TSR TRAFFIC SAFETY RESEARCH
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

ver. 2026-11-21

TSR editorial triage: quality criteria

During the triage process, the editor is expected to make a holistic assessment of the manuscript. The criteria provided should not be regarded as a mere checklist to be completed mechanically. They are, however, a reminder of what is important to consider.

The first and most important question

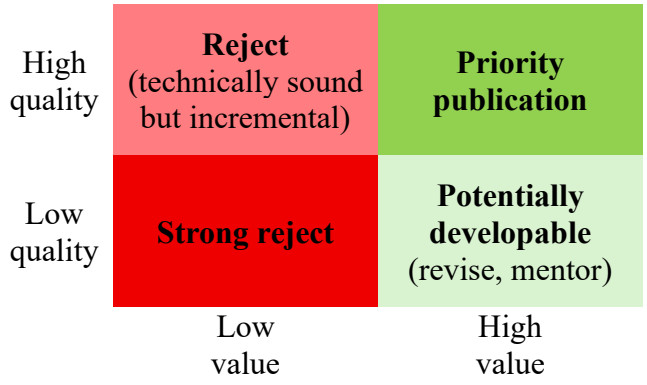
After reading a submission, ask yourself:

> *If this paper is published and a researcher, practitioner, or policymaker reads it, will they learn something that helps them become better at saving lives in traffic?*

Deep down, you will know the answer. If the answer is essentially 'no', you should not engage any further and should reject the paper.

A useful editorial matrix

You may think of a submitted manuscript in terms of two independent dimensions: (*i*) how well it is written (quality); (*ii*) how useful its contribution is (value).



Papers that score highly on both quality and value are strong candidates for publication. Papers that score poorly on both dimensions should be rejected promptly.

High-value but lower-quality papers require additional work to improve their methodology, presentation, or both. Such papers often originate from low- and middle-income countries, where authors may have valuable ideas but less experience in academic writing. Guidance from the editor and reviewers can make a substantial difference. At the same time, be realistic: your time is limited, and in some cases the amount of work required is simply too great. In such situations, rejection with an invitation to resubmit after major revision may be an appropriate option.

The most challenging category is high-quality but low-value papers. Their numbers appear to be growing. They consume considerable time and effort from editors and reviewers while contributing little beyond adding another publication to someone's curriculum vitae. Writing a rejection letter may not be easy, but it is often the right decision. The formulations in the detailed quality criteria below are intended to help you formulate a constructive rejection letter.

Research question (RQ)

Poor	Moderate	Excellent
• The connection between the RQ and traffic safety is weak or unclear.	• The RQ relates to traffic safety, but its relevance to the field could be articulated more explicitly.	• The RQ is clearly and directly connected to traffic safety.
• The RQ addresses a problem of limited importance for reducing deaths or serious injuries in traffic.	• The RQ addresses a relevant traffic-safety problem, but its importance for reducing deaths or serious injuries is not clearly established.	• The RQ addresses a problem of clear importance for reducing deaths or serious injuries in traffic.
• The RQ is essentially a 'why bother?' question; answering it would have negligible implications for current policy or practice.	• The RQ is largely 'nice to know'; its implications for current policy and practice are limited.	• The RQ is a 'must know' question; answering it is important for current policy, practice, or decision-making.
• The RQ is poorly connected to the current context and appears driven primarily by data availability, methodological fashion, or other considerations unrelated to genuine knowledge needs.	• The RQ is connected to current challenges, but the underlying knowledge need is only partially justified.	• The RQ is strongly grounded in the current context and clearly motivated by an important knowledge need.
• The RQ is difficult to identify and is not clearly stated in the abstract, introduction, discussion, or conclusions.	• The RQ can be identified after reading the manuscript, but it is not explicitly or consistently stated throughout the paper.	• The RQ is clearly formulated, easy to locate in the abstract and introduction, and is explicitly revisited in the discussion and conclusions.
• The RQ is overly broad, unfocused, or fragmented into multiple loosely connected questions.	• The RQ is reasonably focused, although some reader interpretation is required to understand its exact scope.	• The RQ is precise, focused, and clearly defines what is being investigated.
• The RQ is unanswerable, or the answer is effectively predetermined by the way the question is formulated.	• The RQ is answerable, although some ambiguity may remain regarding how it should be investigated or interpreted.	• The RQ is clearly answerable through empirical observation, analysis, or other appropriate scientific methods.
• The RQ cannot realistically be investigated using the available data, methods, resources, or timeframe.	• The RQ is feasible to investigate but may require compromises in scope, data quality, or methodology.	• The RQ is fully researchable within realistic constraints of data, methods, resources, and time.
• The RQ is of limited interest to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.	• The RQ is likely to be of interest to a subset of researchers or practitioners.	• The RQ is likely to attract the interest of both the scientific community and traffic-safety practitioners.
• The RQ addresses a topic that has already been studied extensively and offers no meaningful new perspective.	• The RQ provides a modest extension of existing knowledge or a limited new perspective on a familiar topic.	• The RQ addresses an understudied topic or offers a genuinely novel perspective on an existing one.

