the "Reviewer Form: Questions and Rating Scale" in the following pages.

You are not obliged to copyedit the manuscript, but you are encouraged to identify sentences or sections that are confusing or unclear.

Reviewer Form in Editorial Manager

After accepting the invitation, you will be asked to complete the following form in Editorial Manager, which is adapted from the Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles approach.[1] Additional information is listed with each item.

For each item, reviewers should use this scale to rate whether the article addresses the specified criteria:

- 2, thoroughly
- 1, partially
- 0, hardly at all

Reviewer Form: Questions and Rating Scale

1. Justification of the Article's Importance for the Readership

Questions to Consider. Have the authors provided context and background information for understanding why the review is important, a clear description of the topics to be covered, and a discussion about how the review will benefit scientific understanding, prevention, treatment, and/or health outcomes?

Rating Scale (select one option)
○ 2: The context and background are explicitly justified, and the topic/objective is clearly described.
○ 1: The context or importance is alluded to but not explicitly justified, or the topic/objective is somewhat unclear.
○ 0: The context is not provided, the importance of the review topic is not justified, or the topic/objective is unclear.

2. Writing Style and Readability

Questions to Consider. Is the paper well organized, focused on the topic, and written for the target audience (i.e., a broad audience of scientists and clinicians, including trainees, with varying specialties and degrees of expertise in alcohol research)? Are terms and concepts clearly defined?

Rating Scale (select one option)
○ 2: Writing is well organized and suitable for graduate-level students, and terms are clearly defined.
○ 1: Writing is somewhat appropriate for graduate-level students, or manuscript is somewhat organized or sometimes strays off topic.
○ 0: Writing is not appropriate for graduate-level students, or the manuscript is poorly organized or does not stay on topic.

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[1] Baethge C, Goldbeck-Wood S, Mertens S. SANRA—a scale for the quality assessment of narrative review articles. *Res Integr Peer Rev.* 2019;4(1):5. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41073-019-0064-8.

3. Description of the Literature Search

Questions to Consider. Are authors transparent about the sources of information that form the basis of the article? Do they list their search terms, and describe their inclusion and exclusion criteria? Are the search methods and terms relevant to the topic? The authors do not need to describe the literature search in as much detail as they would for a systematic review or a scoping review. *Scoping reviews only:* Have the authors provided full electronic search methodology for all databases used for the review?

Rating Scale (select one option)
○ 2: The literature search description includes search terms, search dates, publication dates, or inclusion and exclusion criteria that are clearly described and relevant to the topic. *Scoping reviews only:* Full electronic search methodology from one or more database is described. ○ 1: Search terms, search dates, publication dates, or inclusion and exclusion criteria are described but of little relevance to the topic. *Scoping reviews only:* Full electronic search methodology from one database is poorly described or inadequate. ○ 0: Search terms, search dates, publication dates, or inclusion and exclusion criteria are not described or are inadequate for addressing the topic. *Scoping reviews only:* Full electronic search methodology from one or more database is not described.

4. Appropriate Description of Data

Questions to Consider. Does the review present evidence for key conclusions, and ensure they tie back to the main topic? Does the paper clearly summarize new and salient findings, limitations of the reviewed studies, and literature gaps?

Rating Scale (select one option)
○ 2: Evidence for key conclusions is described clearly, and conclusions are relevant to the topic and objectives. ○ 1: Evidence for key conclusions is somewhat described, or the conclusions are sometimes relevant to the topic and objectives. ○ 0: Evidence for key conclusions is poorly described, or the conclusions are not relevant to the topic and objectives.

5. References

Questions to Consider. Are key statements backed with references? Do the bulk of the references consist of the most relevant and recent original research (i.e., not other reviews)? Are the number of references appropriate to cover the article topic?

Rating Scale (select one option)
○ 2: Key statements are supported by primary, relevant references. ○ 1: References for key statements are inconsistent, references are missing or irrelevant, or many are non-primary sources. ○ 0: Key statements are not supported by references, references are outdated, or they consist mainly of non-primary (review) articles.

6. Figures and Tables

Questions to Consider. If included, do figures and tables help to better understand the article? If not included, should they be? *Scoping reviews only:* All scoping reviews must include a flow diagram. Does the flow diagram clearly detail the reasons that full-text articles were excluded?

Rating Scale (select one option)
○ 2: Figures and tables contribute to better understanding of the article. *Scoping reviews only:* The flow diagram is clear, and the reasons for excluding full-text articles are described.
○ 1: Figures and tables somewhat help to better understand the article. *Scoping reviews only:* The flow diagram is unclear or confusing.
○ 0: Figures and tables are not included but would be helpful, or they are included but do not help to better understand the article. *Scoping reviews only:* A flow diagram is not included.

7. Charting *(scoping reviews only)*

Questions to Consider. Does the scoping review clearly describe: how items were selected and which software was used; how the form was tested and/or refined; how many reviewers participated (e.g., whether they were independent and compared results, or whether some charted and others verified); and how reviewers summarized data and resolved inconsistencies?

Rating Scale (select one option)
○ 2: The article clearly describes data extraction methods, calibration, ways to reduce error, and how data were summarized and inconsistencies resolved.
○ 1: The article somewhat describes data extraction methods, calibration, ways to reduce error, or how data were summarized and inconsistencies resolved.
○ 0: The article does not describe data extraction methods, calibration, ways to reduce error, or how data were summarized and inconsistencies resolved.

There will be two fields where you should enter your comments:

- **Comments to the Author**
  These comments will be shared with the author, although your review will be anonymous. You should expand upon the "Questions to Consider" in the review form, as relevant. Please do not include anything in this section that you do not want shared with the author.

- **Comments to the Editor**
  Confidential comments to the *ARCR* editors may include the likelihood that the manuscript makes a substantive contribution, areas of the manuscript where you might lack sufficient expertise to evaluate, potential conflicts of interest that may prevent you from reviewing the manuscript, and any concerns that you do not wish to communicate to the authors. Do not just repeat comments that are provided to the authors.

Criteria for Evaluating Revised Manuscripts

Once the author returns the revised manuscript, the *ARCR* editorial staff will review their responses to determine if the revisions suggested by reviewers have been made. If editorial staff are unsure whether your feedback was addressed, they may ask for your input. In this case, the revised manuscript and the author's response to your comments will be emailed to you. You will be asked to answer the following questions in Editorial Manager:

- Has the author responded appropriately to your concerns and feedback?

- Do you have any outstanding concerns about the organization or the content of this review article? If so, please describe your concerns under "Comments to Author" and "Comments to Editor."

There will also be two fields for comments. These include "Comments to the Editor" (confidential) and "Comments to the Author" (shared with the author).

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