This handbook outlines the duties and responsibilities of decision editors for the *Journal of the American College of Emergency Medicine Open (JACEP Open)*. It includes general principles on manuscript management and peer review decisions.

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I. Decision Editor Duties

Decision Editors (DEs) are important and essential functional gears in the journal and serve many key roles:

1. Spearhead the manuscript peer review and acceptance/rejection process.
2. Act as ambassadors and representatives for JACEP Open, ACEP and the specialty.
3. Promote the journal and encourage contributions from authors.
4. Help to set the mission and vision of the journal.

DEs have the following general responsibilities:

1. Decide which new manuscripts merit external peer review (i.e., more than just the editor).
2. Assign reviewers and rate the quality of their reviews using JACEP Open guidelines (detailed in Section III A below).
3. Make decisions on manuscripts, soliciting the input of the Editor in Chief (EIC) when needed.
4. Communicate decisions to authors in a positive, collegial, and educational manner, and, when needed, edit reviewer comments sent to authors to ensure that they also meet these criteria.
5. Ensure timeliness and fairness in all editorial decision making.
6. Ensure that accepted manuscripts are accurate and consistent with JACEP Open standards.
7. Write “The Bottom Line” text for accepted original research articles.
8. Suggest and solicit editorials for accepted manuscripts when such commentary appears desirable.

Editorial board members are also strongly encouraged to submit papers to JACEP Open.

Using Editorial Manager (www.editorialmanager.com/jacep) DEs are expected to monitor their workloads, assign reviewers, and make timely decisions.

II. What are the Standards for Acceptance to JACEP Open?

JACEP Open welcomes papers that make a meaningful contribution to the emergency medicine literature. The goal of an Open Access journal is to accept as much as possible, looking for reasons to accept vs. reject while adhering to ethical principles and best practice guidelines for the peer review process.

Impact – A paper’s “impact” on the field is less important in the acceptance decision for JACEP Open. However, the authors must make a reasonable articulation of why the topic and findings are important or potentially important to emergency medicine practice, science, education, organization or policy. Preliminary results, negative results; confirmatory or replicatory studies are acceptable.

Methods – Similarly, papers considered for JACEP Open do not have to use the most innovative or sophisticated methods, but the methodological and statistical approaches should be reasonable for the paper’s stated objectives and must be properly executed and interpreted.

Other important factors in selecting papers for JACEP Open:

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1. The paper should fall into one of the journal’s article categories (Original Research, Brief Research Report, Review Article, Systematic Review-Meta-Analysis, Concepts, Special Contribution, Case Report, Images in Emergency Medicine, Editorial, Letters to the Editor-Correspondence). Submissions falling outside of the standard categories must be approved in advance by the EIC. See the Author Guidelines for more details.

2. The topic of the paper should have potential interest to emergency medicine readers internationally. Note that a paper does not need to directly pertain to emergency department care to be relevant. For example, *JACEP Open* would welcome a study of long-term rehabilitation outcomes after sepsis, because sepsis is a topic of high interest to the emergency medicine community.

3. The paper must meet ethical standards.

4. The paper must be cleanly written. While copy editors will clean up minor errors, the overall grammar and syntax of the paper must be sound enough to convey the intended meaning. Also, the overall structure and logic of the paper must be sound; impeccable writing is of no value if the author’s points do not make logical sense.

5. The methods of the paper must be reasonable and adequate to address the objectives of the paper. The paper must provide adequate details of the methods.

6. The results of the paper must be plausible and properly presented. The statistical methods must be appropriate to the objectives of the paper and must be correctly executed.

7. The discussion should provide useful insights of the findings but should not be overreaching.

**International Care** – Papers accepted by *JACEP Open* do not need to directly reflect emergency care in the US. *JACEP Open* is an international journal – we welcome contributions that highlight emergency care around the world. We simply ask that authors frame the results so that US readers will understand the context of the findings.

