ONLINE LEARNING
THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF OLC

Online Learning Journal Peer Reviewer Handbook

Updated: March 2026

Contents

Reviewer Code of Conduct

Peer reviewers play a vital role in safeguarding the integrity of the scholarly record. Reviewers are expected to uphold the highest ethical standards and provide fair, constructive, and timely evaluations.

Core Principles

✅ **Integrity** – Uphold the scholarly record; avoid misconduct or misuse of information.
✅ **Objectivity** – Provide fair, evidence-based, and constructive feedback.
✅ **Confidentiality** – Protect manuscript content; do not share, use, or disclose for personal advantage.
✅ **Transparency** – Declare all potential conflicts of interest.
✅ **Respect** – Offer feedback that is professional, specific, and free from hostility or bias. ✅ **Timeliness** – Complete reviews promptly to support the publication process.

Reviewer Responsibilities

When Invited

- Respond promptly to invitations.
- Accept only if you have the expertise and time.
- Disclose conflicts of interest (financial, institutional, personal, or academic).
- Decline if you cannot provide a fair, unbiased, or timely review.

During Review

- Read the manuscript and journal instructions thoroughly.
- Keep all materials strictly confidential.
- Seek clarification if needed; notify the journal of new conflicts.
- Base feedback solely on the merits of the work.
- Report ethical concerns (plagiarism, misconduct) to the journal only.

Preparing the Report

- Provide balanced, constructive, and respectful feedback.
- Support critiques with evidence and references.
- Suggest essential vs. optional revisions clearly.
- Respect authors' voice and language; avoid rewriting in your own style.
- Ensure the report reflects your own work, not someone else's.

After the Review

- Continue to maintain confidentiality.
- Respond to journal follow-up requests promptly.
- Update the journal if new information arises.

- Review revised versions when possible.

✅ By following this code, reviewers help ensure fairness, trust, and integrity in scholarly publishing.

PEER REVIEWER GUIDELINES

Thank you for serving as a peer reviewer for the *Online Learning* Journal (OLJ). Your expertise is essential to maintaining the journal's commitment to high-quality, evidence-based scholarship in online, blended, and digital learning environments. This guide outlines expectations, evaluation criteria, and best practices to support a rigorous and constructive peer review process.

Aim and Scope of *Online Learning*

Online Learning (OLJ) publishes original research on online and blended learning primarily in higher education contexts. It is an international, open-access, peer-reviewed publication that features research, reviews, and perspectives on online, blended, and digital learning. We highlight scholarship that bridges pedagogy, emerging technologies, policy, and practice to support innovation and continuous improvement in online education.

Purpose of Peer Review

The peer review process ensures that published research:

- Advances knowledge in online and digital learning
- Demonstrates methodological and theoretical rigor
- Contributes meaningfully to practice, policy, or future research
- Aligns with OLJ's mission to promote quality and innovation in online learning

Accepting a Peer Review Assignment

Before accepting a review, peer reviewers should:

- **Respond promptly** to the invitation, especially if declining, and avoid intentional delays.
- **Assess subject expertise** honestly. Accept only if qualified to evaluate the entire manuscript or clearly state which parts fall within their expertise.
- **Confirm availability**, accepting the assignment only if they can complete it within the proposed or agreed timeline. If circumstances change, notify the journal promptly.
- **Declare potential conflicts of interest** (personal, financial, professional, institutional, etc.) and seek guidance from the journal if unsure.
- **Follow** conflict of interest policies provided by the journal. If guidance is unclear, disclose if:

    - They work at the same institution as an author.
    - They are applying to or joining the author's institution.
    - They have recently (e.g., within 3 years) collaborated with, mentored, or been mentored by an author.
    - They have a close personal relationship with any author.

- **Decline the assignment** if the intention is solely to view the manuscript without providing a review.
- **Avoid recommending alternative reviewers** for reasons of personal bias or to influence review outcomes.
- **Review afresh any manuscript** previously reviewed for another journal, as content and evaluation criteria may have changed.

