



Editorial: Single-blind or double-blind review processes?

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In a recent editorial, our Educational Studies in Mathematics (ESM) editors wrote about the review process (Mesa et al., 2021). Following the discussion behind that editorial, we have been considering whether ESM should keep using a single-blind review process or turn to a double-blind process.

When authors submit a paper, they receive reviews without knowing the names of the reviewers. Reviewers are blinded in order to give them the freedom to really write what they think without holding back praise or criticism or having to fear negative consequences in their relation to the authors. This is a *single-blind review process*.

Many journals adopt a *double-blind review process*; that is, not only reviewers are blinded to authors, but also authors are blinded to reviewers. By hiding the author names from the reviewers, the journals try to prevent the reviewers from potential biases that might occur with, for example, authors of high reputation, of underrepresented countries, or with names identifying them as members of marginalized groups. Sometimes, well-established authors can be identified anyway, but by far not always.

In recent months, some authors and reviewers have expressed astonishment that ESM uses a single-blind process by which reviewers know who the authors are but the authors do not know who reviews their manuscripts. As Mesa and Wagner, (2019) outlined, “reasons in support of the single-blinded review practice include the perception that it may be useful to have a reviewer who knows the context of the research and can provide an informed analysis of the work” (p. 303). Single-blinded reviews eliminate some of the challenges of reviewing in a double-blind process in which authors remove references to their own work. When their own work is masked, reviewers sometimes criticize missing references to the work of these authors. More importantly, it is difficult for reviewers to ascertain whether the contribution is adding value compared to older work and to ensure that too large overlaps or self-plagiarism is detected.

Further, in particular for research that is attentive to socio-cultural contexts, the positionality of the authors is important. With a single-blind process, reviewers might take into account whether the authors are in a fair position to interpret and report on the context. In this way, the single-blind process gives reviewers and

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editors the opportunity to support new scholars and scholars from underrepresented regions.

While these arguments continue to be relevant, the discourse on non-racist, equitable publishing policies problematizes with increasing emphasis that the single-blind process still favors the supremacy of already-established authors with high reputations or from established contexts (e.g., if a PhD student works at a highly regarded university). In addition, some colleagues told us that their university career systems or fundraising systems increasingly consider the double-blind review process as a *necessary* indicator of high-quality journals counting differently in the CVs or records. So, scholars working in such contexts may be reluctant to publish in ESM.

In other cultural or institutional contexts, transparency is such an important value that even single-blind processes are considered deficient.

Given these diverse contextual conditions across countries, cultures, and institutions, we would ideally offer both options for authors, single-blind and double-blind review processes. But, unfortunately, a choice option is not compatible with publishers' (and index organizers') regulations to clearly identify a journal with one of these options.

So, we open this discussion to a broader group of participants and invite all potential readers, authors, and reviewers to participate. Please, let us know your perspective on any or all of these questions:

- What are the advantages you see in single-blind review processes? What are your most important concerns, on the personal and institutional level?
- What are the advantages you see in double-blind review processes? What are your most important concerns, on the personal and institutional level?
- Which processes are favored by your institutional contexts? (e.g., How strong is the pressure toward double-blind processes?)
- How can authors and reviewers still stay explicit and sensitive to the context of the research even if the process would be double-blind?

We look forward to hearing from you. (To help us organize your responses, please email us with 'ESM review process' as the subject of the email.)

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