



Our journey as intern junior editors at the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*

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Introduction

The peer review process constitutes a fundamental pillar of scientific publishing. Defined as the critical evaluation of manuscripts by experts in the same research field [1,2], it serves to ensure—and improve—the quality, credibility, and transparency of submitted articles. Nonetheless, several issues have been raised regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the peer review process. These include insufficient time that can be allocated to review manuscripts, the difficulty of detecting missing information, disparities between the priorities of editors and reviewers regarding crucial assessment points, inducing delay in publication, reviewers feeling disrespected due to their time being wasted, and some journals fostering a culture where editors merely summarize the reviews [1,3,4].

Some interventions have been successfully implemented by editors to improve the peer review process. Notably, researchers have experimentally investigated the effectiveness of a two-step peer review system that involved early-career researchers (ECRs) in the process [5]. The authors found that trained ECRs exhibited greater accuracy than the usual peer review process (i.e., evaluation by an expert in the field) in identifying inadequate reporting in manuscripts describing randomized controlled trials. However, this system requires recruiting ECRs to review each submitted manuscript, which can be time-consuming and not very rewarding for ECRs, who find their roles relegated to ticking boxes on a checklist.

The aim of this essay is to provide an overview and share feedback on the intern junior editor position that was introduced at the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* (JEP:HPP; <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/xhp>) in 2023. This initiative has the potential to improve the peer review process by reducing the review time and help ensure the presence of essential information, while being beneficial for all parties (i.e., authors, editors, and ECRs).

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Implementation of the Initiative

The intern junior editor position was created in 2023 on the initiative of the *JEP:HPP* Editor-in-Chief Isabel Gauthier, with the aim of helping with the preliminary review process, prior to external evaluation by reviewers. *JEP:HPP* is a subscription-based journal that publishes studies on perception, control of action, perceptual aspects of language processing, and related cognitive processes under the auspices of the American Psychological Association (APA). This pre-external review process was implemented by the editor-in-chief as a way to streamline the editorial process for the associate editors and reviewers. First conducted by the editor-in-chief alone, the pre-external review process can be time-consuming and was recognized as a unique opportunity for ECRs to deepen their understanding of the scientific publishing process and establish a foothold within the editorial sphere. The junior editor internship constituted a nonrenewable 1-year position, with an honorary stipend of US \$1,500. The three authors of the present work were the first to hold this position during the calendar year 2023, while they were postdoctoral fellows.

As intern junior editors, our mission was to assess whether the submitted manuscripts aligned with the journal mission, which is to “provide strong tests of broadly important theoretical hypotheses” (Fig. 1). In addition, we examined compliance with the journal instructions for authors following a regularly updated verification guide generated by the editor-in-chief, such as adherence to APA formatting, the inclusion of a power analysis, and the presence of a “Transparency and Openness”

subsection. We could also highlight concerns that authors might address to strengthen their submission (e.g., difficult-to-follow sentences, the presence of self-plagiarism, or a lack of pagination). It is important to note that neither the editor-in-chief nor associate editors expected us to flag *every* issue, and this process was not meant to be punitive to authors. Rather, the intention was to assist authors with submitting the best version of their manuscript for external evaluation to reviewers in order to enhance the quality of the subsequent editing process.

This pre-external review process focused on the adequacy, transparency, clarity, and internal consistency of the manuscript and did not require expertise in the specific research field of the content. However, if grounded in our area of expertise, we had the opportunity to comment on manuscripts to provide associate editors with preliminary feedback. Such input complemented the subsequent efforts of external reviewers and assisted associate editors in making informed decisions. In addition, pre-external review was a linear and transparent process, as associate editors had visibility into the communication between the intern junior editors and authors once the manuscript was forwarded to them. If necessary, ambiguous aspects of the study or points requiring particular attention were highlighted and directly transmitted from intern junior editors to associate editors. Finally, if we deemed a manuscript inadequate for further editorial processing, thus requiring a desk-reject decision, the work would be reviewed by the editor-in-chief to ensure fairness and rigor in the process, for the sake of both the authors and the editorial office.