Declining an Assignment

Reviewers should **decline** a review if:

- They cannot provide a fair, unbiased, and timely review.
- They have been involved in the research or its reporting.
- They are working on a very similar manuscript that is under consideration elsewhere.
- They cannot comply with the journal's review model (e.g., open review, signed reviews) due to personal or professional constraints.

Reviewer Responsibilities

As a peer reviewer, you are expected to:

1. Conduct an Ethical and Objective Review

- Evaluate submissions **fairly and solely on scholarly merit**, without bias related to the authors' identity, affiliations, or characteristics.
- Provide **constructive, respectful feedback** to help authors improve, even when recommending rejection.
- Refrain from hostile, inflammatory, libelous, or derogatory comments.

2. Maintain Confidentiality

- Respect the confidentiality of the review process and **do not disclose** any manuscript content or review details during or after the process, except as permitted by the journal.

- **Never impersonate another individual** during the review process; such misconduct is taken seriously.
- **Do not upload any assigned manuscript to generative AI** (e.g. ChatGPT). This violates the author's intellectual property rights and COPE ethical guidelines.

3. Disclose Conflicts of Interest

- Proactively declare any actual or perceived conflicts of interest and recuse yourself if appropriate.

4. Honor Timelines and Commitments

- Complete reviews **within the journal's requested timeframe** (typically 2–4 weeks).
- Recognize that peer review is a **reciprocal responsibility** and strive to contribute your fair share.

Review Structure

Your review should include the following three components:

1. Overall Recommendation

Select one of the following options:

- **Accept submission**
- **Revisions required** (the paper will not be published until satisfactory revisions are made and reviewed by an Associate Editor for the journal)
- **Resubmit for review** (this triggers a complete new review process and should only be selected if the manuscript shows promise)
- **Decline submission**

How to choose:

Decision Option	Explanation	When to Choose
Accept Submission	The manuscript is ready for publication as is.	• The writing is clear and professional. • Methods and conclusions are sound. • The work makes a strong contribution and aligns with the

		journal's aims.
Revisions Required	The manuscript is fundamentally sound but needs revision. An Associate Editor will review the changes, not external reviewers.	• The core research is solid. • Issues like clarity, citation gaps, or minor methodological flaws can be addressed. • Fixable in a reasonable timeframe.
Resubmit for Review	The manuscript shows promise but requires substantial reworking. A full new review process will be initiated.	• The topic is valuable, but the paper needs major changes. • Significant improvement in structure, theory, or methods is needed. • Worth reconsidering later.
Decline Submission	The manuscript is not suitable for publication. It has serious flaws or lacks relevance, rigor, or originality.	• The work is fundamentally unsound or poorly executed. • Major issues cannot be resolved through revision. • It does not fit the journal's scope. • It does not uniquely add to the body of literature on the topic.

2. Confidential Comments to the Editor *(optional)*

Use this section to share any concerns, conflicts of interest, or context that may not be appropriate to communicate directly to the author (e.g., ethical issues, concerns about originality, or potential conflicts).

3. Comments to the Author

This section is shared with the author. It should be constructive, specific, and professional. Please include:

- A brief **summary of the article** and its contributions.

- An overview of the **strengths** of the submission.
- **Specific areas for improvement**, such as theoretical grounding, clarity of writing, methodology, data analysis, or alignment with the journal's scope.
- **Actionable suggestions** for strengthening the manuscript

Evaluation Criteria

Use the following dimensions to guide your assessment:

Criteria	Guiding Questions
Relevance to OLJ Audience	Does the submission address topics central to online, blended, or digital learning? Does it fit the aim and scope of the journal?
Originality and Contribution	Does the manuscript offer new insights, frameworks, or findings?
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework	Is there a clear and relevant theoretical basis or conceptual grounding?
Methodological Rigor	Are methods appropriate, clearly described, and soundly executed?
Clarity and Organization	Is the manuscript logically structured and clearly written?
Evidence and Support	Are claims supported by data, literature, or analysis?
Implications for Practice/Research	Are the findings applicable, useful, or insightful for researchers, practitioners, or policymakers?

