

# Cover letter: Making, Updating, and Querying Causal Models with CausalQueries

Berlin, August 2025

Dear Editors:

Thank you and the reviewers for these very useful comments on our manuscript.

Reviewers 1 provided useful guidance especially regarding coding, formatting, and style.

We address these in turn:

1. `\section`, `\subsection`, etc. should be in sentence style

*We have implemented this change.*

2. The code presented in the manuscript should not contain comments within the verbatim code. Instead the comments should be made in the normal LaTeX text.

*We have removed all comments from verbatim code.*

3. For the code layout in R publications, we typically distinguish input/output using `Sinput`/`Soutput` (or equivalently `CodeInput`/`CodeOutput`). Unless there are special reasons to format it differently, the input should use the text width (up to 76 or 77 characters) and be indented by two spaces,

*We relied on the `.qmd` template for `jss`; we have now modified this for `CodeInput`; for `CodeOutput` we adjusted the `.tex` files after compiling.*

4. Code should have enough spaces to facilitate reading. Please include spaces before and after operators and after commas (unless spaces have syntactical meaning).

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

5. For R-related manuscripts: The first argument of `data()` and `library()` should always be quoted, e.g., `library("foo")`.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

6. If using “e.g.” and “i.e.” add a comma after the period to keep LaTeX from interpreting them as the end of a sentence, i.e.: “e.g.,” and “i.e.,”.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

7. The rule for capitalizing the starting letters of Figure, Section and Table is as follows: If you are referring to a particular figure/section/table then capitalize the first letter, otherwise use a lower-case first letter.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

8. Figures, tables and equations should be marked with a `\label` and referred to by `\ref`

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

9. All captions should appear below the corresponding figure/table. The captions should be in sentence style and end with a period. No additional formatting should be used for the caption.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

10. All table row/column headers should also be in sentence style. There should not be further footnote-style annotations in tables; these should all be placed in the caption.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

11. Equations should be marked with a `\label` and referred to by either `Equation~\ref{...}` (with capitalization, without parentheses) or `(\ref{...})` with the former being preferred if the number of equation references is not too large.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

12. In all cases, code input/output must fit within the normal text width of the manuscript.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

13. For bullet lists/itemized lists please use either a comma, semi-colon, or period at the end of each item.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

14. Abbreviations should be spelled in upper-case letters without additional formatting (i.e., without periods, without small caps, italics, etc.). All abbreviations should be introduced with their expansion where the expansion should not be capitalized.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

15. Do not use additional formatting for specific words unless explicitly required by the JSS style guide

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

16. As a reminder, please make sure that: `\proglang`, `\pkg` and `\code` have been used for highlighting throughout the paper (including titles and references), except where explicitly escaped.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

17. Please make sure that all software packages are `[?]`'d properly.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

18. All references should be in title style.

*We have checked compliance with this provision.*

## Reviewer 2

Reviewer 2 provided a number of very helpful substantive comments as well as useful suggestions for the package.

1. Page 6, paragraph 4, line 1: “...define arbitrary DAG...” should be “...define an arbitrary DAG...”.

*Corrected, with thanks.*

2.  $2^{(4^2)}$  with  $2^{(2^4)}$

*Corrected, with thanks.*

3. Page 7, Definition 1, item 3: For consistency with items 1 and 2, the authors may want to replace “a collection of functions...” with “an ordered collection of functions...”.

*Edited, with thanks.*

4. Also, since the paper’s introduction refers to “...causal models consistent with the structural model...” it would be beneficial to add a note on how these terms are distinguished in this paper somewhere.

*We add a paragraph distinguishing between these types of model beside the introduction of the definition.*

5. Page 7, first paragraph following Definition 1: For readers familiar with Pearl’s work, the authors may want to add a note that the nodal type variables in this paper often are referred to as response function variables in his terminology.

*Edited, with thanks.*

6. Page 7, third paragraph following Definition 1: It is unclear what “...align the domain...” means. Using “...partition the domain...” is more clear and standard terminology. Pearl calls this a canonical partition.

*Edited, with thanks.*

7.  $f^j \rightarrow f_{Y_j}$ , and similar

*Edited, with thanks.*

8. Page 8, line 14: Following common terminology on distributions over variables, “...Dirichlet distribution over  $\lambda^j$ ...” should be either “...Dirichlet distribution over  $\theta^j$ ...” or “...Dirichlet distribution for  $\lambda$ ...”. Likewise, the displayed Bayesian updating equation following the paragraph should use  $\theta$  in place of  $\lambda$ , since  $\lambda$  is itself the probability of the causal type  $\theta$ .

