

Nurturing Dialogue: A Reviewer's Guide to Advancing Scholarship in The Dialog

Marla J. Lohmann, Ph.D.
Colorado Christian University

Rachel Schachter Ph.D.
University of Illinois Chicago

ABSTRACT

Peer review is a vital part of academic scholarship, but providing high-quality reviews can be challenging and specific expectations for peer reviews may differ from one journal to another. The Dialog is an open-access journal focused on early childhood inclusion and welcomes submissions from a variety of authors, including professionals and families outside academia. Reviewing for The Dialog requires an understanding of the role of peer review in scholarship, knowledge about specific review expectations for the journal, and an appreciation of the diverse voices represented among journal authors. This article provides practical guidance for reviewers.

KEYWORDS

Peer Review; Open-access; Academic Writing; Publication; Early Childhood; Research-to-practice

Peer review is a form of dialogue about scholarship, including research and practitioner-focused research-to-practice manuscripts. The peer review process is used to ensure high-quality scholarship is accepted and published in academic journals, such as The Dialog (Ali & Watson, 2016). Peer review helps distinguish scholarly works from manuscripts published in mainstream publications (Kochetkov, 2026). The role of peer reviews is to identify both strengths and areas for improvement of submitted manuscripts (Hoffman, 2022) and support authors in improving their work before it is published (Ali & Watson, 2016; Sundeen et al., 2025). The use of peer review can also provide an avenue for researchers to engage in meaningful dialogue with other scholars regarding their own work and broader related research in the field (Kochetkov, 2026). This dialogue helps to improve the writing skills of authors over time (Wang & Chen, 2026).

The Dialog: A Journal for Inclusive Early Childhood Professionals
2026, Volume 29, Issue 1
<https://doi.org/10.55370/thedialog.v29i1.2282>
Contact: Marla Lohmann @ MLohmann@ccu.edu

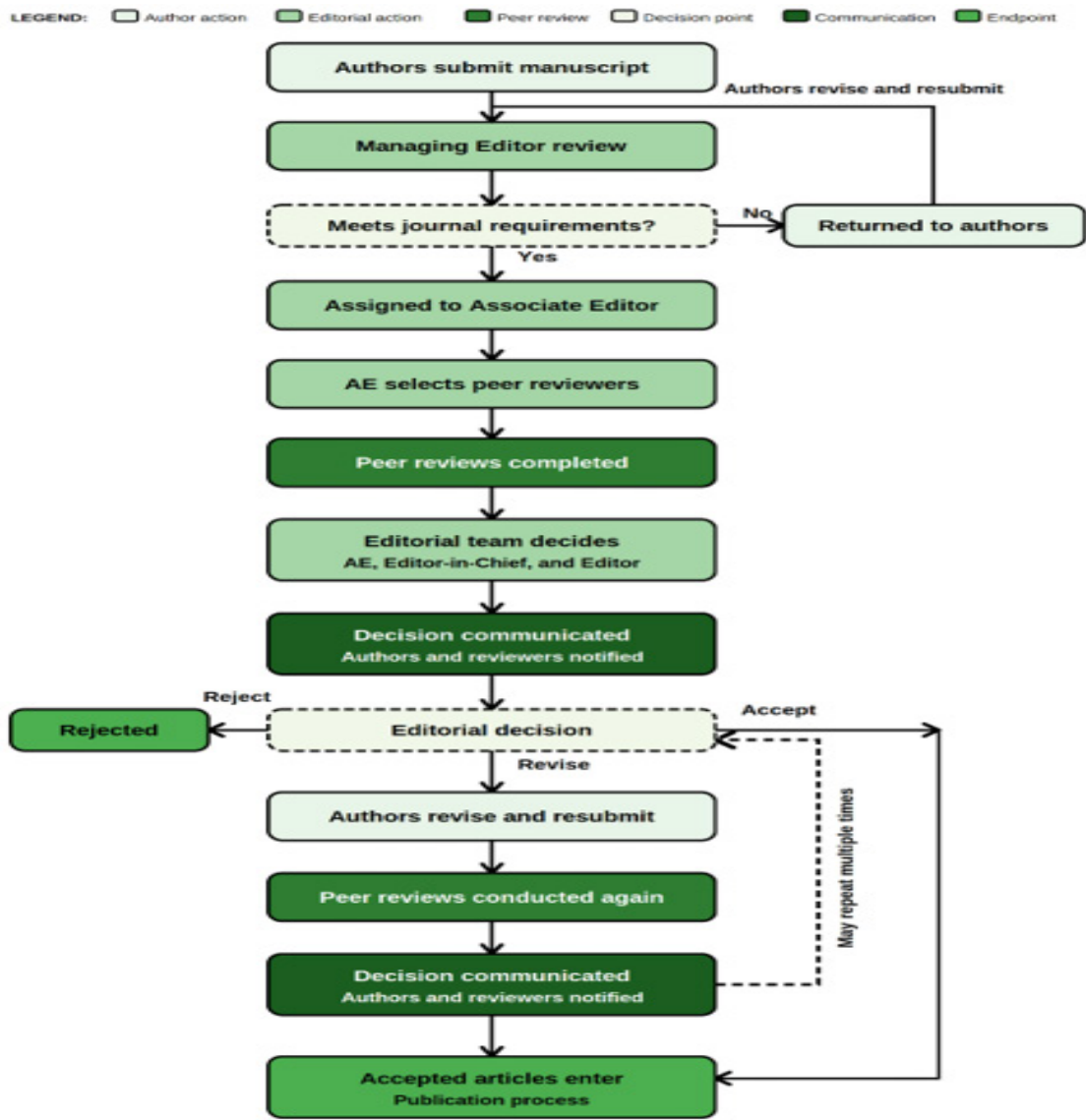
Copyright © 2026 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Following the Dialogue: A Step-by-Step Look at the Review Process