Tone and Professionalism

Peer reviewer comments should reflect professionalism and collegiality. Reviewers are expected to:

- **Use respectful, scholarly language** throughout the review.
- **Provide constructive feedback**, particularly when suggesting revisions or recommending rejection.
- **Avoid personal remarks**, including hostile, inflammatory, libelous, or dismissive comments.
- You are welcome to provide **in-text comments**, but please remember to blind the

document before uploading it to the review portal.

Ethical Considerations

Reviewers must adhere to the highest ethical standards. Please avoid the following:

- **Using ideas or information from the manuscript** for personal, professional, or organizational gain, or to disadvantage or discredit others.
- **Contacting the author(s)** directly at any point during or after the review process.
- **Discussing the manuscript** with others or sharing its contents outside of the designated review system.
- **Misrepresenting your credentials** by providing inaccurate or misleading personal or professional information, including subject expertise.

Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions about your review assignment, deadlines, or journal scope, please contact the OLJ editorial team.

Principles of Peer Review Conduct (Aligned with COPE Standards)

1. General Responsibilities

- Recognize that peer reviewers play a vital role in safeguarding the integrity of the scholarly record and are bound by ethical obligations.
- Accept review invitations only if you have the appropriate subject expertise and can complete the review within the agreed timeframe.
- Conduct reviews objectively, constructively, and respectfully, avoiding hostility, bias, or derogatory remarks. Feedback should be clear, evidence-based, and helpful to authors.
- Respect the confidentiality of manuscripts: do not disclose, use, or share any information gained through the review for personal advantage or to discredit others.
- Declare all potential conflicts of interest (financial, institutional, professional, personal, or academic rivalries), seeking guidance from the journal when in doubt.
- Respect intellectual property rights by acknowledging the originality of the work and recognizing the contributions of others.
- Provide accurate personal and professional information and never impersonate another reviewer.
- Acknowledge that peer review is reciprocal and commit to doing your fair share of timely reviews.
- Uphold the highest ethical standards, ensuring fairness, integrity, and respect throughout the review process.

2. When Approached to Review

- Respond promptly to invitations, especially if declining, so as not to delay the editorial process.
- Accept only if you can provide a fair, unbiased, and timely review.
- Clarify the scope of your expertise if you can assess only part of the manuscript.
- Disclose all conflicts of interest, including close collaborations, institutional ties, or personal relationships with authors.
- Re-review manuscripts afresh if previously reviewed for another journal, as both manuscripts and evaluation criteria may differ.
- Suggest alternative reviewers only when appropriate, ensuring recommendations are free from personal bias or manipulation.
- Decline to review if you cannot provide an impartial evaluation, if you are involved with the work, or if you have a competing manuscript under preparation.

- Decline if you object to the peer-review model used by the journal (e.g., open review).

- Never accept a review simply to gain early access to the manuscript.

3. During the Review

- Immediately inform the journal of any new conflicts of interest or inability to provide an unbiased review.
- Read the manuscript, supplemental materials, and journal instructions thoroughly; request clarification or missing items if needed.
- Do not involve others (e.g., mentees) in the review without prior journal approval and acknowledge any contributions appropriately.
- Maintain confidentiality of the manuscript and review materials.
- Notify the journal promptly if delays arise, providing a realistic revised timeline. Timely reviews are essential to the dissemination of research and authors' careers.
- Report suspected ethical issues (e.g., plagiarism, duplicate submissions, misconduct) confidentially to the journal without conducting your own investigation.
- Avoid intentionally prolonging the review process or requesting unnecessary information.
- Ensure your assessment is based solely on the merits of the work, avoiding bias or undue influence from external factors.
- Do not contact authors directly without the journal's permission.

