

Unified Scholars and Publishers  
**Guide for Editors and Peer Reviewers. Updated 21/05/2024.**

General Information

As an editor or a peer reviewer on the Unified Scholars Platform (USP), you bear high responsibility for upholding the quality and standard of our scholarly publications. And as you take on this noble task, we (Unified Scholars & Publishers) would continue to support you with the best of digital technology to ease your work, and with basic payment for your time and expertise.

In return, we expect our journals to publish high quality research that you have reviewed and approved. We also expect our platform to build and retain a reputation for efficiency, fairness, honesty and integrity. And those depend on you and how you use the platform. Hence, we admonish our editors and peer reviewers to uphold the highest code of conduct and the highest quality standard whilst working on the platform.

Every user of the USP is expected to understand how the platform works. And this document has been specifically prepared to get editors and peer reviewers up to speed with the platform. This document is complementary to the demo videos and you are advised to watch the demo videos before reading this document. They could be found on our website here: <https://unifiedscholars.org/onboarding.html> .

Also, kindly read this document to the end. It is a very important document for you. Take your time to watch all the demo videos and then read this document again and again.

Registration and validation of editors and peer reviewers

To become an editor or a peer reviewer, you have to register on the main domain of the platform (<https://unifiedscholars.com>). On the registration form, you would select your "field of specialization", which should be the field where you have the highest competence to evaluate papers. After submission, we would receive your details and validate them. We have developed ways to validate registration data, to weed out fake registrations and dishonest registrants. Usually, we would validate your data within 24hrs, but it could take a few days if we have any doubts. In that case, we would email you to ask some questions.

If your account is approved, you would receive your login details. Kindly login and go to your dashboard. The tag at the bottom tells you your approved role. You could be

a reviewer or an editor, depending on your choice and your experiences. Peer reviewers would have a green tag marked "reviewers account"; while editors would have, in addition to the green tag, a blue tag marked "editor role". So, editors would have two tags, one of which is marked "editor role".

Kindly ensure you keep your login details safe. If, for any reason, you have difficulty logging into the platform, kindly email admin ([admin@unifiedscholars.org](mailto:admin@unifiedscholars.org)) from your registered email, and ask to reset your password. You would receive a new password in your registered email.

### Communication with editors and peer reviewers

The platform communicates with users (editors, peer reviewers, authors and publishers) by email. And there would be lots of email notifications to guide you as you use the platform, especially to guide the peer review process. We therefore encourage you to take our (Unified Scholars) emails very seriously. The platform is programmed to send you one reminder email, reminding you of your peer review commitment. But we do not want you to rely on our reminder email; so please read the emails as they come and set your reminders on Google calendar or other related applications. You are responsible for managing your own time and keeping to deadlines.

Your email address is a critical part of our communication and validation of you, hence we place emphasis on it when validating your registration. If you have registered with your official email address, then the validation of your details is much easier and you could be approved within a few hours. But if you have registered with ordinary email addresses like yahoo and gmail, then we would apply other validation techniques, which could take between a few hours and one day. If you wish to change your email address at any time, email admin your new email address and quote your 'user id' and 'field of specialization' in the email.

### Invitation to peer review

When a paper is submitted to the platform, you would receive an (invitation to peer review) email. Kindly login to the platform and check that paper; It is open for reviewers and editors. If you are highly competent in the research that the paper addresses, then you can commit to evaluate the paper.

Please, as highly educated scholars, we expect the highest standard of conduct and

integrity. Check the papers on the peer review page that are open for editors and peer reviewers, but you should only commit to papers that you are highly competent on, and that you have the time to evaluate. Since this is a paid service, and there are tens of other experts in your field, on the same platform, we encourage you to login as soon as you receive the invitation email and check the paper. You would only receive one "invitation to peer review" email. So the earlier you login, the better.

When you login, take your time to check you are highly competent in that paper's research before you commit. There is no rush; after committing, you would have 25 days to review that paper. The first step is to check the paper and commit; and you have to find time for this out of your busy schedule.