While the peer review process is similar for most journals, it is important to understand the

specific steps for manuscripts submitted to The Dialog. Figure 1 outlines these steps. Please note that some manuscripts require multiple rounds of revision and Steps 8 through 10 may occur more than once.

Figure 1
The Peer Review Process



Note. *Flowchart made by ClaudeAI with steps written into prompt and revisions made by the authors.

Engaging in the Dialogue: Conducting Peer Reviews for *The Dialog*

When reviewing articles, it is important to keep the peer review framework in mind. A review should provide constructive feedback focused on enhancing the manuscript and providing new knowledge to the field. With this in mind, there are several areas for consideration when reviewing a

Table 1

Considerations in Peer Review

Areas for dialogue within a review	Considerations
Research Questions or Research Aims	• In empirical studies, are the questions and aims clearly stated?
Relevance and Contribution	• Is this article relevant for The Dialog audience? • Does the article provide knowledge that can strengthen inclusion, preparation, practice, or policy in early childhood? • Do the authors make this contribution clear within their work?
Methods	• Do the methods address the research questions/aims? • Is sufficient detail provided such that another researcher could replicate the approach? • Are tools and procedures adequately described so that the reader can tell if they address the research questions?
Results	• Were the correct analyses used to address the research question or for the data? • Do the authors provide sufficient data to support their description of the results (for all types of studies)?
Contextualization within the extant literature	• Do the authors adequately synthesize the extant literature to build a rationale for the study or conceptual? • Are key constructs described/defined using the extant literature and applied consistently throughout the manuscript? • Do authors connect their findings to the broader literature demonstrating how their work is situated within current knowledge?
Clarity	• Is writing clear and logically ordered? • Do the authors write coherently for The Dialog audience? • Do the authors use text structures and APA sufficiently to support the readability of the manuscript?

manuscript for *The Dialog*. These include considering the relevance of the manuscript for the journal, the quality of the Methods and Results, and the contextualizing of the study within the extant literature (APA, 2026; Wiley, n.d.). These key areas for dialogue and considerations are presented in Table 1. How these are applied varies based on the type of manuscript that is being reviewed.

