

## [Review Standards](#)

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We recognize that H-Net Reviews is made up of a wide range of individuals from diverse academic and other backgrounds. We wish to embrace that diversity, and not stifle the flexibility and creativity on the part of individual networks that has made H-Net so strong.

However, experience has taught us that circumstances arise, ranging from inexperience to ill-fortune, in which H-Net Review editors might find themselves in situations that threaten to compromise their own professional integrity and the integrity of H-Net Reviews as a whole.

The standards outlined below should serve as a set of best practices to guide review editors in the performance of their responsibilities, and as a shield in case a particular situation takes an unfortunate turn. We hope that network Editorial Boards will take an active role in overseeing the review projects of their own networks, if necessary drafting network-specific standards that speak to the particular challenges of their own area.

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**Definition:** An H-Net Review is one that is assigned and managed by a certified and trained H-Net Reviews editor, that goes through the centralized copyediting process, is published on the H-Net Commons, and ultimately archived in the H-Reviews database. The Vice-President for Research and Publications exercises jurisdiction over H-Net Reviews in co-operation with the Publications Committee and the Associate Editor of Research and Publications.

If a particular network publishes reviews that do not go through this process, these are considered to be publications of that network (such as H-South publications) rather than H-Net publications. (This includes roundtable debates or forums.) Nonetheless, it is expected that the particular network will promulgate and adhere to standards that seek to avoid conflicts of interest, overt partiality, and other circumstances that may adversely influence the high standards to which H-Net networks and their editors hold themselves.

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## **Adapted from the AHA's "Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct."**

Reviewers should be mindful of any conflicts of interest that may arise as a consequence of their agreeing to review a particular scholarly work for H-Net. A conflict of interest arises when an individual's personal interest or bias could compromise (or appear to compromise) his or her ability to act in accordance with professional obligations. Reviewers should identify and, where appropriate, recuse themselves from reviewing any work in which a conflict of interest or the appearance thereof arises. An individual should normally refuse to participate in the formal review of work by anyone for whom he or she feels a sense of personal obligation, competition, or enmity.

It is the responsibility of the individual reviewer to determine if they face a conflict of interest, or the appearance thereof, in any particular case. If they do, then they should decline to review the particular work. If they already have the work in hand, they should withdraw from the review and return the book to the commissioning review editor.

Examples of situations where conflicts may arise, or appear to arise, include:

- The reviewer has some sort of close professional relationship with the author beyond mere professional acquaintance, such as that of advisor to student.
- The reviewer contributed in some material way to the publication of the book, by serving as a manuscript peer reviewer, for example.
- The reviewer contributed a pre-publication review (a "puff" or "blurb") to the publisher.
- The reviewer is serving on a prize or award committee for which the book is being considered.
- The reviewer is specifically recognized in the book's acknowledgments. This category requires care in its application. There is a difference, for example, in acknowledging an intellectual debt to another scholar (who may still be able to function as an impartial reviewer), and acknowledging a material debt, such as peer review.

Questions of conflict of interest are not always clear cut, and may not always be immediately apparent. Reviewers should consult with the commissioning review editor if they have questions, or if they believe that their circumstances require an

exception to the above. In the latter case, review editors should consult with their Editorial Boards, and as needed, the Publications Committee.

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## Conflicts of Interest

1. Within the normal bounds of professional life, conflicts of interest, whether actual or apparent, should be avoided by H-Net Review editors in pursuit of their responsibilities. All editors are encouraged to consult with their Editorial Boards, and/or with the Vice-President for Research and Publications, the Associate Editor of Research and Publications, and the Publications Committee if they are unsure whether they face a conflict of interest, or if they are unsure about how to proceed with an issue confronting them.

2. Reviews should be assigned to qualified reviewers by network review editors. Individual books should not be offered up through network-postings or any other public forums. However, it is acceptable (depending on network culture) to place a general call for reviewers, so long as the appropriate qualifications are taken into consideration and conflicts of interest are avoided.

3. Determining the qualifications of a reviewer for a particular book is a matter for the professional judgment of the individual review editor. Although standards for particular fields and networks may vary according to circumstances, a "qualified reviewer" is generally understood to be one: (a) who has completed or who is engaged upon the final stages of a terminal graduate education, as appropriate for their field, or (b) someone with demonstrated expertise in a specific field. Individual networks should publish their own qualifications for reviewing, within these general parameters.