If you aren't competent in one paper, check the next paper that is available. There would be several of them. Do not commit to a paper that you cannot sufficiently evaluate, please.

Note also that peer review on the USP is geo-targeted. During submission of manuscripts, authors can choose how they want their papers to be peer reviewed. They can choose between a 'global peer review' or a 'regional peer review'. If they choose global peer review, scholars/experts from anywhere in the world can peer review the paper. But if they choose regional peer review, only experts from their region would be allowed to peer review the paper. This formal delineation in peer review is called the "geo-targeted peer review" and the platform implements it automatically. For you as an editor or a peer reviewer, feel free to commit to any available paper. The platform knows how it guides the peer review process.

### The Commit System

When you find a paper that you are competent to evaluate, the next thing is to commit to that paper. Since there are tens of experts on the platform who might be interested in evaluating that paper, we developed the commit system so that you need not worry about other scholars taking your place on that paper. So, committing to a paper reserves it for you to evaluate within 25 days; and you need not worry about other scholars evaluating the paper before you. Committing to a paper means it is yours to evaluate.

So, when you commit to a paper as a reviewer, and few other scholars somewhere also commit to that paper. The paper now has sufficient peer reviewers. One Dr. Smith, in his home, has just logged onto the platform and sees the script id, how

does he know that the paper is fully taken? How do other scholars in their respective offices know which papers are fully taken and which ones are available? The answer is simple! Look at the "commit lights" for each paper.

So, when you arrive on the peer review page, the first thing you should check is the commit lights for the papers. They tell you whether a paper is available for you to evaluate or whether it is fully taken by other scholars. In any case, check out other papers. They are all in your field of specialization.

### The Commit lights/indicator

On the peer review page, next to every script/paper) are two lights - a circular one and a square one. The circle represents the peer reviewers of that paper whilst the square represents the editor of that paper. And the colour on each shape passes a message to the appropriate group.

A red circle means that the paper has sufficient peer reviewers and no more reviewers are needed. A green circle means the paper is still open for reviewers and you are invited to commit. Similarly, a red square means the paper has an editor, whilst a green square means an editor is needed and you can commit to be an editor for that paper. Every paper would have these two lights, passing messages to editors and peer reviewers all over the world.

It is important that you understand this very simple and innovative commit system. As a guide, any RED light means FULL, and any GREEN means OPEN or is an invitation for you to commit and evaluate.

Reviewers on the platform should look at the circle colours, while Editors look at the square colour next to any paper of interest, to know whether it is fully taken or is available for you. Please watch the videos here:

<https://unifiedscholars.org/onboarding.html>

### How to commit

To commit, click [R], choose the appropriate option and confirm. You would receive an email that confirms your commitment. Then, your 25 days start counting from then onwards.

Please make sure you have the time before you commit to be a reviewer or an editor for a paper. Our platform is digitized and highly automated to process thousands of papers, and it is currently unable to process the cancellation of commitments to a paper. If for any reason, force majeure, you are unable to evaluate a committed

paper; you have to email admin with the full details. But we frown seriously at this. Hence, make sure you have the time and you are in good health, before you commit to a paper. We also strongly frown at late submission of feedback past the due date. So, feel free to commit, but be sure you can fulfill your commitment to a good standard and within the allotted time frame.

At the bottom of the dashboard are coloured tags which tell you your role. You are either an editor or a peer reviewer. And you commit and work according to your role. This means, an editor can only commit as an editor, and a peer reviewer can only commit as a peer reviewer. A peer reviewer would not be able to commit as an editor and vice versa. If you cannot perform in your role, kindly email admin asap. Or, if you want to switch roles, you would have to email admin to switch your roles, and perhaps show that you are competent in the other role you seek.