4. Preparing the Report

- Provide a fair, balanced, and constructive evaluation of the manuscript's strengths and weaknesses.
- Follow journal guidelines for report format, content, and structure.
- Indicate clearly if you were asked to review only specific sections.
- Support critical statements with evidence and references where relevant.
- Suggest improvements for clarity, accuracy, or rigor, but avoid rewriting the manuscript in your own style.
- Phrase feedback respectfully, being sensitive to authors writing in a second language.
- Differentiate between essential revisions needed to support claims and optional suggestions that would extend the work.
- Ensure the report reflects your own assessment and is not prepared by another person.

5. After the Review

- Continue to keep all manuscript details confidential.
- Respond promptly to follow-up queries from the journal.

- Notify the journal if new information arises that could affect your review or recommendation.

- Review feedback from other reviewers, when provided, to strengthen your own understanding and practice.
- Be willing to review revised or resubmitted versions of manuscripts you have previously assessed.

What OLJ Looks for: 10 Key Elements of a Strong Submission

Use this guide as a reviewer or editor to evaluate whether a manuscript meets the standards of the *Online Learning* Journal *(OLJ)*. Each criterion aligns with OLJ's mission of publishing rigorous, impactful, and well-structured research in the field of online education.

1. Manuscript Length and Rigor

- OLJ publishes manuscripts that are **thorough and research-rich**. Papers under **3,000 words** typically lack sufficient depth in the literature review, discussion, or methods sections.
- Conversely, papers exceeding **10,000 words** violate OLJ's submission requirements and risk being unfocused or repetitive.
- **Ideal range**: 3,500–9,500 words (including references), depending on study design and complexity.

2. APA 7th Edition Compliance

- All submissions must strictly follow **APA 7th Edition** style. Watch for:
    - No grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors (especially ensure U.S. English spelling).
    - Correct formatting for section headings:
        - **Level 1**: Centered, bold (e.g., Introduction)
        - **Level 2**: Left-aligned, bold or italic, per APA rules
    - Required sections present and clearly labeled:
        - Abstract
        - Keywords
        - Introduction
        - Literature Review
        - Research Questions / Hypotheses
        - Methods
        - Results
        - Discussion
        - Conclusion
        - References
    - Tables and figures embedded in the text, numbered, and labeled appropriately.

3. **Original Contribution to the Literature**
    - The manuscript should offer a **unique and meaningful addition** to the field.
    - If the stated contribution is vague or duplicates well-established findings, it may signal a weak or outdated literature review.
    - Rule of thumb for ed tech and pedagogy: the majority of cited works should be **within the last 5 years**, except for foundational theory (e.g., Bandura for Social Learning Theory).

4. **Clarity and Alignment of Research Questions**
        - Research questions should:
            - Be clearly stated, logically framed, and tied to identified gaps in the literature.
            - Imply a specific method of analysis.
            - Clearly indicate **what is being measured**, **which group(s) are being compared**, and **expected outcomes**.

    - Red flag: Vague or exploratory questions that sound like "What happens if we run [test] on [data]?"
    - Hypotheses (if present) should be **directional**, **precise**, and **testable**.

5. **Transparency and Appropriateness of Methods**
    - Look for:
        - Clearly described methodology, aligned with research questions.
        - Sampling procedures, sample sizes, and recruitment strategies.
        - Instrumentation: Are tools cited and validated? If newly created, is validation described?
        - Are any methods mentioned only once and not tied to results?

If you're confused at any point in this section, chances are **key details are missing**.

6. **Transparency and Reproducibility of Statistical Analysis**

Ethical research includes **complete statistical transparency**. Manuscripts should:

- Clearly state the **type of test**, the **data used**, and the **outcome value** (e.g., p, t, F, r, β).
- Include **reliability coefficients** (e.g., Cronbach's α, interrater reliability) for all relevant instruments or coding schemes.
- Provide enough detail to allow replication of the analysis.

Tip: If the test used is vague (e.g., "a correlation"), look for specific type (e.g., Pearson's r). For t-tests, is it one-tailed or two-tailed? Match these details to the research questions.