Research question (RQ), *cont.*

Poor	Moderate	Excellent
• Answering the RQ has little or no potential to contribute to practical traffic-safety improvements.	• Answering the RQ may contribute useful insights, although the pathway to practical application is not obvious.	• Answering the RQ is likely to generate knowledge that can support tangible traffic-safety improvements, such as preventing injuries or improving policy and practice.
• The RQ does not comply with ethical principles, or ethical implications have not been adequately considered.	• The RQ complies with ethical requirements, although ethical considerations receive limited attention.	• The RQ complies with ethical requirements and demonstrates thoughtful consideration of relevant ethical issues.

Motivation (M) and existing knowledge review (KR)

Poor	Moderate	Excellent
• The manuscript fails to use earlier research or existing data to support the relevance of the RQ or the study in general.	• The manuscript uses earlier research or existing data to support the relevance of the RQ and the study, but the argument is incomplete or only partly convincing.	• The manuscript persuasively demonstrates the relevance of the RQ and the study by drawing on earlier research and existing data.
• M is generic and could apply equally well to many other studies (e.g. '1.19 million people are killed in traffic every year').	• M contains study-specific arguments but does not combine them into a compelling overall case.	• M provides clear, study-specific arguments and presents them as a coherent and persuasive overall case for conducting the study.
• KR is shallow and relies on a mixed collection of sources without considering their relevance, quality, or contextual applicability.	• KR relies on relevant sources but misses important references or contains contextual gaps.	• KR is sufficiently thorough to establish the current state of knowledge. Sources are carefully selected with regard to relevance, quality, study design, and context.
• The literature is presented as a 'laundry list' of studies, with little synthesis or critical reflection.	• The literature is synthesized to some extent, but the overall narrative remains incomplete or inconsistent.	• The literature is critically synthesized into a coherent narrative that highlights patterns, contradictions, and knowledge gaps.
• KR does not lead to clear conclusions, and the connection to the RQ and study design is weak or absent.	• KR supports the RQ and study design, but the logical progression remains only partly convincing.	• KR leads to clear conclusions that logically justify the RQ and support the choice of study design and methods.

Method (MT)

Poor	Moderate	Excellent
• MT is weak, scientifically unsound, or incapable of answering the stated RQ.	• MT is generally appropriate for the RQ, although some aspects of its design or justification could be improved.	• MT is well aligned with the RQ, scientifically sound, and appropriately designed to answer it.
• MT is described insufficiently for readers to understand, evaluate, or replicate the study. Important details regarding data, procedures, variables, instruments, analytical decisions, or software are missing.	• MT is described in sufficient detail to understand the study, but some information required for full replication, evaluation, or reuse is missing.	• MT is described transparently and in sufficient detail to allow independent evaluation, replication, or adaptation of the study. All important methodological decisions are clearly documented and justified.
• Obvious errors are found in the MT application.	• MT is applied correctly overall, although minor imperfections or limitations can be identified.	• MT is applied correctly and consistently in accordance with current best practice.
• The choice of MT appears driven primarily by factors other than obtaining the best answer to the RQ (e.g. data availability, access to software, familiarity with a specific technique, or methodological fashion).	• MT is chosen mainly to answer the RQ, although alternative approaches may have been equally or more suitable.	• MT is clearly selected because it represents the most appropriate way of answering the RQ within the practical constraints of the study.
• MT is unnecessarily complex, or its sophistication exceeds what is needed to answer the RQ. Similar or better insights could have been achieved with a simpler approach.	• The MT complexity is broadly appropriate, although some elements appear unnecessary or insufficiently justified.	• The MT complexity of the method is proportionate to the RQ and justified by the expected gains in validity, precision, or insight.