*Please note: We have maintained the existing language here. The reason is that the **CausalQueries** package in fact updates over the  $\lambda$ s. The reviewer correctly notes that the  $\lambda$  terms characterize the distribution over the  $\theta$ s; they are thus part of the definition of a causal model. However **CausalQueries** works on distributions over the  $\lambda$ s, that is it lets users update over causal models. Intuitively one might think of  $\lambda^j$  as capturing the share of units of type  $\theta^j$ ; if a unit is drawn at random then the probability that a unit has type  $\theta^j$  is  $\lambda^j$ . We assume however that there is uncertainty not just over  $\theta^j$  but over the shares,  $\lambda^j$  and so we update over these shares.*

9. Page 8, bottom: In the displayed multinomial, the parameter N has not been defined.

*Edited, with thanks.*

10. Page 9, first displayed formula: Here it becomes relevant what kinds of responses the subscripts actually encode.

*This is correct, thank you. We have now added text providing the encoding we use explicitly: “As a practical matter we need to label response types. In **CausalQueries** this is done using subscripts that indicate the response given different combinations of parents. A node,  $Y$ , with one binary parent,  $X$ , has nodal types subscripted with two values indicating the two possible values of  $Y$ ’s parent (0 or 1):  $(\theta_{00}, \theta_{01}, \theta_{10}, \theta_{11})$ , where  $\theta_{ab}$  denotes a nodal type for which  $Y$  takes the value  $a$  under the intervention  $do(X = 0)$  and the value  $b$  under  $do(X = 1)$ . The same*

*approach is used for nodes with more (or fewer) nodal types, where the  $i$ th digit in the subscript corresponds to the value the node takes when the parents take on the  $i$ th combination of possible parent values (listed in colexicographic binary order given the specified ordering of parents)."*

11. Page 16–17: Regarding caution and sensitivity to priors, the authors may also want to refer to Richardson et al. [2011].

*Added, with thanks.*

12. Page 17, line 1: In "...when models are not identified...", the word models should rather be replaced by estimands or queries.

*Edited, with thanks.*

13. Page 27, second code block should use "Y[X=0]==1" rather than "Y[X=1]==1" to be consistent with the preceding paragraph.

*Corrected, with thanks.*

14. Page 28, first line of paragraph following second code block: "...in addition..." should be "... and in addition,..." or "...in addition to...".

*Corrected, with thanks.*

15. Page 29, example under "Nested queries": The authors may want to add a note that the query  $Y[M=M[X=0], X=1]==1$  is commonly referred to as a natural direct effect in mediation analysis by Pearl.

*Added, with thanks.*

16. Page 32, sentence before code block: "...limits model..." should be "...lipids model...".

*Corrected, with thanks.*

17. Page 34: The authors note that risk ratios are currently not implemented but trying `lipids_model |> get_query_types("Y[X=1] / Y[X=0]")` yields output without warnings.

*The reviewer is correct. The output in this case indicates possible problems but no warning was provided:*

```
>lipids_model |> get_query_types("Y[X=1] / Y[X=0]")
  Z0.X00.Y00 Z1.X00.Y00 Z0.X10.Y00 Z1.X10.Y00 Z0.X01.Y00 Z1.X01.Y00
      NaN      NaN      NaN      NaN      NaN      NaN
  Z0.X01.Y10 Z1.X01.Y10 Z0.X11.Y10 Z1.X11.Y10 Z0.X00.Y01 Z1.X00.Y01
      0      0      0      0      Inf      Inf
```

*The output from the updated package now includes a warning:*

```
Warning message:
In check_query(query) :
  Non-linear transformations (such as /, ^, exp() or log())
  are not supported in querying.
```

18. In `?make_model`, the possibility for confounded  $X \leftrightarrow Y$  should be mentioned.

*Added to the most recent package update, with thanks.*

19. Also nice to have: links to documentations of related functions mentioned, e.g., to set priors and set parameters in `?make_model`.

*Implemented in the most recent package update, with thanks.*

20. In `summary.causal_model`, the meaning of the display column for a node is not immediately clear and might benefit from an example in the documentation.

*We have sought to make this output more interpretable in the most recent package update:*

```
> make_model("X1 -> Y <- X2") |> summary()

Causal statement:
X1 -> Y; X2 -> Y

Nodal types:

Nodal types for X1:
0  1

Nodal types for X2:
0  1

Nodal types for Y:
0000  1000  0100  1100  0010  1010  0110  1110  0001  ...

Guide to interpreting nodal types for Y:

  index      interpretation
1  *---  Y = * if X1 = 0 & X2 = 0
2  -*---  Y = * if X1 = 1 & X2 = 0
3  --*-  Y = * if X1 = 0 & X2 = 1
4  ---*  Y = * if X1 = 1 & X2 = 1
```

This careful set of reviews and the close reads have greatly strengthened this manuscript.

We note only one point of disagreement with reviewer B but hope to have improved the text at this point also to make the logic clearer.

With thanks,

Macartan Humphreys