The Health Literate Author Guidelines

Undergraduate Public Health Journal | University of Maryland, College Park

The Health Literate Background and Mission Statement

The Health Literate, founded in 2026, is the University of Maryland, College Park's first undergraduate public health academic journal. It is housed within and staffed entirely by undergraduate students in the School of Public Health but accepts public health-oriented submissions from undergraduate students of all majors.

The Health Literate understands Health Literacy, defined as both the capacity of individuals to access, digest, and make healthy decisions based upon health information and the responsibility of organizations and institutions to translate complex scientific research into accessible, actionable knowledge for diverse communities, to be a powerful vehicle to achieve these goals. Its published issues will provide a platform for student work that utilizes the principles of Health Literacy to address the world's pressing public health challenges.

As such, we envision the journal upholding values of equity, innovation, rigor, integrity, collaboration, and tolerance both in its internal processes and forward-facing communication and publication. Centering these values in the work has potential to inform policy, elucidate significant findings, and empower communities in their own health literacy.

Any and all questions can be directed to the The Health Literate executive board at umd.sph.urj@gmail.com.

Accepted Submission Formats

1. Original Research

a. Description: Full-length, empirical undergraduate scholarship that presents novel data collected/analysis. Must feature an extensive literature review, highly detailed methodology, and robust discussion that attempts to draw generalizable public health conclusions. Note: Capstone projects will not be accepted.

b. Length: 3,000-5,000 words

c. Required components:

i. Abstract

ii. Background

iii. Methods

iv. Results

v. Discussion

d. Subject to double-blind review

2. Briefs, Methods, or Replication Reports

a. Description: Condensed manuscripts designed to quickly communicate targeted scientific findings, specialized techniques, or secondary analyses of public datasets. These are well-suited for short research projects that culminated in poster or oral presentations, where the completed poster or select presentation slides can be submitted as a supplementary file(s).

b. Length: 1,500-2,500 words

c. Required components:

i. Abstract

ii. Background

iii. Methods

iv. Results

v. Discussion

d. If based on a previously presented poster or oral presentation:

i. The original poster must be submitted as a supplementary file. Standalone submissions of a poster do not substitute for any of the required sections above.

ii. Manuscript text must be original writing for this submission (not just copy-and-pasted content from poster/slides).

e. Subject to double-blind review

3. Policy/Practice notes

a. Description: Accommodates highly practical public health projects completed during student internships or specialized classroom assignments. Submissions may evaluate localized program implementation, analyze specific healthcare legislation, etc. without attempting to extrapolate the findings into generalizable models.

b. Length: 1,800-2,800 words

c. Must Include:

i. Abstract

ii. Background & Problem Statement

iii. Actionable Policy Options

iv. Analysis and Evidence

v. Recommendation(s)

vi. Conclusion

d. Subject to double-blind review

4. Perspectives/Commentaries

a. Description: This submission format provides a journalistic-esque platform for student voices on pressing public health issues, including via op/eds, critical reflections, and persuasive commentary written in the writer's own voice rather than a strict research register.

b. Length: 800-1,200 words

i. Unlike other submission types, Perspectives/Commentaries do not follow a rigid structure. Though they should adhere to standard professional writing practices, writers have flexibility in how they organize and pace their argument so long as the piece reads as a cohesive op/ed rather than a research summary.

c. Subject to double-blind review

5. Research Spotlights

a. Description: Similarly journalistic/blog-post in nature; features structured interview profiles that highlight active faculty laboratories and their undergraduate research assistants.

b. Length: 800-1,000 words

c. Must include:

i. Lab/researcher introduction

ii. Current research focus

iii. The undergraduate experience

iv. Q&A (with verbatim quotes)

v. Why it matters/discussion

d. Subject to double-blind review

Notes:

• Word count limits are not inclusive of the title, abstract, references, and accompanying statements.

• If you are unsure of which category your submission may fall under, please reach out to The Health Literate for guidance (umd.sph.urj@gmail.com).

Formatting, Abstract, and Title Requirements

1. Text formatting

a. Normal text

i. Entries for the Health Literate are designed to be easily legible by both academics and lay readers. Keep the font size at 11 or 12 points and use a straightforward, easily visible font. Set line spacing to 1.15 or 1.5 and orient all text to the left for better reading. Use distinct paragraph breaks to divide concepts.