The Dialog publishes multiple types of articles relevant for the field. The first are **Research Articles**. These may be the most familiar to reviewers. These are articles that report on original research, reflecting current best practices. For these types of articles reviewers would want to consider the rigor of the methods along with the implications for *The Dialog* audience. Similarly, **Reviews of the Literature** are also empirical articles that include clear methods and procedures for conducting the reviews and analyzing findings. Again, reviewers should consider both the methods and the relevant contribution of the findings for the field. **Conceptual Articles** present theoretical or conceptual frameworks, or perspectives on current issues in the field relevant to *The Dialog* audience. Although not empirical, this type of manuscript should draw heavily from the theoretical and empirical literature. Reviewers should consider the quality of the framework as well as how the work contributes to inclusion, practice, preparation, and policy in early childhood. The final article type is **Dialogs From the Field**. These manuscripts are unique to *The Dialog* and are intended to showcase the lived experiences and practices from the field and therefore embody the research-to-practice mindset of the journal. In sharing innovative or effective practices these articles should connect back to the extant literature to ground described practice in evidence and support claims and recommendations. Reviewers should still consider the relevance and empirical base of the work for *The Dialog* audience.

There are several different ways that reviews can be structured, often varying based on the article types and the key considerations. One convention for opening article reviews is to start by providing a statement summarizing the article (e.g., “This article describes an early childhood coaching intervention”), followed by a statement indicating how ready the manuscript is for publication *without* indicating an accept, revise, or reject decision and the potential contributions of the work to the field (e.g., “With some clarity in the methods, this work can contribute a new model for implementing coaching for inclusive preschool classrooms.”)

There are several different options for organizing the remainder of the review. One common format is to organize the review by the typical manuscript headings (Introduction, Method, Results,

Discussion) providing feedback on each section. Another format is to provide feedback along the categories of consideration provided in Table 1. A third, and similar option is to provide a list of key points of feedback. This approach is often useful when there are a few main areas of concern that are relevant to multiple sections of the manuscript. To a certain extent this is a matter of personal preference in how the reviewer chooses to organize their ideas. Some find it helpful to always use the same template or organizational structure for each review whereas others find it helpful to organize the structure of the review based on the individual manuscript. Reviewers are welcome to seek guidance from journal editors at any time to support their process.

Maintaining the Dialogue: Tips for Successful Reviews

There are several important considerations for preparing the final review document in order to maintain a sense of dialogue rather than a one-sided critique. First and foremost, respect and kindness are key. Within the double-anonymous review process it can be easy to forget the purpose of the review and to neglect to consider the individuals who will receive it and the considerable time and effort they put into writing their manuscript. Be sure to pay attention to your tone and comments throughout while considering how the reader will receive and can use your feedback. Peer review is a critical part academic publishing and should serve as an opportunity to provide constructive feedback that supports the authors in creating a stronger manuscript. This is especially important as many authors are still learning about the journal submission process.

Relatedly, it is important to focus on the big picture feedback. Although it can be helpful to point out needed copyedits and APA issues when they impede the reader’s understanding, that should not be the focus of your review. Rather, the review should focus on clear actionable steps the authors could take to strengthen the article. These can come in the form of direct suggestions or questions that you think the authors should consider/address within their revision in pursuit of improving the manuscript (APA, 2026). Importantly, these

should be aligned with the manuscript and intentions of the authors. Sometimes reviews comment on how they would have conducted the study or request something that is not aligned with the intentions or purposes of the manuscript. This type of feedback does not support a dialogue with the authors and is a missed opportunity to enhance the submitted work in ways that advance the field. Further, reviewers should refrain from suggesting citations of their own work (unless there is a very specific reason for the suggestion).

Collaboration on peer review can be a critical way to continue the dialogue. Faculty mentors are encouraged to include graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the review process. It is customary, however, to notify the Associate Editor in advance of the review to seek permission. The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) is not appropriate for conducting peer reviews. There are several limitations of AI including bias, limitations in the corpus from which AI draws its models, as well as a lack of decision making and critical thinking that can only come from human analyses (Crawford et al., 2024).