7. How to Spot Questionable or Misused Statistics

You don't need to redo the stats to detect problems—just apply these logic checks:

- **Confidence intervals and p-values must agree**:
  If a confidence interval (CI) includes 0, the result should *not* be statistically significant. If it excludes 0, the result *should* be significant.
- **Inverse relationships**:
  Higher test values (t, F, r, β) should yield lower p-values, assuming equal degrees of freedom.
- **Categorical data misused**:
  Nominal variables like gender cannot be averaged or treated as interval data.
- **Standard deviations (SD) matter**:
  - SD = 0? No variation—analysis is meaningless.
  - SD extremely high? Possibly bimodal or non-normal data—check assumptions.

Detecting poor statistical reasoning is one of the fastest ways to identify a flawed or unpublishable paper.

8. Robust and Reflective Discussion Section

A strong **Discussion** should:

- Revisit and explain each major result in **plain language**.
- Tie findings to both **similar** and **contrasting** literature.
- Reconnect with the **Literature Review** to reinforce contribution.
- Identify **limitations** and corresponding **areas for future research**.
- Demonstrate a deep understanding of the study's implications.

If the Discussion feels short, overly general, or fails to address findings in depth, it likely needs revision.

9. Logical and Evidence-Based Conclusions

- A paper's **Conclusion** should flow directly from the:
  - Research Questions
  - Methods
  - Results
- If the conclusions stretch beyond the evidence presented, or don't align with the findings, the paper needs clarification or revision.

10. References: Breadth, Depth, and Accuracy

- Check the **number** and **range** of references:
  - 20–30 references is typical for a robust study.
  - Include both **foundational** and **recent** sources (last 5 years preferred).

- Confirm:

    - All **DOI links work** and lead to correct sources.
    - All cited authors and journal titles are correctly formatted in **APA 7**.
    - The reference list accurately reflects the **citations used** in the paper.
- A sloppy reference section is a red flag for poor scholarly rigor.

A brief primer on Stats and what to look for in Methods and Results sections

Confidence Intervals

Confidence intervals (CIs) approximately represent how much, and in which direction, a value from a statistical test shows that the data deviates from the null hypothesis (i.e. no significant difference, which is represented as 0). They should always be presented with 2 specific aspects:

1. An lower bound and an upper bound.
2. A percent value indicating the probability that the true mean/population mean falls within the range denoted by the upper and lower bounds. (This correlates with the value of *p* that is considered statistically significant, so it should be a 95% CI or higher.)

As we only have access to the means/correlations/other data provided by the sample, we cannot know what the data would say if we could include the entire population into a study. However, given the sample, we can estimate and calculate the probability that the population differs from our null hypothesis, or the probability that there is/would be an effect for whatever the focus of the study is. The upper bound and lower bound presented with a CI are estimates of how much the population would differ from the null hypothesis, or 0, given the sample data. Thus, if a CI contains 0, it is essentially saying that the population mean could very well not be different from the null hypothesis. If a 95% CI does not contain 0, it is saying that the researchers can claim, with more than 95% certainty, that the population mean differs from the null hypothesis.

Let's see a simple example. Say we sent out a survey asking whether or not someone likes music on a 5-point Likert scale, and divide that out by whether the person identified as a man or a woman to see if there is a significant difference based on gender. The table below describes the mean responses with standard deviations, the value of the t-test performed, the upper and lower CI bounds, and the resulting *p* value.

	Men *M*	Women *M*	*t*	95% CI: Lower Bound	95% CI: Upper Bound	*p*
Do you like music?	4.23	4.46	1.22	-0.23	0.56	.24

The lower bound of the 95% CI is negative, while the upper bound is positive; therefore, the CI contains 0 and the *p* value is greater than 0.05, meaning this test is not statistically significant. Seems legitimate, right?

Well, let's look a little closer. There are two crucial pieces of information I did not give you in this table that you would need to know to be able to recreate this test on your own and get the same result. That would be the degrees of freedom.

Degrees of Freedom

The larger the sample, the more data that can be used to estimate and the more confident researchers can be that the effects they see would hold true in the wider population. Thus, a larger sample size leads to more **degrees of freedom** (df). This value is crucial in determining the threshold of significance for many statistical tests. In other words, df determines the minimum value of t, F, r, or other value that results from a test that will be significant.