Results (R)

Poor	Moderate	Excellent
• R are vague, incomplete, or insufficiently reported.	• R are reported, but some aspects lack clarity, detail, or depth.	• R are reported clearly, completely, and with sufficient detail to support the study's conclusions.
• R presentation is disorganized and difficult to follow.	• R are presented in a generally logical manner, but the flow, structure, or signposting could be improved.	• R are presented in a logical, well-structured manner, with smooth flow and clear headings.
• Figures and tables are poorly designed, unnecessary, or difficult to interpret.	• Figures and tables support the presentation of the results, but their integration, design, or explanatory value could be improved.	• Figures and tables are well designed, clearly integrated into the narrative, and enhance understanding of the results.
• R are poorly linked to the research question, making it difficult to determine what has been learned.	• R partially address the research question, although some links between findings and the RQ remain unclear.	• R results directly address and answer the research question.
• R presentation includes substantial interpretation, speculation, or discussion that is not supported by the data.	• R section occasionally mixes reporting and interpretation, but the distinction remains mostly clear.	• R are presented objectively, with interpretation and broader implications reserved for the discussion section.

Discussion (D)

Poor	Moderate	Excellent
• D discussion lacks a clear structure, moves erratically between ideas, and is difficult to follow.	• D is generally organized but contains occasional inconsistencies in flow, structure, or transitions.	• D follows a clear and coherent structure, presenting ideas in a logical progression that supports the overall argument.
• D largely restates the results without providing meaningful interpretation or linking them to the RQ.	• D offers some interpretation of the findings, but the connection to the RQ remains only partially developed.	• D clearly explains what the findings mean in relation to the RQ, hypotheses, and study objectives.
• D fails to place the findings within the context of previous research and existing knowledge.	• D relates the findings to previous research but overlooks important studies or emphasizes less relevant comparisons.	• D effectively compares and contrasts the findings with previous research, highlighting consistencies, differences, and novel contributions.
• D fails to acknowledge important limitations and creates an unjustified impression of certainty.	• D mentions limitations but provides limited detail or reflection on their implications.	• D transparently acknowledges the main limitations of the study and reflects on their implications for interpretation and generalization.
• D presents a single interpretation of the findings and ignores plausible alternative explanations.	• D acknowledges alternative explanations but considers them only superficially.	• D critically evaluates alternative explanations and demonstrates balanced scientific reasoning.
• D does not explain how the findings may contribute to reducing deaths or serious injuries in traffic.	• D acknowledges potential traffic-safety implications, but the pathway to impact remains unclear.	• D clearly explains how the findings could contribute to reducing deaths or serious injuries in traffic through policy, practice, design, regulation, education, or future research.
• D overlooks the broader significance of the findings and provides little guidance regarding practical implications or future research.	• D mentions implications and future directions, but these remain general, vague, or insufficiently developed.	• D clearly explains the scientific, practical, policy, or societal significance of the findings and identifies meaningful directions for future research.
• D makes claims that are unsupported by the evidence or extends conclusions beyond what the results justify.	• D is generally balanced but occasionally overstates or understates the strength of the evidence.	• D maintains an appropriate balance between confidence and caution, drawing conclusions that are fully supported by the evidence.

Conclusions (C)

Poor	Moderate	Excellent
• C section is missing or does not contain clearly formulated conclusions.	• C are present but lack clear structure, conciseness, or prioritization of key messages.	• C are concise, well structured, and clearly summarize the main takeaways of the study (e.g. through a logical narrative or concise bullet points).
• C are trivial, superficial, or merely repeat individual findings.	• C synthesize the findings but provide only limited generalization beyond the study itself.	• C clearly articulate the new knowledge generated by the study and explain its relevance beyond the immediate study setting.
• C are not supported by the study results or extend beyond what the evidence justifies.	• C are generally consistent with the findings, although some statements may be weakly supported or insufficiently qualified.	• C are firmly grounded in the results and accurately reflect the strengths and limitations of the evidence.
• C do not explain how the findings may contribute to improving traffic safety, policy, practice, or future research.	• C acknowledge possible implications, but their practical significance remains unclear.	• C clearly explain how the findings can inform traffic-safety practice, policy, system design, regulation, education, or future research.