**4. A statement concerning conflicts of interest should routinely accompany every invitation to review.** We recommend following the AHA's standard, that "an individual should normally refuse to participate in the formal review of work by anyone for whom he or she feels a sense of personal obligation, competition, or enmity." (See below) It is the responsibility of the reviewer to disclose a conflict of interest that could not otherwise be identified by the review editor.

5. As a general rule, requests by potential reviewers, qualified or otherwise, to review particular books should be politely declined.

6. As a general rule, review editors should not duplicate their responsibilities, whether it be between H-Net networks, or between H-Net and print publications, i.e., a review editor should not be responsible for the same duties (assigning reviews, for example) for more than one institution or publication. Such activity would be deemed a conflict of interest. When in doubt, please consult the appropriate H-Net bodies. If their duties are materially different (review editor in one case and copy editor in another, for example), then multiple appointments are permissible, so long as the Editorial Boards of the relevant networks are apprised of the circumstances and are willing to accept them.

7. Review editors should be especially careful in assigning reviews in circumstances where they themselves face an interest. If necessary, disinterested colleagues from within one's own network or guest review editors from unaffiliated networks should be tasked to proctor reviews in all aspects for those works. It is essential here that the appearance of conflicts of interest are avoided.

The following represent potential areas where conflicts could arise, and review editors should consult their Editorial Boards and/or the Vice-President for Research and Publications, the Associate Director for Research and Publication, and the Publications Committee for guidance:

- Fellow network editors as reviewers.
- Books authored or contributed to by fellow network editors or Editorial Board members.
- Books authored or contributed to by graduate advisors or other scholars to whom a review editor may feel a sense of obligation.
- Scholars who are active candidates for job openings in the review editor's department, or over whom editors have some sort of immediate power relationship.

8. Review editors should be mindful of a potential reviewer's relationship to the commercial side of publishing. Generally speaking, an employee of a press publishing books in related fields is never an appropriate reviewer, regardless of other qualifications. Review editors should be aware of the potential conflicts of interest inherent in individuals with other commercial relationships to publishing such as bookstore staff, and should seek to avoid them as reviewers in all possible cases.

9. Review editors should not assign reviews to anyone with whom they have any prior or current personal relationship that would disqualify them from supervisory

responsibility under standard professional policies on sexual harassment, nepotism, or fraternization. Neither should they assign reviewers to books by authors in cases where similar circumstances exist.

10. Review editors should never write H-Net Reviews for their own network, although they should be free to do so for networks with which they are not affiliated.

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## Accusations of Misconduct

11. H-Net expects each Reviews Editor and Reviewer to be familiar with professional academic standards of conduct consistent with the field of study most impacted by a particular review (see for example the ["Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct"](#) for historians published by the AHA).

12. H-Net reviewers each own his/her review which is published under the Creative Commons license (see [H-Net Policies](#) Article III: Policies on Copyright and Intellectual Property). H-Net and its editors have a professional obligation to edit and publish responsibly, but H-Net as a scholarly community and non-profit corporation assumes no legal liability for the content (e.g., of book reviews) published on its networks.

13. H-Net strongly recommends that networks not publish reviews of publications where there is evidence of academic misconduct (e.g., plagiarism).

14. If a network believes that a discussion or a review which suggests or alleges academic misconduct is of such value that it needs to be published, then the editor (e.g., in the case of a book review, the commissioning reviews editor) must present the drafted content and accompanying evidence for the alleged misconduct to the Vice-President for Reviews and Publications for verification before the content can be approved for publication.

15. H-Net staff will not communicate directly with an author, publisher, employer or any other concerned party regarding an allegation of academic misconduct that arises through the moderation and/or review process.

16. An H-Net reviewer or H-Net network member who feels an obligation to report misconduct by an author takes that responsibility upon her/himself. Any related communication must be from an individual, not from or on behalf of H-Net or any

affiliated network. Members should be aware that such a report can trigger legal and academic disciplinary processes beyond her/his control.

*Approved by H-Net Council, June 2007; amended January 2016*