Ensuring a Blind Review

Removing Identifying Information From Your Manuscript

Authors are responsible for removing any information from their manuscripts that might lead a reviewer to discern their identities or affiliations. Although thoroughly masking a manuscript requires some revision, *JSSWR* seeks to reduce the burden on authors and suggests the following masking procedures. Identifying information that will require masking is typically found on the title page, in location names, IRB statements, and in authors' self-citations of prior work.

1. Mask the Title Page Attached to Manuscript

Masking the title page is simply a matter of omitting identifying information. The title page attached to the manuscript should contain three pieces of information:

- Running head
- Article title
- Date of submission

This title page should omit all identifying information (e.g., authors' names, affiliations).

2. Create SEPARATE FILE with Author-Identifying Title Page
– DO NOT attach or upload with manuscript

A title page with full identifying information should be created as a separate file and uploaded for the editor's eyes only. This page should include the following information:

- Full name and institution/university for each co-author
- E-mail address for each co-author
- Name of designated Corresponding Author, with full contact information (e-mail and physical address, telephone and fax numbers)
- Authors' Note, including current position of each co-author
- Acknowledgments, including funding statement
- Date of submission

3. Mask Location and University Affiliation

Referring to the research site or the university's review board by proper names is likely to be second nature for most researchers/writers; therefore, *JSSWR* suggests that authors perform a word search of their manuscript for location, and when found, make revisions as shown in the examples below.

Instead of writing,

> "These data were collected from incoming master's level students at the University of Maine School of Social Work…," mask the location using one of the following options:

> ✓ "Data were collected from first-year social work students enrolled in a graduate-level program at a university in the Northeastern United States."

> ✓ "Data were collected from first-year students enrolled in the MSW program at [location masked for blind review]."

4. Mask University Affiliation in Statements of IRB Approval

Instead of writing,

> "This research was approved by the University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board," give the region of the university or research site:

> ✓ "This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of a large Southeastern public university."

5. Mask Authors' Self-Citations of Published Work

Most researchers' current work builds from previous investigations, requiring self-citation of published findings. Typically, double-blind reviews have instructed authors to replace their names in self-citations with "Authors" in both in-text citations and reference entries. However, given the relatively small size of the social work research community (as compared with that of psychology or medicine), that type of masking singles out publications and makes it more, rather than less, likely that a reviewer might discern an author's identity. Therefore, self-citations are best masked by leaving the names but ensuring that you use third person to discuss the work. See the examples of typical self-citations and revisions.

Instead of writing in the first person as shown in examples below:

> **Typical self-citation:**

> "In our evaluation of the *Making Choices* social skills training intervention, **we** found middle-elementary aged girls (i.e., Grades 3 and 4) were more adept at processing nonverbal social cues than were boys in the same age range (**Fraser, Day, & Galinksky, 2004**)."

> **Typical masked self-citation that doesn't really hide identities**:

> "In our evaluation of the *Making Choices* social skills training intervention, **we** found middle-elementary aged girls (i.e., Grades 3 and 4) were more adept at processing nonverbal social cues than were boys in the same age range (**Authors, 2004**)."

JSSWR suggests using third person to mask self-citations as shown in the examples below:

> **Third-person reference to self-citation:**

> "In **their** evaluation of the *Making Choices* social skills training intervention, **Fraser, Day, and Galinksky (2004)** found middle-elementary aged girls (i.e., Grades 3 and 4) were more adept at processing nonverbal social cues than were boys in the same age range."

OR

> "In an evaluation of the *Making Choices* behavioral intervention, researchers found middle-elementary aged girls (i.e., Grades 3 and 4) were more adept at processing nonverbal social cues than were boys in the same age range (**Fraser, Day, & Galinksky, 2004**)."

- **Self-Citation of Unpublished Findings, Manuscripts, or Conference Presentations**

Authors rarely have access to materials that are "in press," "under review," "unpublished, on file with author," or a "manuscript in preparation" unless they are affiliated with the research in some way. In cases when you are citing unpublished materials, masking follows the standard course of replacing your name or co-authors' names with "Author" in both the in-text citation and the reference entry.

"Although participation was limited to one mother-adolescent pair from a family, our pilot study showed that including the entire family in the briefing about the study increased participation levels and decreased attrition (**Authors, in press**)."

Reference entries for Author self-citations should be re-alphabetized under "A for Authors" rather than leaving the entries in their original placement in the section. Reference entries for "Author" should show only Author and the year. **DO NOT** include article titles, DOIs, or other identifying information.