There are tables describing these thresholds for various tests, but it is not necessary to have all of these memorized to use df to your benefit when analyzing a paper for proper statistical methods. For example, let's add df (the value next to the t) and a second question to that table above. See if you can spot what is suspect:

	Men *M*	Women *M*	*t (67)*	95% CI: Lower Bound	95% CI: Upper Bound	*p*
Do you like music?	4.23	4.46	1.22	-0.23	0.56	.24
Do you like sports?	4.63	3.87	-2.14	-0.65	0.07	.27

The suspect value in the above table is the *p* value for the "Do you like sports?" question. The absolute value of the t value is higher (2.14 > 1.22), yet the *p* value is higher. This would be possible if the degrees of freedom were inconsistent, yet the df value is 67 for both. Because df is constant, the threshold of significance of the t value is held constant, so it holds that **the same t value will always correspond to the same p value.** This is true for any test where the df is constant. Therefore, either the *p* value was entered incorrectly, or the authors are intentionally manipulating the values in the table. Either way, papers with these errors should be sent back for revision or outright rejected if they are blatant enough like in this case.

Now, let's cover the importance of the other factor I have yet to give you. Let's rearrange the values for that sports question a bit:

	Men *M*	Women *M*	*t (67)*	95% CI: Lower Bound	95% CI: Upper Bound	*p*
Do you like music?	4.23	4.46	1.22	-0.23	0.56	.24
Do you like sports?	4.46	4.23	-0.75	-0.74	0.35	.32

If you're scratching your head at that table, good! Given an equivalent difference in means, the t value, CI, and p values are completely different. How does that work?

Standard Deviation

The one value I did not provide for you in this table is the standard deviation (SD) of the responses. A standard deviation should be provided alongside **any** mean provided in a paper, for the precise reason that it has a drastic impact on the results of statistical tests like shown above. It approximately represents how far responses tend to deviate from the mean value. As such, the higher the standard deviation, the less sure we can be that the mean is an accurate measure of responses. This will lead to a lower value in the statistical test, a wider CI, and a higher *p* value.

So, let's plug in the SD values to that table and finally complete it:

	Men *M (SD)*	Women *M (SD)*	*t (67)*	95% CI: Lower Bound	95% CI: Upper Bound	*p*
Do you like music?	4.23 (0.53)	4.46 (0.43)	1.22	-0.23	0.56	.24
Do you like sports?	4.46 (0.62)	4.23 (0.93)	-0.75	-0.74	0.35	.32

The standard deviations for the responses to the sports question are higher, making estimation of the population mean more difficult, leading to a lower t value and all the downstream effects discussed above. Now, you have what you need to exactly recreate my results. However, this data is completely made up; if you found a dataset that gave these exact values and could perfectly recreate it, that would be a coincidence for the ages!

Standard deviation can also be a good indicator of the quality of the data. For instance, if the SD is higher than the mean, this is often an indicator of poor quality data or data that is highly bifurcated. As many statistical tests assume a normal distribution of data, this high SD would indicate that parametric tests may not be wise to use on the data at hand.

Assumptions of Tests

Now we will cover some basic assumptions of common statistical tests like t-tests, ANOVAs, and linear regressions. It can be challenging to detect if these are broken without taking an in-depth look at the paper, but there are things we can do. Let's cover them:

Equality/Homogeneity of Variance

This is perhaps the easiest to detect of the main 3 assumptions. The assumption is that, when comparing groups on a measure, the variance in those groups on that measure is equal. Assuming standard deviations are provided, which again they very much should be, looking at these can give you an idea as to whether or not the assumption of equality of variance holds true, as standard deviation is just the square root of variance. If one group has a wildly different standard deviation than the other, this may be an indication that equality of variance is broken. It is on the researcher to determine whether this assumption holds by running a Levene's test for equality of variance, but it is only on them to report it if that test is significant (meaning that the assumption is broken). So, if the researcher does not report a Levene's test, this could mean that the test was non-significant, or it could mean that they did not run it. Double check the standard deviations to ensure that this assumption is true for any parametric tests.