### III. The Peer Review Process – General Considerations

#### A. Timeliness of Assignments

Speed is important in the peer review process and a priority consideration for authors.

For new/direct submissions or papers transferred from *Annals of Emergency Medicine* **without peer reviews**, we request that DEs assign reviewers or make a desk reject (reject without review) decision **within 48 hours** of assignment.

For papers transferred from *Annals of Emergency Medicine* **with peer reviews**:

1. In the case of papers transferred from *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, we request that DEs make a rapid initial assessment and decision.

2. It is strongly suggested that the peer reviews from *Annals* are used to make a decision for *JACEP Open* if at all possible. This is to expedite the peer review process and avoid excess use of peer reviewers.

3. Rejections or the inviting of additional peer review by *JACEP Open* should occur **within 48 hours**. If the DE wishes to synthesize the *Annals* reviews and offer the option of revision to authors (thereby deferring additional *JACEP Open* peer review), that decision should occur **within 5 calendar days**.

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Once all reviews are completed, DE’s should process a decision **within 5 calendar days** of the completion of all reviews. DEs are expected to monitor the performance of their reviewers to ensure timely turnaround, rate completed reviews, and assign more reviewers when needed.

B. **Methodology/Statistical Reviews**

*JACEP Open* has a team of methodology and statistics editors. All accepted original research papers must undergo review by a meth/stats reviewer. The goal of this process is to ensure consistency in the analysis and presentation of results. Meth/stats reviewers are also available for specialized questions or consults.

The process for engaging meth/stats review:

1. Solicit content peer reviews for the paper. If the content reviews are supportive, and you think that the paper can be revised towards acceptance, email the *JACEP Open* editorial at jacepopen@acep.org and ask for a meth/stats review. They will arrange for an expedited M/S review. Please do not invite the meth/stats reviewer directly yourself.

2. On occasion, you may feel that a new submission is very strong and likely acceptable after peer review – it is fine to ask for meth/stats review at the same time you solicit other reviews.

3. If the paper has been transferred from *Annals of Emergency Medicine* with a completed meth/stats review, a *JACEP Open* meth/stats review is not required. However, consulting meth/stats is still a good idea, as they can help to navigate the *Annals* meth/stats comments.

C. **Conflicts of Interest**

Whenever an editor has even the appearance of a conflict of interest with an assigned manuscript, they are expected to recuse themselves from the given manuscript or to discuss the situation with the EIC.

If an editorial board member is an author on a manuscript, the paper should be assigned to another editor. The EIC should be involved in the final decision on these papers.

The author/editor is expected to respect the proctoring editor’s comments and decisions. Direct engagement of the proctoring editor by the author/editor is strongly discouraged.

Editors should also be aware of potential conflicts of interest by reviewers, who are supposed to declare them but may not always do so. An editor can still choose to use the review, depending on the nature of the conflict (and sometimes specifically because of the logic that if a person with a COI cannot come up with a criticism, then probably a major one does not exist).

D. **Editor in Chief Invited Papers**

A portion of *JACEP Open* papers are invited by the Editor in Chief. The expectation is that these works will eventually be accepted with or without revision. If you receive an EIC-invited paper that is fatal, weak or otherwise should not be considered for publication, please contact the EIC at jacepeic@acep.org.
IV. Initial Review

A. Decide Whether a Manuscript Merits Peer Review

It is typical for a DE to reject a portion of manuscripts without sending them for external peer review (desk rejects). The reject:review ratios can vary in different topic areas. Manuscripts containing potentially novel or important concepts or results should receive the benefit of the doubt and be sent out for review. If you are ambivalent, discuss the paper with the EIC.

