Peer reviewers may be suggested by:

- the Editor handling the manuscript.
- authors on submission of their manuscript to a journal.
- another reviewer who is unable to peer review the manuscript.

While there is an expectation that everyone involved in the process acts with integrity (Ref 1), the peer review process can be susceptible to manipulation (Ref 2-4) as discussed at COPE’s 2016 North American Seminar. (Ref 5)

The features or patterns of activity shown opposite are suggested to help Editors recognise potential signs of peer review manipulation. Often it is the occurrence of these features in combination that may indicate a potential issue, and they may only become apparent at later stages in the peer review or publishing process.

**Recognised Features or Patterns of Reviewer Activity**

- **Similarity to other peer reviewer reports** (purportedly from different individuals)
- **Third party agency involvement** (Ref 4-6)
- **Suspicious email address** (including, but not limited to: gmail, yahoo, or hotmail accounts)
- **A review that is vague in style** (language not typical of apparent seniority, experience, or educational background of reviewer) (Ref 46)
- **Positive review in strong contrast to other reviewers** (with mainly grammatical changes)
- **Never recommends rejection**
- **Reviews frequently returned well ahead of the deadline**
- **Agreeing to review many manuscripts** (and particularly ‘active’ in a journal’s peer review database)
- **Complimentary review but point out minor technical issues** (appearing credible)
- **Fictitious name**
- **Work in an unrelated subject to the manuscript**
- **Extremely quick to agree to peer review**
- **Atypical features of the IP address**
- **Suspicious email address** (atypical for that reviewer)

**Relevant COPE Cases:**

- **Case 11-27: Author Creates Bogus Email Accounts for Proposed Reviewers**
  [http://bit.ly/2eTOmVm](http://bit.ly/2eTOmVm)
- **Case 12-12: Compromised Peer Review in Published Papers**
- **Case 12-16: Compromised Peer Review (Unpublished)**

**References:**

1. COPE Ethical Guidelines to Peer Review.
2. COPE Statement on Inappropriate Manipulation of Peer Review Processes.
3. Who Reviews the Reviewers? Jigisha Patel
   [http://bit.ly/1AgfKDc](http://bit.ly/1AgfKDc)
4. Inappropriate Manipulation of Peer Review. Elizabeth Moylan
5. Can You Spot a Fake? The Trend of Fake Peer Reviews. Alison McCook
6. Organised Crime Against the Academic Peer Review System. Adam Cohen et al

**Best Practice to Minimise Peer Review Manipulation**

1. **SUBMIT**
   - Require that authors submit manuscripts to the journal themselves.

2. **VERIFY**
   - Try to use institutional emails or institutionally verified ORCIDs when inviting peer reviewers.

3. **QUALIFY**
   - Always check that suggested peer reviewers are qualified to review the manuscript and their email address is accurate.

4. **BEHAVIOUR**
   - Check for unusual patterns of behaviour which in combination may suggest peer review manipulation is occurring.

How to recognise potential manipulation of the peer review process...