Normality

This is the assumption that data collected follow a normal distribution (the bell curve), which applies to t-tests and ANOVAs. As with equality of variance, there are tests to determine if this holds. Typically, researchers run a Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test or look at the skew and kurtosis values of their data to determine whether this assumption holds true. If the KS test is significant ($p < .05$), the skew value is outside the range of -2.0–+2.0, or if the kurtosis value is outside the range of -7.0–+7.0, the assumption of normality is broken. Again, researchers are only required to report if this is the case, not when it is not. This is more difficult to detect, but is possible. Standard deviations come in handy again, with the same case that an abnormally large standard deviation can be an indication of non-normally distributed data. A second piece of information you can use to detect normality, while rarely provided, is the median. In a normal distribution, a median is very similar to a mean, so there is little point in providing it. This is not the case for non-normally distributed data; the median will differ greatly from the mean especially if the skew value is high.

Linearity

As implied by the name “linear” regression, this test and similar ones like Pearson correlations assume a linear relationship between variables being assessed (so $y \propto x$, rather than $y \propto x^2$, $y \propto \log_x$, or other). This can potentially be seen visually if a scatter plot of the data is provided. Otherwise, if the full dataset is not provided, this can be very difficult to detect.

Microsoft Word document blinding instructions

Here's a set of step-by-step instructions for **blinding Word documents** (removing author-identifying information) for both **PC (Windows)** and **Mac** systems using current versions of Microsoft Word (typically Word 2019, 2021, or Office 365).

🔒 **How to Blind a Word Document**
(Remove identifying information before submitting for peer review)

🖥️ **On a PC (Windows)**
✅ **Step 1: Remove Author Info from Document Properties**

1. Open the document in **Microsoft Word**.
2. Click on **File** → **Info**.
3. Click **Check for Issues** → **Inspect Document**.
4. In the **Document Inspector** window, ensure **Document Properties and Personal Information** is checked.
5. Click **Inspect**.
6. Click **Remove All** next to any personal information found (e.g., author name, document properties).
7. Click **Close**, then **Save** the document.

✅ **Step 2: Check for Identifying Info in the Text**

- Search the document manually for your **name**, **institution**, **acknowledgments**, or **self-citations**.
- Replace with [Author], [Institution], or anonymize as appropriate.

✅ **Step 3: Remove Author from Comments or Track Changes**

1. Go to the **Review** tab.
2. In **Track Changes**, click the drop-down next to **Show Markup → Reviewers**.
3. Make sure only one name appears, then:
    - Click **File → Options → General**.
    - Under **Personalize your copy of Microsoft Office**, change the **User name** and **Initials** to something generic (e.g., "Reviewer").
    - Click OK.
4. Save the document with the revised information.

🍎 **On a Mac (macOS)**

✅ **Step 1: Remove Author Info from Document Properties**

1. Open the document in **Microsoft Word**.
2. Click **Tools → Protect Document → Remove personal information from this file on save**.
    - If that doesn't appear, go to **File → Properties**.
    - Under the **Summary** tab, delete any personal information (e.g., Author, Company).
3. Save the document.

✅ **Step 2: Inspect the Document (Manually)**

Unlike Windows, the Document Inspector is limited on Mac:

- Manually search for your name, institution, and self-citations.
- Replace identifying text with [Author] or [Institution].

✅ **Step 3: Remove Identifiers in Comments and Track Changes**

1. Go to **Word** → **Preferences** → **User Information**.
2. Change the **Name** and **Initials** to something neutral (e.g., "Reviewer").
3. Save the document.
4. If you've used **Track Changes**, consider accepting all changes to avoid embedded identifiers:
    - Go to **Review** → **Accept All Changes and Stop Tracking**.

💾 **Final Step (Both Systems)**

- Save the document with a **generic filename**, e.g., Manuscript_Blinded.docx
- Double-check by reopening the file to ensure no identifying metadata or content remains.