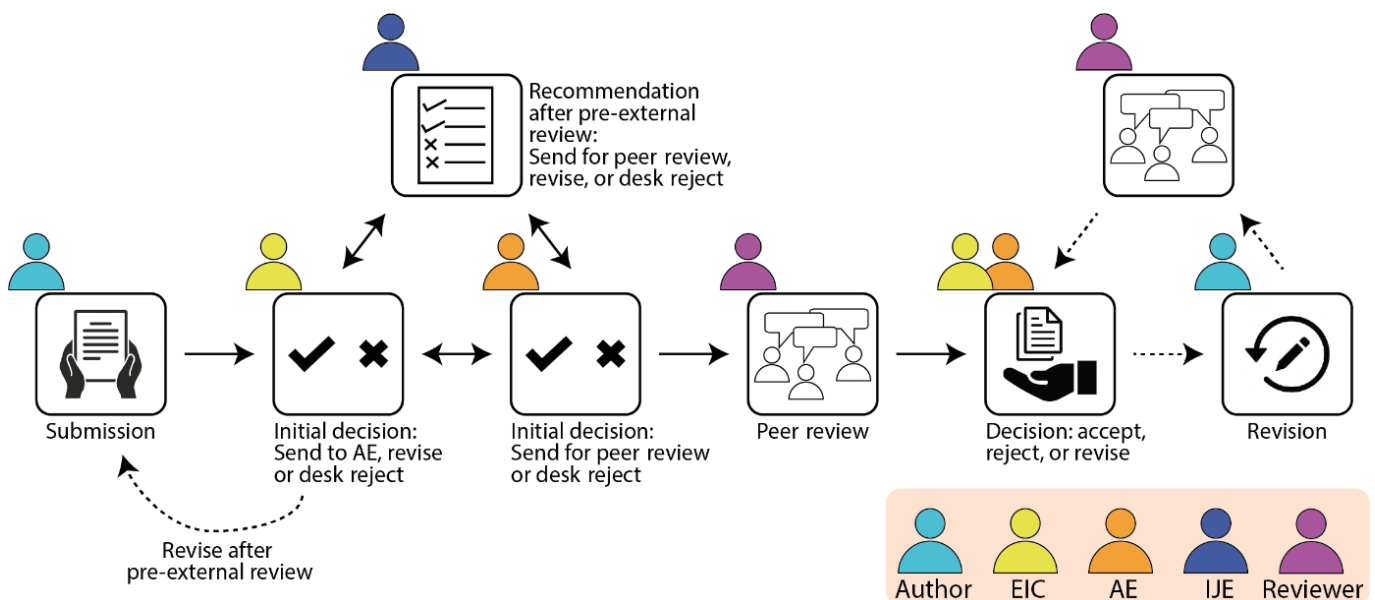


Fig. 1. Workflow of academic publication with intern junior editors (IJE). EIC, editor-in-chief; AE, associate editor.

Regarding the workload, we had a maximum of four pre-external reviews to perform per month and per intern junior editor, which could be easily integrated into our work schedule. Once well-established, the pre-external review process typically required approximately 1 hour per submitted article. However, it should be noted that if only one intern junior editor had been involved, the monthly time commitment for the task would have risen considerably, potentially becoming unmanageable. The ideal number of intern junior editors depends on the number and quality of submissions (approximately 30 articles are submitted per month to *JEP:HPP*). We also had one meeting per month with the editor-in-chief, sometimes including the associate editors, to discuss various editorial-related matters and possible ways of improving the review process for authors.

Advantages of the Initiative

The pre-external review process adopted by *JEP:HPP* offers benefits to all parties, spanning from the intern junior editors to the associated editors and authors.