Common reasons for rejection of manuscripts without the invitation of peer reviewers:

1. The topic of the paper falls completely outside the scope of JACEP Open. The manuscript is of no potential interest or relevance to any segments of our readership.
2. The manuscript is poorly written, with multiple grammatical and spelling errors, requiring major rewriting. (Special consideration should be given to authors from non-English speaking countries, however, and alternative sources of writing help can be suggested).
3. The manuscript is clearly redundant – the topic has been well covered within the previous few years or is highly duplicative of a prior study appearing in JACEP Open or other emergency medicine journals. (Note that JACEP Open’s does consider replication or confirmatory studies. A replication study may be a very important contribution to the literature.)
4. There is no clear or useful goal or hypothesis.
5. The methods are weak or inappropriate.
6. The results are sparse or inaccurate.

B. Inviting/Sending Out a Manuscript for Peer Review

If the manuscript is good enough to warrant review, you should select at least 2 content reviewers with appropriate expertise in the topic of the manuscript. A minimum of 2 completed reviews should be obtained for each paper. For tips please see the supplementary document “Reviewer Selection FAQs” at www.acep.org/jacepopen.

When selecting reviewers, please first search from reviewers who are designated as “JACEP Priority” reviewers. These are reviewers who specifically showed interest in reviewing for JACEP Open.

If you would like to invite a reviewer who is not registered in Editorial Manager, you can invite them as a guest reviewer. To do so, go to Action > Invite Reviewers > Request Unregistered Reviewer (in blue on the left).

JACEP is building its reviewer database. If you would like to recommend reviewers, ask them to email their CVs to jacepopen@acep.org. The EIC will review CVs and will then invite those who meet the reviewer criteria to be JACEP Open reviewers.

C. More About Transfers from Annals of Emergency Medicine

Papers rejected by Annals of Emergency Medicine that match JACEP Open’s article type categories will be considered for transfer to JACEP Open. The paper will be transferred to JACEP Open only if the author chooses this option.
If the paper underwent peer review at *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, the reviews will be transferred with the manuscript to *JACEP Open* (this is classified as “reject with reviews-transfer to JACEP”). *You should try to make a decision (accept, revise, reject) based upon the Annals reviews.* Please try not to send [transferred with reviews] papers out for additional *JACEP Open* peer review unless there a compelling point not addressed by the original *Annals* reviews.

To view the Annals decision letter, go to Action Items > Details > and then go to Transfer Letter from ANNEMERGMED, which is near the bottom of the page in blue. Or, you can view the Annals decision letter by going to Action Items > History > Correspondence History > Transfer Letter.

If the paper did not undergo peer review at *Annals* (this is classified as “reject without review-transfer to JACEP”), you may treat the paper like any other new *JACEP Open* manuscript.

Certain transferred papers may be classified as “high priority;” these are papers rejected by *Annals* but where the *JACEP Open* EIC has offered “expedited review towards acceptance.” Please contact the EIC promptly if you feel that a high priority transfer should not be accepted.

If you need to reach out to an *Annals* editor for clarification on *Annals* editorial or peer review comments, please contact the EIC Henry Wang – he will facilitate contact with that editor. (Please follow this chain of command to ensure maximum responsiveness from the *Annals* editor.)

**V. Making a Decision**

**A. Dealing with Missing or Incomplete Reviews**

If reviewers are late or incomplete, you have three options:

- **Reach out to the reviewer(s)** – often they have completed their review and just have not filed the report yet.
- **Un-assign the reviewer** – This removes the assignment from the reviewer’s queue but does not penalize them.
- **Terminate the reviewer** – This removes the assignment from the reviewer’s queue and provides a negative mark.

**The difference between “un-assigning” and “terminating” reviewers in Editorial Manager:**

If reviewers are not late and you need to make a decision, please “un-assign” the reviewers instead of “terminating” them because Editorial Manager gives reviewers negative marks on their performance records when they are “terminated.” For content reviewers, please feel free to terminate them if they are late and you need to make a decision. With meth/stats reviewers, please “un-assign” them so they don’t get negative marks on their records.