Joining the Dialogue Benefits You: What Reviewers Gain from their Service

Providing high-quality peer reviews can be very time-consuming, especially amidst the competing demands of academia, but choosing to serve the field of inclusive early childhood through peer review offers a variety of professional benefits. First, the act of reviewing may increase your knowledge of the field of inclusive education. While this is especially true for early career scholars, engaging in peer review can support established researchers to stay up to date on progress in the field and expose them to new and emerging ideas and research (Ali & Watson, 2016; Chitiyo & Weiss, 2022). Second, peer reviewing may increase your own knowledge of writing scholarly articles (Mayer et al., 2024). Third, university faculty are often expected to engage in service to their field of study. Serving as a peer reviewer is one way in which faculty can meet this requirement (Ali & Watson, 2016; Kang et al., 2023). Finally, by being a peer reviewer and ensuring that high-quality scholarship is published in *The Dialog*, you are supporting the dissemination of best practices in inclusive early childhood ed-

ucation and advancing work in our field (Steer & Ernst, 2021). Peer reviewing for *The Dialog* offers meaningful benefits for reviewers, authors and the broader field.

Thank You for Engaging in Dialogue

The editorial board of *The Dialog* is thankful for the many people who choose to serve the journal and the field of inclusive early childhood education by serving as peer reviewers. We know that each of you has countless demands for your time and other journals that are also requesting your expertise. Thank you for sharing your time and knowledge with us.



References

- Ali, P.A. and Watson, R. (2016). Peer review and the publication process. *Nursing Open*, 3, 193-202. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.5>
- American Psychological Association. (2026). Guidance for preparing a review. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/resources/preparing-peer-review>
- Bergstrom, C. T., & Gross, K. (2026). Screening, sorting, and the feedback cycles that imperil peer review. *PLoS Biology*, 24(2), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3003650>
- Chitiyo, A., & Weiss, M. P. (2022). How to review for the Journal of Special Education Preparation. *Journal of Special Education Preparation*, 2(1), 14–18. <https://doi.org/10.33043/JOSEP.2.1.14-18>
- Crawford, J., Allen, K.-A., & Lodge, J. (2024). Humanising peer review with Artificial Intelligence: Paradox or panacea? *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 21(1), 9–16. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.T2024100700001400104634650>

Hoffman, A. J. (2022). A modest proposal to the peer review process: A collaborative and interdisciplinary approach in the assessment of scholarly communication. *Research Ethics*, 18(1), 84-91. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F17470161211051230>

Kang, J., Haughney, K. L., & VanUitert, V. (2023). How to review for the Journal of Case Learning and Exceptional Learners. *The Journal of Case Learning and Exceptional Learners*, 1(1), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.20429/jclcl.2023.010103>

Kochetkov, D. (2026). Peer review at the crossroads. *Learned Publishing*, 39(2), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.2046>

Mayer, D., Eastin, C., Kane, B., Lee, S., Davis, J., & Chan, T. M. (2024). The importance of peer review skills: Value and necessity of training residents to ensure continued scientific excellence. *AEM education and training*, 8(Suppl 1), S76-S79. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aet2.10940>

Steer, P. J., & Ernst, S. (2021). Peer review - Why, when, and how. *International Journal of Cardiology Congenital Heart Disease*, 2, 100083. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijcchd.2021.100083>

Sundeen, T. H., Williams, T. R., Cheek, A. E., & Lohmann, M. J. (2025). Reviewing for Rural Special Education Quarterly: Insights into the peer review process. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 44(4), 226-235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87568705251362464>

Wang, X., & Chen, M. (2026). From novice to expert: The impact of peer review interaction on authors' academic growth. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1642718>

Wiley (n.d.). The Modern Guide to Peer Review. <https://authors.wiley.com/asset/the-modern-guide-to-peer-review.pdf>