Figure 1. **Example of a Masked Reference List**

References
Auden, M. (2009). Challenges in conducting longitudinal research with immigrant families. *Social Work, 1,* 3-13. Author. (in press). Author. (2008). [Title omitted for blind review]. Unpublished manuscript.

6. Make Masked References Available in Cover Letter

Information for the masked references should be included in the cover letter to the journal editor. Making that information available will speed the review process in the event that a reviewer deems it necessary to consult a specific reference in making her or his decision about the manuscript.

7. Last Step: Removing Meta-Data Hidden in Electronic Files

Submitting a manuscript for publication without first scrubbing it of all hidden data is akin to walking across the stage to accept a national award with a 3-foot strand of toilet paper trailing from your left shoe. It can make a lasting impression.

If you have collaborated with others on writing a manuscript, used Track Changes to make revisions or add comments, or exchanged the manuscript through e-mail, it is likely that your manuscript contains hidden personal data that you will not want to share with your reviewers. Directions for scrubbing your documents of hidden data are given below for the most commonly used versions of Word.

Windows – Office XP/2003

Download the **Remove Hidden Data Tool** from Microsoft, available at http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyId=144E54ED-D43E-42CA-BC7B-5446D34E5360&displaylang=en

Be sure to print or save the instructions for using the tool that are given on the download page. After you install the **rhdtool**, open the document you want to clean. Then, on the **File** drop-down menu, click **Remove Hidden Data**. The tool will remove all comments, changes, versions, annotations, and other types of hidden text and data.

Windows Office 2007, 2010, 2013

Recent versions of Microsoft Office have a built-in feature to scrub documents of hidden data. First, note that changes made during this procedure are not reversible, so make a copy of the document you want scrubbed!

Word 2007 Open your Word document, and then click the **Office Button** (logo icon in upper left corner). Select **Prepare** from the drop-down menu, and then click **Inspect Document**.

Word 2010, 2013 Click on the File tab in the upper left of the Word ribbon, from the center of the document page that opens, click on the box (center of page) for Prepare to Share and then choose the Inspect Document option.

Word 2007, 2010, 2013 The **Document Inspector** box will open and present options for what types of data to be scrubbed. Check the appropriate boxes for (a) Comments, Revisions, Versions, Annotations; (b) Document Properties and Personal Information; (c) Custom XML data; and (d) Hidden text.

Do Not check the fourth option for **Headers, Footers, and Watermarks** because it will remove page numbers. Manually check your headers and footers to ensure they do not contain identifying information.

Macintosh – Office 2004 / Office 2008
In both versions of Office for Mac, the remove hidden data feature is built-in to the application. Open your Word document; select **Preferences** from the Word drop-down menu, then select **Security**. Select the option "**Remove personal information from this file on save.**"
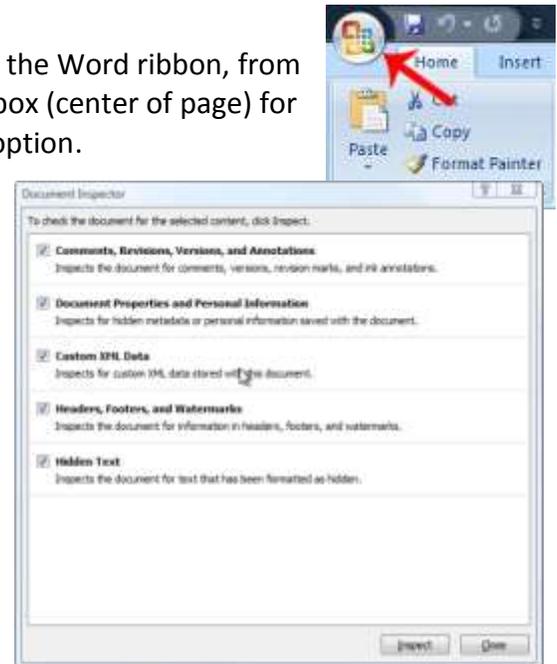
References

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Milsom, A. (2009). Manuscript blind review: An overview of our process and suggestions for authors [Editorial]. *Professional School Counseling Journal, 13.* Retrieved from http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=132&contentid=235

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Yankauer, A. (1991). How blind is blind review? *American Journal of Public Health, 81*, 843-845. doi:10.2105/AJPH.81.7.843