**How to “un-assign” reviewers instead of “terminating” them:** On the decision page, there is a grey button called “Terminate Outstanding Assignments and Proceed” (screen shot below). Please click this button if content reviewers are late and you want to make a decision. If you want to “un-assign” a reviewer instead, click on the blue text that says “Invite Reviewers.” That will take you to the “Invite Reviewers” page. When you’re on the “Invite Reviewers” page, you can click on “un-assign” next to the reviewer’s name.
B. Rating the Reviewers

On receiving the reviewer comments and reading them, the DE must give each review a numerical rating in Editorial Manager. These should be whole digits from 1 to 5 as follows:

1= Unacceptable effort and content  
2= Unacceptable effort OR content  
3= Acceptable  
4= Commendable; of use to the decision editor and author  
5= Exceptional; hard to improve (expected to describe no more than 10% to 15% of reviews)

Assign your score using the following components of a quality review:

- The reviewer provided a good overall assessment of the paper (accept vs reject).  
- The reviewer identified and commented upon major strengths and weaknesses of study design and methodology.  
- The reviewer commented accurately and productively upon the quality of the author’s interpretation of the data, including acknowledgment of its limitations.  
- The reviewer commented upon major strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript as a written communication, independent of the design, methodology, results, and interpretation of the study.  
- The reviewer provided the author with useful suggestions for improvement of the manuscript.  
- The reviewer’s comments to the author were constructive and professional.  
- The review provided the editor the proper context and perspective to make a decision on acceptance (and/or revision) of the manuscript.

These ratings are critical for our journal quality control. Remember that 5 is warranted only by the top 10 to 15% of reviews – we do not want grade inflation. Reviewers will not know their scores. Scores are for internal assessment.

You do not need to rate the meth/stats reviewers.

C. Making an initial decision.

All acceptances will be reviewed by the Editor in Chief before they become final. The EIC reserves the right to reverse ("veto") any acceptance/rejection decision.

It is essential that you communicate professionally and cordially with authors – always be informative and provide feedback on areas of potential improvement. Authors are our customers. Comments that are pejorative or inflammatory reflect poorly upon the journal, harm the journal’s reputation, and discourage authors from future contributions. In general, write the decision letter as though you are speaking to the author in person.
The DE must then make a decision on whether the manuscript should be rejected at this stage, accepted, or sent back for revision. The single best description of the papers we want to accept are those with results that are reasonably credible and that add something to preexisting literature that move the field forward. In formulating this decision, consider several factors:

1. Our readership includes not only practicing clinical physicians but also individuals with interests in education, quality improvement, and scientists.
2. The results may not be striking or exciting, but that does not mean they are automatically not useful. You should keep an open mind to this, and whenever in doubt discuss it with the EIC.
3. In some areas, rigorous research is particularly difficult due to logistic issues.
4. In new and emerging areas of interest, we may be willing to initially publish studies of lower quality simply to help launch the field and move it forward.
5. An important paper that fosters subsequent important research might be aimed at quite a small audience and yet still be cited often.

If you choose to request a revision, be sure that the author can satisfactorily meet your requests. If the author seems to lack basic writing skills, their revision may be prolonged and require additional work by you and the reviewers, and still not meet our standards for acceptance. While JACEP Open will generally invite revisions, you may choose to reject a paper if you sincerely believe that an author group cannot successfully accomplish the required changes.

Please think through and express your revision requests carefully. Requested changes should be feasible within the span of 1-2 revisions. Refrain from comments that seem like you are asking for a completely different study. It is not fair to introduce completely new major requirements further down the road in the revision process. Our goal is to limit to 1-2 revisions. If you are requesting revision #3 or greater, you should have a discussion with the EIC first.

All revision decisions are reviewed and confirmed by the EIC before processing. Rejection decisions are not reviewed by the EIC except by special request.