### Understanding the platform

The platform is well programmed and for now, we have not identified any error in its operations. It is decently fast, provided you are using a modern computer. But you need to allow it a few seconds to load because it is a web app, and because every click you make might cause the app to reload the database on the server. Also, when you complete a step, it might reload and take you to a different page. Keep an eye on the breadcrumbs to know what page it has taken you. And you could navigate back to the dashboard if you need another page rather than the page it shows you. Sometimes it may invalidate your token and log you out, forcing you to re-login. This usually happens when a page has changed and it wants you to refresh the page to get the latest version. So, do not worry about the log outs. It doesn't happen frequently.

Note that the "my commit" page looks very similar to the "peer review" page, but they are different. Keep an eye on the breadcrumbs to know which of them you are on.

The "my commit" page lists all the papers you have committed to. You need not memorize script id or search for scripts. When you are ready to evaluate your committed papers, just go to the "my commits" page and work from there. You need to be able to differentiate the "peer review" page from the "my commit" page.

If at any time, you feel something is off with the platform, kindly email the admin immediately. You can also send your feedback on the platform to the admin. We look forward to continuously improving the platform for your convenience. If there are features you want us to add or remove, feel free to let us know.

### The Review process

After committing, the editor has the first five days for his editorial checks (initial assessment) to decide on the suitability of a paper for peer review. Key questions for the editor are:

- A. Whether the paper falls within the field
- B. Whether the paper is worthy of publication.

If one answer is No, then an editor should reject the paper by entering his reasons in the text box and clicking decline. An editor's decline is a rejection.

If the paper is inappropriate or malicious, the editor should delete the paper from his review page bin.

On the other hand, if a paper is suitable for evaluation, then editors need do nothing but leave the paper on the platform to continue its review journey. After the editorial checks within the first 5 days, editors would use the next 20 days to edit the paper and submit to the platform.

On the other hand, the peer reviewers have the full 25days for thorough evaluation of the manuscript.

As a committed reviewer or editor for a paper, you are expected to evaluate that paper until it is accepted or rejected. This means you would review the paper (review1), and also check the revised or resubmitted paper (review2) to ensure the revisions you suggested have been effected. You would have 7 days to check resubmitted papers. If the revised/resubmitted paper is still not satisfactory, enter the areas for further revision in the feedback box and click revise, for the author to effect a second revision and resubmit (review3) before accepting or declining the paper. Each paper has three (3) review chances, but the first review (review1) is the main thorough review or evaluation. Review 2 and Review 3 are to check that the revisions were done satisfactorily. You wouldn't be submitting much feedback for review 2 and review 3; just note the areas you think the authors should revise and explain the revisions to be made.

Remember that as an editor and a reviewer, your role is to thoroughly evaluate papers and submit your feedback through the textbox and click options. The platform's algorithm controls the workflow and makes decisions for each paper based on the feedback you submitted. The exception is desk rejection of a paper by the editor.

Also and very importantly, if peer reviewers return to a paper that is of very low quality or out of scope and that has not been rejected by the committed editor, the

reviewers should state their reasons in the text box and decline that paper immediately, without wasting time on serious evaluation. Though we expect that the committed editor would have declined such a paper; but as a fail safe measure, a reviewer can decline very poor papers without wasting time on serious evaluation. There are three options to click when submitting your feedback- Approve, Revise and Decline. Any option you click, you would have to enter your reasons or feedback in the box.

- Click Approve if the paper you saw is good for publication as it is.
- Click Revise if the paper needs revisions.
- Click Decline if the paper is poor and is not worthy of publication as it is.

Editors should exercise caution when clicking the "decline" option, because an editor's decline is a rejection, and it terminates the peer review for that paper. So, if an editor must click decline at any stage of the review process, (s)he must be sure that the paper is no good to publish.

At the end of the review process, when a paper has been either accepted or rejected; the editor and peer reviewers would have their wallets credited with \$200 each.