1. Submissions in hard-to-read fonts will be rejected and sent back for a second review. The right to submit future work will be revoked for authors who submit unreadable entries on a regular basis.

Examples of unacceptable fonts and font sizes:

2. The Health Literate

3. The Health Literate

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4. The Health Literate
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b. Headers

i. Headers are a great way to guide readers through your body of writing. Headers should be bolded to make them stand out. The style should be the same for all matching header levels. Generally speaking, headings should not exceed 70-80 characters. All headings should be in title case.

Example: Future Directions Quisque faucibus ex sapien vitae pellentesque sem placerat. In id cursus mi pretium tellus duis convallis. Ad litora torquent per conubia nostra inceptos himenaeos. Tempus leo eu aenean sed diam urna tempora. Pulvinar vivamus fringilla lacus nec metus bibendum egestas. Iaculis massa nisl malesuada lacinia integer nunc posuere. Ut hendrerit semper vel class aptent taciti sociosqu. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet consectetur adipiscing elit.

2. Figure guidelines

a. Figures (inclusive of images/graphs, diagrams, tables, etc) should be readable, integrated into the manuscript, and convey information relevant to the surrounding text. Any legends/keys necessary for their interpretation should be included within the figure.

b. Caption expectations

i. Start each caption by identifying the figure or table with a brief, bold title using title case. Then provide a brief overview of what is displayed. Place all definitions, clarifications, and notes at the end in a smaller font 8 size.

Example:

1. Figure 1.0: Lorem Ipsum Dolor Sit Amet Consectetur Adipiscing. Quisque faucibus ex sapien vitae pellentesque sem placerat. In id cursus mi pretium tellus duis convallis. Tempus leo eu aenean sed diam urna tempor. Pulvinar vi. Notes: Hendrerit semper vel class aptent taciti sociosqu. Ad litora torquent per conubia nostra inceptos himenaeos.

3. Citations/references

a. The Health Literate follows citation guidelines given by the AMA (American Medical Association).

4. Abstract expectations

a. An abstract should normally be between 250 and 300 words long. Essential background information should be given in the first one or two phrases. The writers' objectives or actions should be described in the next sentence or two. After that, condense the main results into one or two sentences. Summarize the study's suggestions or policy implications in one or two sentences at the end.

5. Title expectations

a. A title should be concise and informative and should advance our journal's commitment to health literacy for all of our readers!

i. The main idea or outcome must be stated without the use of jargon, difficult-to-read acronyms, or a question format. Avoid the use of results presented in complete detail, witty or clever puns that distort meaning or leave readers confused, and vague or ambiguous opening sentences.

IRB Disclosure

All research involving human subjects unequivocally mandates formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Submissions requiring approval will not advance to the peer review without a verified determination letter.

1. If your work meets the following criteria, your work qualifies as "research"

a. A systematic inquiry intended to produce public, generalizable findings whose primary objective is to draw broad conclusions or establish theories applied to populations beyond your immediate sample pool.

2. If your empirical research involved collecting data from or about living human participants, you must submit formal IRB documentation.

3. If your research was completed under a faculty member's broader protocol, you do not need an entirely separate approval. Instead, provide verification connecting you to that protocol. This can be in

the form of:

a. An official IRB personnel amendment or

b. A signed faculty PI statement confirming you were authorized to handle the study data.

4. For more information on UMD's IRB policy and if it may or may not apply to you, visit this website.

IACUC disclosure

All research involving animal subjects must be accompanied by an approved Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) protocol. This includes all relevant permit numbers, names, and other information.

Required Accompanying Statements

All statements should be appended to the very last page of your submission.

1. IRB not applicable

a. If your submission does not involve human subjects research requiring IRB approval, include this exact statement: "I certify that this submission does not constitute human subjects research as defined by the University of Maryland IRB policy, and therefore does not require IRB approval or exemption determination."

2. Conflict of Interest Statement

a. Declare any non-financial ties to evaluated groups, including student leadership roles

b. Indicate if a student author was a paid intern or employee of the institution of focus

c. Disclose whether the research took place inside a faculty advisor's lab where that advisor has a secondary interest in being evaluated and potentially published by The Health Literate

d. If there are no conflicts of interest in your work, attach this statement: "The authors declare no competing financial, personal, or professional interests that could have inappropriately influenced the work reported in this manuscript."