D. Structure and Content of the Decision Letter

The decision letter should consist of 1-3 sentences summarizing your overall impression of the paper, plus reviewers’ comments appended at the end (if any). If you plan on rejecting the paper, clearly state why. If you plan on inviting revision, be sure to give the author direction on the overall or specific comments that require attention. You should edit the reviewers’ critiques so that there is a succinct and cohesive set of comments for the authors to follow. You are permitted to rewrite – or delete – individual reviewer comments. The reviewer comments are to help support your decision and interaction with the authors.

E. Dealing with Difficult Decisions

Maintaining uniform standards of acceptance and editing is a challenge for a journal with a broad scope. For questions about a manuscript or the editing process, please reach out to the EIC for direct guidance.

Keep in mind that all editorial decisions are subject to review. No editor should regard their decision making as beyond question, or be offended when approached with well-intentioned, constructive input. Each of us are human, and even the best editors will at times overlook methodological issues or have his or her viewpoint clouded by special circumstances.
Examples of manuscripts that may require EIC input:

1. Manuscripts with well-done reviews that are strongly conflicting on major points.
2. Manuscripts in which the DE disagrees strongly with the recommendation of the reviewers (reviewers may be very capable, but they often do not have the same perspective or priorities as the editors do).
3. Manuscripts eligible for fast-tracking or priority handling.
4. Manuscripts warranting an editorial.
5. Manuscripts likely to create unusual levels of controversy or having a major impact on the specialty.

VI. Acceptance

A. Content Editing

Once a manuscript is deemed worthy of acceptance, it may benefit from content editing. The goals of content editing are to:

1. Eliminate redundancy and improve readability
2. Remove unsupported claims
3. Ensure a fair and thorough description of limitations
4. Ensure the abstract reflects the manuscript accurately (especially as regards conclusions)
5. Ensure the major concerns of methodology/statistical editors are discussed

The purpose of content editing is to ensure that JACEP Open’ articles are well written, clear, accurate, and consistent with JACEP Open’ style. Well-written means direct verbs, fairly simple sentence structure, clear organization, and an unpretentious vocabulary. A manuscript that does not meet these criteria should not be accepted and sent on to the Editor in Chief. You do not need to personally copyedit the manuscript (the publisher has copy editors for that purpose), but you should feel free to strike out redundant or repetitive words, phrases, and sentences, and rewrite material for clarity.

If extensive content editing is necessary, the authors should be required to revise the manuscript. In a minority of instances, it may be helpful to communicate directly with the author (e.g., by telephone or e-mail, copying journal staff) to discuss content editing. Decision editors are responsible for the final manuscript being in a readable and accurate style before it goes to the Editor in Chief for final approval, but they are not responsible for doing the author’s work for them. Authors whose grasp of English is not adequate may need help from professional writers, who can be arranged via their university, by private consultants, or through the publisher, so this problem alone need not doom a manuscript.

B. “The Bottom Line”

For all reports of original research, the DE spearheads writing “The Bottom Line.” The purpose of “The Bottom Line” is to put original research in context for readers in about 280 characters. The text will appear in a box or other high-visibility format adjacent to the article. The Bottom Line can be written by the editor or solicited from the author.

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“The Bottom Line” should be written in the form of an extended “tweet” that succinctly summarizes: 1) The key question addressed by the study, and 2) the key headline/punchline of the study. Make the language simple, clear, and explicit – in other words, more like an intelligent lay conversation than the usual “scientific” format. Outline the key finding of the paper. A few numbers and exact results are desirable; many are not. No abbreviations should be used.

Examples;

1. While paramedics typically use intubation in cardiac arrests, the best airway management approach is unknown. This randomized controlled trial of 3,000 adults found that the laryngeal tube resulted in higher survival than intubation in cardiac arrest.
2. EMT suicidality is an unrecognized epidemic in the US. The cross-sectional study from the southern US found that 1 in 10,000 EMTs commit suicide each year.