#### Peer reviewer job description.

As a peer reviewer on the Unified Scholars Platform, your key responsibilities are:

- a. Check that research papers are within the scope/field
- b. Evaluate articles for quality and completeness
- c. Evaluate for validity and accuracy.
- d. Fact check any claims made in the article
- e. Identifying plagiarism, ethical breaches, research fraud, etc.
- f. Suggest revisions and provide feedback to improve the paper.
- g. Check resubmitted papers for completeness and quality

If all revisions have been done and the paper is good for publishing, note it in the text box and click approve. If NO, then note the areas that need work and click revise again. You can access your earlier feedback report by clicking [F].

You are not expected to write unnecessarily long feedback reports. Just concise comments on all the revisions you want the author to make to improve the paper. Be

sure to convey sufficient information to guide the author.

As you evaluate the paper, please be on the lookout for plagiarism, data fraud, ethical breaches, duplication of topics, etc. And if you have any suspicions, contact admin immediately to request for the plagiarism originality report, approvals, permissions, etc. We expect you to be very thorough as you evaluate papers, and the Admin would support you to the fullest.

***Summary for peer reviewers- you would be checking the quality, accuracy, correctness and validity of submitted research papers; and submitting your constructive feedback in the text box. You would also check that the revised or resubmitted paper is good before approving, declining or requesting another revision.***

#### Editor job description

##### Editorial checks

Immediately after committing as an editor, your first responsibility is the initial assessment of the paper. And you should complete this stage within the first 5 days of commitment.

The key questions for you are -

- a. whether the paper is within scope/field.
- b. whether the paper is worthy of publication.

If one answer is NO, then the paper should be declined. State your reasons in the text box and decline the paper. An editor's decline is a rejection. And this initial assessment should be done within the first five days, lest we waste the peer reviewers time.

If the answer to both questions is Yes; then no action is taken. Leave the paper for peer review. Your job would be to refine it and prepare it for publication. And you would have the next 20 days for this.

##### Editing the paper

If a paper passes the initial assessment, then editors would have a further 20 days to edit the paper. Editors will:

- Fact-check any claims made in the material.
- Identify errors, inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and ambiguities in the text, and correct them.
- Evaluate the language structure, coherence, style, and tone of the written

material.

- Enhance the clarity, readability and overall flow of the text by restructuring sentences and moving paragraphs, ensuring that ideas flow logically and smoothly.
- Provide valuable feedback and guidance to writers, helping them to refine their ideas and express them more effectively.
- Editors would return an edited version of the paper. This would be attached to the review panel when submitting your feedback.
- Editors are also required to check the revised or resubmitted paper to ensure that all the suggestions have been effected. You can access your earlier feedback report by clicking [F].

If all revisions have been done, then note it in the text box and click approve. If no, then note the areas that need work and click revise again.

***Summary for editors- You would first check that a paper falls within scope/field and is worthy of publication. If no, decline. If yes, then over a few more weeks, you would edit the paper properly. You would validate its content, correct technical errors, enhance clarity and flow, and ensure that the ideas are presented in a logical manner. You would return the edited version of that paper, attach it when submitting your feedback. You would also check the revised or resubmitted paper to confirm it is good for publication, before you approve it.***

#### Quality assurance on the USP

The USP has a rigorous vetting system before peer reviewers and editors are approved for any field. We also have a system for reporting and flagging low quality feedbacks; which would trigger an assessment of the reported feedback. Editors have powers to outrightly reject a paper of very low quality and they can also delete inappropriate/malicious files that are uploaded to the platform.

There are also consequences for authors or reviewers/editors who are caught on the offending side. Hence, as a paying platform, we admonish everyone to uphold the highest standard of quality and conduct, across all roles and responsibilities. As a new platform, we seek to win the trust of scholars and to build a reputation for the quality of our service. And we expect you, who earns from the platform, to support us in this objective by upholding the integrity of our process.