Practical usefulness

Poor	Moderate	Excellent
• The manuscript addresses a problem of limited practical importance for reducing deaths or serious injuries in traffic.	• The manuscript addresses a relevant traffic-safety problem, but its importance for reducing deaths or serious injuries is not clearly established.	• The manuscript addresses a problem of clear importance for reducing deaths or serious injuries in traffic and provides knowledge that can support action.
• The manuscript provides abstract or purely theoretical results without explaining their relevance to real-world traffic safety.	• The manuscript identifies potential real-world applications but does not clearly explain how the findings could contribute to solving traffic-safety problems.	• The manuscript clearly demonstrates how the findings can contribute to addressing a specific real-world traffic-safety problem or need.
• The manuscript is overloaded with technical language, limiting its accessibility to anyone outside the immediate specialist field.	• The manuscript is understandable to specialists but not readily accessible to practitioners, policymakers, or researchers from other disciplines.	• The manuscript communicates its practical implications clearly and accessibly to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.
• The study is highly context-specific and provides little insight beyond the particular setting studied.	• The study presents findings of primarily local relevance, with limited discussion of their applicability in other settings.	• The study provides valuable insights within a specific context while clearly explaining their relevance to other settings or broader traffic-safety challenges.
• The manuscript offers no suggestions for practical application, implementation, or further applied work.	• The manuscript suggests practical applications but provides limited guidance on implementation or feasibility.	• The manuscript proposes specific, realistic, and context-appropriate actions, interventions, or implementation pathways.
• The manuscript does not discuss the broader practical, societal, economic, or policy implications of the findings.	• The manuscript acknowledges the broader implications of the work but discusses them only superficially.	• The manuscript explicitly discusses the broader practical, societal, economic, or policy implications of the findings.

Language, style, visualizations, formatting

Poor	Moderate	Excellent
• The manuscript does not comply with the journal's submission requirements.	• The manuscript complies with the journal's submission requirements, although minor deviations or omissions may remain.	• The manuscript fully complies with the journal's submission requirements.
• The language contains substantial grammatical, spelling, or stylistic problems and requires extensive proofreading.	• Minor language imperfections are present but do not substantially hinder readability.	• The language is clear, fluent, and professional; any remaining imperfections are negligible.
• The writing style is inappropriate for academic communication (e.g. excessive jargon, colloquial expressions, contractions, or unnecessarily complicated wording).	• The writing style is generally appropriate for academic communication, although it occasionally lacks precision, clarity, or consistency.	• The writing style is appropriate, precise, and accessible to the intended audience.
• The presentation assumes highly specialized knowledge and is difficult for researchers, practitioners, or policymakers outside the immediate field to follow.	• The presentation is understandable to specialists but may be challenging for readers from other disciplines or professional backgrounds.	• The presentation is accessible to a broad traffic-safety audience, including researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from different disciplines.
• The manuscript lacks a clear narrative structure and is difficult to follow or understand.	• The manuscript has a generally clear structure, although some sections are difficult to follow or insufficiently connected.	• The manuscript follows a clear and coherent structure and is easy to follow and understand throughout.
• The manuscript is poorly formatted and appears unfinished or not ready for submission.	• The manuscript is generally well formatted, although occasional inconsistencies, unfinished elements, or formatting issues remain.	• The manuscript is consistently formatted and presents itself as a polished, publication-ready document.
• Figures and other visual materials are difficult to read, poorly designed, redundant, unnecessarily cluttered, or ineffective in communicating their intended message.	• Figures and other visual materials generally support the manuscript, although readability, design, colour choices, integration, or information density could be improved.	• Figures and other visual materials are clear, informative, aesthetically balanced, easy to read, free of unnecessary clutter, and effectively complement the text and tables.
• Tables are poorly organized, difficult to interpret, unnecessarily complex, redundant, overloaded with information, or improperly formatted.	• Tables are generally well organized and useful, although some information may be redundant, overly detailed, or insufficiently structured.	• Tables are clear, concise, well formatted, and present only the information necessary to support the manuscript's objectives.