

As Editor-in Chief of *Building Healthy Academic Communities* Journal, I am delighted to announce that our reviewer of the year is Thad Mantaro, PhD. His work as a reviewer for *BHAC* is always exemplary and timely and both this editor, and our readership, owe him a debt of gratitude. Given that he also was awarded this honor last year, I felt he likely had sound advice and guidance that he could offer to our reviewers that could be helpful in this journey as *BHAC* reviewers – a few “tricks of the trade” shall we say. With this in mind, what follows is Dr Mantaro’s suggestions and reflections on how to be an effective and efficient reviewer for *BHAC* manuscript submissions. – Warm regards and thanks to our reviewers and our publication team for all their contributions –
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Thoughts on Effective and Efficient Manuscript Reviews

Dr. Thad Mantaro

BHAC 2023 Reviewer of the Year

Reviewing articles is a process that I enjoy, and I have found the opportunity to serve in this role for the *Building Healthy Academic Communities Journal*, a satisfying service opportunity. This role allows me to both serve the health and wellness community and to continue to enhance my knowledge within the field. Serving as a reviewer provides a chance to see where the zeitgeist is and helps me continue to hone my critique and writing skills. Here I provide a few suggestions for how I approach the process of serving as an effective manuscript reviewer that may be useful for both novice and seasoned reviewers.

1. **Responsiveness:** I have reviewed about 14 journal articles, and when I’m asked to take on a specific article, I always say yes. Even if I am busy, with many projects and personal responsibilities (we have a 14-year-old volleyball player, and weekend tournaments are in full swing), I find time in the early morning hours when my mind is fresh to review the articles. The morning time allows for no distractions, and, for me, it is when the conditions are best for this type of work. My suggestion is to find your “best review time” and schedule it in your calendar.
2. **Guidance:** Keep your APA 7th Edition manual close at hand. I keep mine on my desk right next to my computer, and the pages are worn from thumbing through it to check on key insights like proper citations and references. I also will complete a quick search online for components that seem more obscure, or that would be difficult to find quickly in the manual. I also keep a copy of the Guidelines for Reviewers at hand and frequently refer to it to consider, for example, “Are the evidence sources clearly stated?”
3. **Process:** I tend to block off about 3 hours to review an article from start to finish. I find that if I approach it from a fragmented task approach, my sense of the overall gestalt, and the ideas and constructs are impacted, and I have to repeat the review from the start to refresh my understanding of the manuscript. By working through a complete submission all at once, I’m better able to link feedback that I may see early in the article, with the summation and other details throughout.
4. **Context:** I use my own experiences to help assess the relevance to the field. I often follow a pathway on a specific reference or citation to ensure that the author has not plagiarized. If something feels off, for example language that seems out of context for the style, I have sought out the original source to ensure



that the author has provided appropriate citations. If an article lacks sufficient depth in the literature review, I will provide feedback on that to the authors encouraging deeper scholarship.

5. **Style:** I provide stylistic feedback on word choices that are unsuitable for scholarly writing. I note instances where the author may be too close to the work and where they may be too emotional, or where they express subjective opinions or idiosyncratic understandings. Suggest neutral, scientific insertions where appropriate.
6. **Editing:** I support the editorial team by looking closely for small grammatical and punctuation details. Assess whether authors are inconsistent related to in-text citations, capitalization, and other details. Pay careful attention to details like tense. Often, there may be several authors and details associated with present and past tense may get missed in larger editorial conversations among them. This is a common error and one frequently overlooked. Be a helpful aid in ferreting out these small issues.
7. **Read Critically:** If you find that some language or writing does not fit within a certain section, or if the document might be enhanced by a suggestion to reorganize some sentences, offer that. Read with discernment into the argument that the author(s) are making. Offer adjustments from your perspective that make the argument more streamlined and effective. Consider if the article is worthy of inclusion in the journal. Rarely, but occasionally, I make a recommendation not to publish. This can be due to poor writing or a lack of skill; it may also be due to plagiarism. Be vigilant in the value of the work and its relevance to the journal.
8. **Literature Review:** Consider if the references are noteworthy, relevant, and current. Do they cite a mixture of major works and newer research? Are all the references outdated or obscure? Does the literature review situate the study within an appropriate context and is it deep enough in its inquiry? All are critical to assessing if the article is situated appropriately.
9. **Findings:** Note interesting findings to the author, particularly if there are instances where the design methodology may have done more to help elaborate and confirm these findings. Suggest alternative or additional insights that may not be presented in the work. Review the details carefully to ensure that, if statistical significance is noted, that it is also clinically significant as well and this is represented in the tables.
10. **Methods:** Assess if the methods section adequately describes the study details particularly if the study is empirical. Is the study design and process fully described and, if there is an intervention, is it described with sufficient detail to be replicated, but with a degree of parsimony? Are the participants and recruitment adequately described? If measures have been collected, consider if these are validated instruments. Could you repeat the process with fidelity? Are details like the data collection and data analysis adequately described? Does it make sense to you and does it contribute something new to the field?
11. **Feedback:** Be honest, direct, and professional in your evaluation of the article. In several instances, study sites that should have been masked were either easy to identify or not removed from the article. At times it can be challenging to balance tact and an effective critique with a frank discussion of the merits and shortcomings of an article, but a good review makes the manuscript better and assist the author in getting their message and findings out to others. You may need to be the one to recommend if the work is of sufficient quality to be included in the journal. Do not be afraid to recommend either significant revisions, or to decline to publish if there are concerns that necessitate this. The editor needs a “real decision” from reviewers so don’t neglect to provide this critical component in the review.

12. **Encourage:** Finally, reviews are meant to provide professional critique to help authors to publish the results of their hard work. Find ways to credit them with sections that are well-written or methods and results that add to the field of knowledge. It takes a great deal of work and vulnerability to place one's ideas in front of an audience. Look early in the manuscript for elements the author(s) are getting right. Note if they have set the framework well or teed up the argument. This builds trust and allows for a degree of scrutiny in later paragraphs where you may want to offer suggestions on style or tone that might be needed. I find that including a few encouraging remarks where the author(s) strengths show through, is important, particularly if I have offered significant editorial feedback. Striking a balance between feedback and encouragement is something we all appreciate.

In summary, it is a remarkable privilege to serve in this capacity, and I appreciate both the opportunity and the recognition again this year. I'm grateful and encourage you to consider contributing your skills in service to the Journal.