#### Inappropriate conduct on the USP

Whilst we are happy to pay editors and peer reviewers for their time; we must advise that peer review shouldn't be seen as a money making venture. Hence, with or without pay, we expect scholars to still uphold the standard and integrity of our peer review process. The want of pay should not be a reason to review a low quality paper, which should have been declined outrightly. And the want of pay should not be a reason to rush up peer reviews in order to jump on the next paper. It shouldn't be a case of "many papers, more money". Instead, it should be a case of high quality service in the interest of academia. The money should not be the motivation factor; you are providing service for your colleagues and they expect the best from you, to improve their papers.

There is no restriction on the number of papers you can commit to and evaluate. But please make sure you have the expertise and competence to evaluate the papers; and that you have the time to meet such commitments. As long as you meet those criteria, we wouldn't care how many papers you commit to. And you would be paid for each paper you evaluate.

#### Payment and charges on the USP

Editors and peer reviewers would have their wallets credited with (\$200) for each paper they evaluate. The pay is the same for both editors and peer reviewers who have fully evaluated a paper up to decision (acceptance or rejection). The final decision does not affect your pay. You would still be paid the full \$200 if the paper was rejected after full peer review.

We have recently increased the pay to \$200. It was initially \$150 and the reason for the increase is because, after peer review, scholars would still have to check the resubmitted paper for quality and completeness, before it is approved. If the resubmitted paper still isn't satisfactory, another revision is requested. That is some extra hours of work. Hence, we have increased the pay to reflect the standard of work you would be doing.

Note also that we have to strike a balance between "reasonable pay" for reviewers and "affordable charges" for authors. And \$200 seems to give us that balance to pay three reviewers, pay the publishers and pay for our service, whilst keeping the overall charge affordable at \$1250.

For low quality papers or out-of-scope papers that are desk rejected by the editor within the first five days, we take it as no editing or proper peer review has been done. And it would be unfair to charge any fees to the author of that paper. Hence,

desk rejected papers are not charged. This doesn't mean that editors should allow low quality papers to get full peer review, just so he can earn the full pay. No, that would be wrong and it would be a waste of the author's time and money. And this would be counter-productive, because the platform is smart.

We expect that after desk rejections, editors and reviewers can move to the next committed paper without wasting much time.

Check your wallets for your earnings at any time. Your balance accumulates as you do more work on the platform. The platform is integrated with Paypal and your wallet would ask for your payment details. So check your wallet regularly. We currently have integrated only paypal, but as we go along, other payment and withdrawal methods would be integrated.

### Customer service

Feel free to email admin for any issues or queries you may have. We work 24/7 and we strive to reply to queries within a few hours. We are currently working to introduce live chat so that you can chat with us. Please keep an eye on our website for updates.

### Additional Guide for Peer Reviewers (source: Elsevier)

#### How to do peer review

##### *Full length research article*

- Examine the importance of the research question addressed in the manuscript (e.g., are objectives and justification clearly stated?).
- Assess the originality (contribution, addition of knowledge to scientific literature or field) of the manuscript.
- Clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of the method described in the manuscript.
- Make specific useful comments on the writing of the manuscript (e.g., writing, organization, figures, etc.).
- Offer specific comments on the author's interpretation of the results and conclusions drawn from the results.
- In case applicable, comment on the statistics (for example question if they are robust and fit-for-purpose and if the controls and sampling mechanisms are sufficient and well described).

##### Review article

- Discuss the importance of the topic/scope of the review.
- Assess the originality of the review.
- Comment on the author's representation of the most relevant recent advances in the field. Specifically, determine whether the references are relevant to the topic and cover both historical literature and more recent developments.
- Offer comments on the writing, organization, tables, and figures of the manuscript.
- Comment on the author's interpretation of the results.

In any case, your first task is to read the article. You might consider spot checking major issues by choosing which section to read first. Below we offer some tips about handling specific parts of the paper.