Suggestion: Err on the side of disclosure. A stated leadership role or lab affiliation that turns out to be immaterial costs nothing, while an undisclosed one can trigger ethical flags, technical holds, or other editorial mechanisms that may delay/preclude the acceptance of your work.

3. Data Availability Statement

a. If analyzing data, explicitly state location of data you're presenting or legal justification to why your data cannot be disseminated.

i. If PHI/HIPAA/privacy constraints prevent public sharing, write "Due to participant confidentiality boundaries under HIPAA frameworks, individual-level data cannot be made publicly available."

ii. If analyzing secondary/already existing datasets, provide the URL to the dataset.

4. AI Use Disclosure

a. If generative AI was used beyond spelling/grammar assistance, attach an AI Declaration Statement that includes:

i. Specific platform, model name, and version identification (ex. "Anthropic Claude 3.5 Sonnet").

ii. A precise description of the scope of use. Detail the exact editing tasks performed and map them to locations in the manuscript. If any changes were made by AI in the revision stage, describe these as well.

iii. An explicit statement affirming: "I affirm that generative AI tools were used exclusively for limited support, including but not limited to language editing, formatting, or assisting with code generation, and are not credited as authors on this work. Generative AI was not used to autonomously conduct data analysis, interpret findings, draft core written content, generate synthetic images, or fabricate citations. All outputs were independently validated by the author(s), no confidential research data or protected health information was shared with any AI platform, and all usage strictly complied with The Health Literate ethical standards, which I have read and understood."

5. Funding Statement

a. Requirements:

i. Explicitly list all funding sources and describe the assistance provided by each (material, financial, or access-based)

ii. Specify how each funding source contributed to the research process

iii. Name the specific department, program or grant (not ambiguous terms like "supported by the University")

iv. If no funding was received, include this exact statement: "This research received no specific grant or financial support from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors."

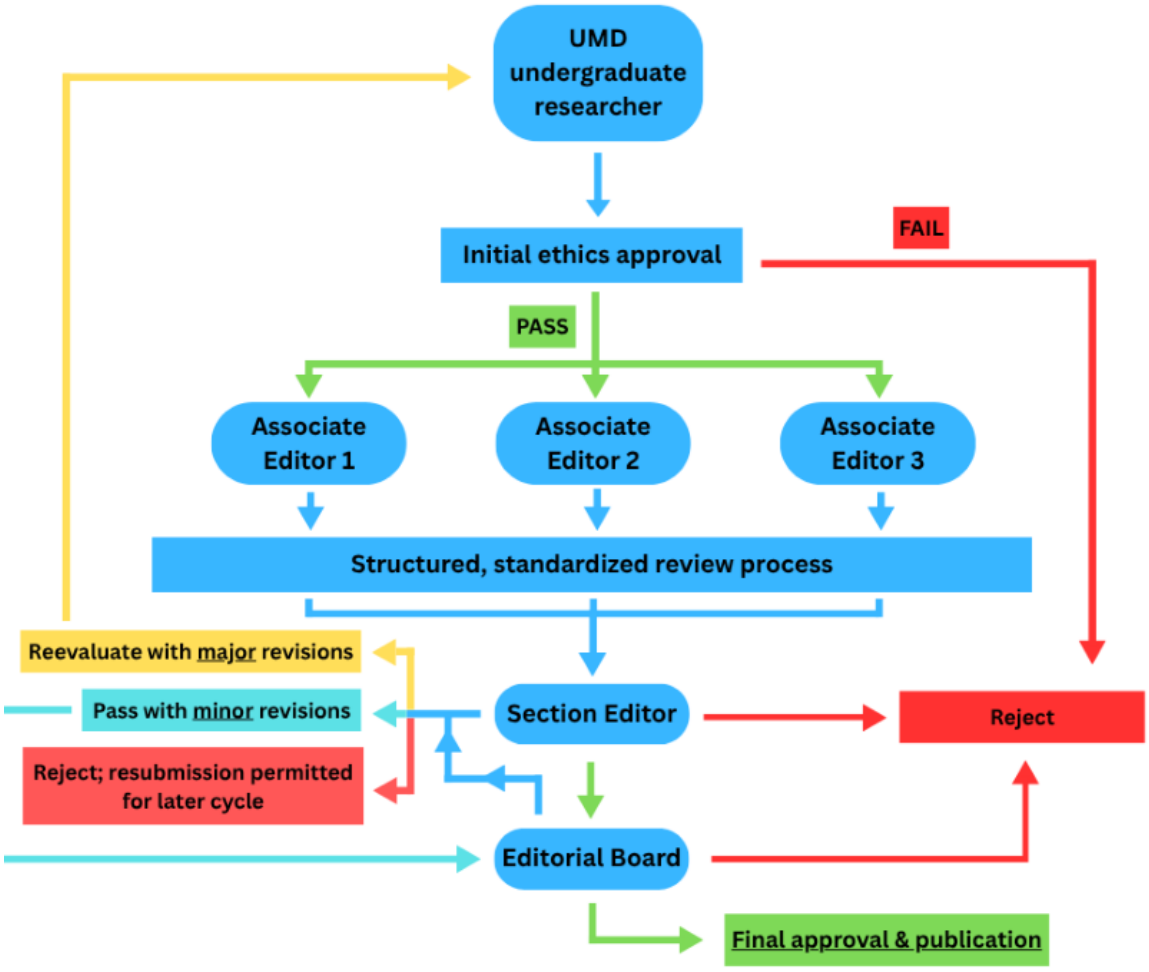
6. Principal Investigator (PI) statement of assent