Benefits for the authors

The authors receive quick feedback regarding the appropriateness of their submission, usually within three workdays. This expedites the review timeline, as most key details (e.g., public significance statement, demographics, effect sizes) are included in the manuscript sent to external reviewers, which can result in fewer rounds of review and a lower probability of rejection. In addition, authors can showcase their work in a better form—thus increasing the likelihood of eventual publication—in terms of format, writing style, technical precision, and conceptual framing (i.e., *JEP:HPP* requires published articles to make a strong and clearly articulated theoretical contribution). In addition, even if the manuscript is desk rejected, we offer considerably more feedback to authors than would be the case in a standard procedure. This constructive advice can then be used by the authors to improve their work when submitting it to another journal.

Benefits for the journal and the scientific publication process

When intern junior editors verify the presence of the information necessary to ensure a smooth reviewing process, the associate editors and reviewers are relieved from tasks not requiring their specific research expertise. In terms of cost for *JEP:HPP* and the editor-in-chief, the position requires minimal training because intern junior editors already have substantial experience with the scientific publication process (the position is for senior PhD students and postdoctoral fellows).

In addition, the stipends for three to five intern junior editors are outweighed by the time and efficiency gains for all others involved in the editorial process.

The pre-external review process can contribute to advancing open science by ensuring that the study materials, data, metadata, and (pre)processing codes are accessible and easily usable. Currently, there exists considerable variability in open practices [6], in part because these assessments rely on the specific reviewers assigned to a manuscript, who can have different levels of expectations. Ensuring this task is systematically conducted as part of the pre-external review will lead to consistency in applying these minimal open research standards, ultimately bolstering wider and standardized adoption of open research practices.

The pre-external review process has the potential to cultivate more transparent statistical reporting. As part of the process, we assessed the inclusion of a robust power analysis (including the rationale for the chosen effect size) for each study in the manuscript. We also verified that statistics, along with their effect sizes, were adequately reported for all hypothesis tests, including those yielding non-significant results. Moreover, we scrutinized assertions to guard against overly expansive claims, such as conclusions regarding the absence of an effect based on the absence of evidence.

Benefits for the intern junior editors

It is important to note first that the intern junior editors were selected with a commitment to diversity in various aspects, aiming to enhance the presence of underrepresented individuals, areas, or countries within the peer review process. The intern junior editor position was an opportunity to expand our network with leading experts in our research field through meetings with the associate editors. Being intern junior editors also allowed us, as ECRs, to gain knowledge on the scientific publishing process and to influence the policies at *JEP:HPP* by raising concerns and suggestions with the editor-in-chief. In addition, the position represented an opportunity to gain valuable diplomatic, analytical, and critical thinking skills. These skills and experience have been and will be useful both in our own research practice and potential future roles as scientific editors. We believe that the intern junior editor position is highly conducive to gaining experience through working in synergy with, and learning from, an editor-in-chief and associate editors, ultimately providing the scientific community with a cohort of more experienced young editors.

At the midpoint of our period as intern junior editors, each of us was afforded the chance to undertake the editing of an article at *JEP:HPP* under the wings of the editor-in-chief. Specifically, we assumed the role of associate editors, taking on the responsibility of the entire review process, while receiving

guidance and feedback at each step of the process. The action letters were co-signed by the editor-in-chief. This experience proved invaluable in preparing us for prospective editorial roles. We firmly contend that such mentorship from experienced editors to ECRs is pivotal for passing on the torch to the next generation of journal editors.

Conclusion

The role of intern junior editor at *JEP:HPP* has afforded us valuable opportunities to enhance our communication skills through interactions with authors and reviewers, as well as to cultivate a meticulous approach to evaluating the transparency, clarity, and internal consistency of submitted manuscripts. The pre-external review process that we oversaw benefits authors, associate editors, reviewers, and ECRs. It helps to ensure a smooth review process and promotes open science practices. As we progress in our academic careers, the insights gleaned from our time as intern junior editors will undoubtedly serve as a solid foundation for our future roles as scientific editors.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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Data Availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Supplementary Materials

The authors did not provide any supplementary materials for this article.

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