VII. Other Editorial Board Information

A. Conflicts of Interest

JACEP Open is committed to the greatest possible transparency and avoidance of any potential conflict of interest. Please be familiar with JACEP Open’s Conflict of Interest policy at www.acep.org/jacepopen

Upon your appointment as a decision editor and annually thereafter you must declare your competing interests in accordance with the above policy. Your COIs may be reported on the ACEP or JACEP Open website. It is each decision editor’s responsibility to promptly update this disclosure should important changes occur.

B. Editorial Board Organization

With the exception of the EIC, all inaugural editorial board positions for JACEP Open will be designated “Editorial Board.” As the journal matures, editorial tiers will be implemented (e.g., Assistant Editor, Editorial Board, Associate Editor, Senior Associate Editor, Deputy Editor) to recognize the relative contributions of editors and reward those whose contribution is above the average. The EIC will determine all editorial board assignments and roles.

Editorial board positions are filled over time depending upon specific journal needs, volume and topic areas of submitted manuscripts, candidate scientific and research expertise, and candidate availability, all of which can and do change in a complex fashion.

C. Evaluation Process for Decision Editors

All new DEs will be proctored by the EIC on their first manuscript assignments (usually 3-5). This occurs even if you have had substantial experience in manuscript management at another journal. The purpose of this is to ensure a consistent JACEP Open approach and consistent standards in a large and heterogeneous editorial board. As these instructions imply, our journal covers a broad medical specialty with many subspecialty areas of varying size, maturity, and research sophistication. Keeping our decisions consistent is a logistical challenge and requires constant attention.

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The performance of DEs will be assessed by the EIC. Factors in the review will include volume of paper assignments, timeliness of managing manuscript assignments, quality of decisions (including distillation of reviewers’ comments), and collegiality with the editorial staff.

D. Selection of Decision Editors

New decision editors typically come from the ranks of JACEP Open’s top reviewers, matched also with journal needs due to changes in manuscript topics and/or volume, as well as the reviewer’s areas of scientific expertise and research. Appointments as decision editors are for a 1-year period and will be renewed on an annual basis.

The list below roughly prioritizes the qualities needed in an editorial board member. Many valuable talents (e.g., administrative, procedural skill, etc.) are not relevant or useful to this particular function. Editorial board members should bear these qualities in mind when suggesting a candidate.

1. Past performance as a peer reviewer. The ideal editor should have experience with at least 30 prior peer reviews for a range of medical journals.
2. Authorship of original scientific articles as either first or senior author.
3. Experience on other editorial boards.
4. Professionalism; ability to work well and constructively with others and convey a positive and unassuming image for JACEP Open, including providing supportive relationships with authors, reviewers and others.
5. Crossover to other specialties (in research, funding, publications, leadership), that is, someone with dual training or noteworthy activity in emergency medicine and another specialty, and who would bring us something extra and perhaps some outside publications.
6. Leadership activities in emergency medicine (and especially academic and research emergency medicine).
7. Research experience (funding, crossover to other specialties, prestige, national level experience with organizations, such as National Institutes of Health, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).
8. ABEM, AOBEM or pediatric emergency medicine subspecialty certification, if an emergency physician.

Factors that are considered less important include state and local committees and leadership, lectures given, abstracts, administrative activities.

E. Decision Editor Calls and Meetings

Video conference calls will be held quarterly to apprise DEs of important operational information, and to help educate DEs on the editing process. A major portion of each call will be dedicated to reviewing 1-2 sample manuscript decisions. DEs should strive to attend at least 2 of the editorial board video calls. An annual in-person JACEP Open editorial board meeting will be held at the annual ACEP Scientific Assembly; attendance is encouraged but not required.

F. ACEP Membership

Editorial board members who are eligible for membership in ACEP are expected to hold and maintain membership in ACEP. Some editorial board members are exempted from this expectation. For details, contact the JACEP Open editorial staff.

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