a. If the research was done under a PI, include a signed statement from them affirming their approval for you to submit this specific work to The Health Literate. Their statement should include a date, the submission's title, and contact information.

7. Academic Integrity & Honor Pledge

a. All student authors must affirm the University of Maryland honor pledge during submission: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this submission."

Peer Review Process Schematic



Copyright, Licensing, & Conditions of Submission

1. Copyright Ownership

a. Authors retain full copyright ownership of their work at all times. Submission to The Health Literate does not transfer copyright to the journal.

2. License Granted Upon Acceptance

a. Submission alone does not guarantee the journal any rights. Authors retain full and exclusive control over their work unless and until it is formally accepted for publication. Upon acceptance, authors agree that:

i. Their work will be made publicly available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), allowing others to share, distribute, and adapt the work, provided appropriate credit is given to the author(s) and The Health Literate.

ii. They grant The Health Literate a perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right to publish, archive, and distribute the accepted submission regardless of any later withdrawal request.

b. Authors whose submissions are not accepted retain full rights to their work.

3. Attribution

a. Authors are responsible for ensuring that all submitted work is original and that any copyrighted materials, including images, figures, tables, or datasets, are used with proper permission and attribution.

4. Conditions of submission

a. By submitting work to The Health Literate, author(s) confirms that:

1. The submission is their original work

2. All individuals who contributed meaningfully to the work are listed as authors and approved its submission for review and potential publication by The Health literate

3. All sources and referenced materials are properly cited in AMA format

4. The submission does not contain plagiarized, fabricated, or falsified data

5. Permission has been obtained for any copyrighted images, figures, tables, or media included in the submission, with proper attribution

6. The submission is not currently under review by another publication, unless disclosed to and approved by the editorial board

7. They have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this submission, including plagiarism or unverified AI synthesis

8. IRB approval or exemption status has been disclosed where applicable, along with documentation linking the student to a faculty member's protocol if working under one

9. If research involves animals, IACUC protocol is included.

10.The submission includes accurate Conflict of Interest, Data Availability, AI Use Disclosure, University of Maryland Honor Pledge, and Funding statements

11.They retain copyright of their work while granting The Health Literate a non-exclusive right to publish, archive, and distribute the submission

12.They agree to publication under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)

13.They understand that if submitting Original Research, Briefs/Methods/Replication Reports, or Policy/Practice Notes, their submission will undergo double-blind peer review, during which their identifying information will temporarily be redacted from the version seen by reviewers. The Health Literate will under no circumstances officially disclose the identities of the peer review board assigned to their submission, and will take every reasonable measure to keep author identities redacted until final acceptance and publication

14.They agree to The Health Literate's publication, licensing, and editorial review policies