### *Methodology*

If the manuscript you are reviewing is reporting an experiment, check the methods section first. The following cases are considered major flaws and should be flagged:

- Unsound methodology
- Discredited method
- Missing processes known to be influential on the area of reported research
- A conclusion drawn in contradiction to the statistical or qualitative evidence reported in the manuscript

For analytical papers examine the sampling report, which is mandated in time-dependent studies. For qualitative research make sure that a systematic data analysis is presented and sufficient descriptive elements with relevant quotes from interviews are listed in addition to the author's narrative.

### *Research data and visualizations*

Once you are satisfied that the methodology is sufficiently robust, examine any data in the form of figures, tables, or images. Authors may add research data, including data visualizations, to their submission to enable readers to interact and engage more closely with their research after publication. Please be aware that links to data might therefore be present in the submission files. These items should also receive your attention during the peer review process. Manuscripts may also contain database identifiers or accession numbers (e.g. genes) in relation to our database linking program.

Critical issues in research data, which are considered to be major flaws can be

related to insufficient data points, statistically non-significant and unclear data tables. NB for certain types of visualization, preview tools are available, allowing you to inspect how files will display on ScienceDirect if the manuscript is accepted. For other data visualizations, there may be other ways of inspecting the files.

#### Ethical considerations

Experiments including patient or animal data should properly be documented. Most journals require ethical approval by the author's host organization. Please check journal-specific guidelines for such cases (available from the journal's homepage, accessible via the journal catalogue).

#### *Overview*

If you don't spot any major flaws, take a break from the manuscript, giving you time to think and return to it. Consider the article from your own perspective. When you sit down to write the review, again make sure you familiarize yourself with any journal-specific guidelines (these will be noted in the journal's guide for authors).

#### Additional Guide for Editors

As an editor on the USP, your role is to check the quality of the draft manuscript and to give the draft its best form for publishing. You are to ensure that the paper is in its best possible form for readers.

You are not:

- checking grammatical errors
- checking punctuation
- formatting the paper

You are:

- i. checking the scientific terms, the technical facts, and their validity
- ii. improving language quality and consistency
- iii. improving clarity, coherence, readability and overall flow

To do the above, you may need to cut text from one part and add to another to enhance flow. You may also need to move or rewrite sections to enhance the overall content.

So, in summary, as an editor working on a draft manuscript on the USP, you need to

ensure the paper is in its best possible form for readers. You may need to perfect the language, make

structural cuts and rearrangement to ensure that ideas are presented in a logical manner. You may need to rewrite paragraphs or sections to improve quality, coherence and readability. And while doing all those, you need to check the validity of the entire work.

Every draft manuscript is different. Some would need more work, others may need less work. The variety of work you get adds to the flavour of working on the USP. And please, make sure to give the draft manuscript the best effort you possibly can give. You have 20 days to do this, which is very sufficient time.

When you finish editing, you need to return the edited version of that paper to the author. You can attach it (docx) on the review panel and summarize your feedback in the textbox before clicking the revise option.

#### Customer Service

For any issues relating to your account, email us on: [admin@unifiedscholars.org](mailto:admin@unifiedscholars.org)  
For general enquiries, chat us on WhatsApp: +447914534911. No calls please.

#### About Unified Scholars and Publishers (aka Unified Scholars)

Unified Scholars is a tech startup that seeks to solve the complex and persistent problems in scholarly publishing. We are not a publishing company. We are a tech company. The USP, our flagship software platform, is made available to scholars and to publishers as a peer review and scholarly publishing service. So, both scholars and publishers are users of the platform, whilst we own and manage the platform, and coordinate our publishing/business model, which we call publish-on-air.

To allow for a more effective solution of the problems we set out to solve, we introduced Unification to the publish-on-air model, which together now becomes the Unified Concept. Hence, in keeping with our concept, the publishers who get papers from the USP would be publishing under the Unified Journals brand.

As a company, everything we do is guided by the concept. Hence, you should expect us to be different. We are championing our own process, with the aim of reforming scholarly publishing. We welcome you on this noble journey.