

## THE REVIEW PROCESS

The *Canadian Journal on Aging*, from inception has been a peer-reviewed journal. Readers may be interested to know how the review process is structured. Journals differ in just how they organize review, and the *Canadian Journal on Aging* review process is related to the structure of the editorial board. We attempt to manage a review process which is fair, humane and educational. Many manuscripts which we review are not accepted; almost none are accepted without some revisions having been made. I would like to describe our review process by tracing the fate of a typical manuscript.

Manuscripts are submitted in one of two editorial styles, following instructions printed on the inside back cover of every issue. Five copies are sent to the Editor-in-Chief. The author may suggest a preferred "Divisional" Editor, or the Editor-in-Chief will select an Editor who is appropriate to the subject matter of the article. The Journal has one Editor for each of its Divisions: Health Sciences, Social Sciences, Social Welfare, Biological Sciences, Psychology.

As Editor-in-Chief, I also review the manuscript for form and scholarly appropriateness. At this stage, a very small number of manuscripts might be returned to the author because they clearly fall outside the scope of the journal, in subject or in quality, or because they are not submitted in the appropriate style. Because the review process places demands on the voluntary labour of a large number of people, it would be inappropriate to automatically review every manuscript received.

Suppose that the article is judged worthy of review. One copy is retained in the Editorial Office and four are sent to the selected Editor (the names of Divisional Editors appear on the inside front cover of each issue). He or she will review the article on the same grounds. If it is felt by the Editor that the manuscript is

not of adequate quality to be reviewed, he or she will enter into consultation with the Editor-in-Chief. In virtually all cases, the manuscript will be sent for review and at this point the process is under the direction of the Editor. The manuscript will be sent for review to at least two reviewers. At this point, the manuscript is "blinded" by removing the author's name, affiliation, and any other identifying text.

Ideally, the two "blind reviewers" will not know the identity of the author—although since they are chosen because of their expertise in the subject matter of the article, they may well guess who the author is. The author however is never informed of the identity of the reviewers. This frees the reviewers to make judgments which are as fair as possible.

The reviewers fill out a page (and often add more pages) of comments which evaluate the manuscript, and make one of the following recommendations to the Editor: 1) accept as is; 2) accept with minor revisions; 3) accept with major revisions; or 4) reject.

The Editor receives the two referee evaluations and looks for points of agreement and disagreement. If there is serious disagreement in the evaluation of the two referees, a third blind review may be sought. Normally, either minor or major modifications will be called for. The Editor will then write the author, requesting changes. The review sheets will be forwarded to the author, but the Editor will add his or her additional comments as to which are the most important revisions to consider.

The difference between a rating of 2 (minor revisions) and a rating of 3 (major revisions) is that in the former case, the revised and re-submitted manuscript will be reviewed only by the Editor; whereas in the case of major revisions, the revised manuscript will be sent back to at least one of the blind reviewers for evaluation. In both cases the manuscript has

a good chance of being accepted eventually, but this is likely to happen faster with minor revisions.

In my experience, the greatest delay in the review process occurs when authors who have been asked to make major revisions fail to do so quickly. Any author who reaches that stage should realize that the chances of eventual success are quite high and should make the revisions as quickly as possible. Those asked to make minor revisions should be even more strongly motivated to respond quickly.

Depending on the evaluations of the blind referees, it eventually becomes possible for the Editor to make a recommendation to the Editor-in-Chief. This recommendation, which will be either to publish or to reject a manuscript, is accompanied by copies of all blind reviews and correspondence with the author. A careful reading of this material, along with the manuscript, allows the entire process to be monitored. Final decision rests with the Editor-in-Chief.

This process sounds complex and perhaps a little intimidating. It is designed primarily to guarantee that all material published in the *Canadian Journal on Aging* will be of scholarly merit and reliability. To have one's work published in a "peer reviewed" journal is a sign of respect from one's scholarly peers which is recognized, for example, in merit, promotion and tenure reviews for academics. We, however, don't go to all this trouble just to help merit evaluations to be made. Our concern is with the promotion and publication of high-quality scholarship.

The peer review process achieves this goal not just by establishing barriers to publication

but by an educational process. I am proud of the quality of reviews received for manuscripts submitted to the *Canadian Journal on Aging*, and confident that they serve an important teaching function. Our reviewers and Editors give generously of their time not just to evaluate, but to educate. It is a kind of altruistic behaviour similar to that of the blood donor, who gives anonymously but knows that everyone benefits from the process. The only public recognition of our peer reviewers is a list of their names in the final issue of each volume.

The peer review process is far from perfect. I am aware of recent publications in highly respected gerontology journals which did not survive our peer review process. But we do the best we can; and I would hope that guidance received from *Canadian Journal on Aging* reviewers helped these authors to revise their manuscript for publication elsewhere.

All papers published in the *Canadian Journal on Aging*, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, have gone through the peer review process just described. The Editorial is not peer-reviewed, and book reviews are reviewed only by the Book Review Editor (who happens to be the Editor-in-Chief at this time). From time to time, we will publish special issues, such as the planned issue, "Gerontological Trends and Issues in Social Welfare", which we hope to publish in May, 1987. All material in special issues will also be fully peer reviewed.

Victor W. Marshall  
Editor-In-Chief