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Table 1: Sources of complexity within reporting guidelines and the system drives their use.

| Source of complexity | Example |
| --- | --- |
| Number of components involved | Reporting guidelines often consist of guidance documents, checklists, and flow diagrams, and other tools. These are disseminated through websites, publishing platforms, submission systems, and they are endorsed and enforced by staff at stakeholders including publishers, the EQUATOR Network, conference organisers, and pre-print platforms. |
| Range of behaviours targeted | Guidelines comprise “reporting items”. Some items are relatively simple, like asking the author to specify their study design in the title. Others are harder, perhaps because they require time, expertise, or prerequisite tasks. For instance, some items may require authors to have conducted their study or analysis in a certain way, or to have collected particular information. |
| Expertise and skills required by those delivering and receiving the intervention | Academics from a particular field write reporting guidelines for their peers (as opposed to a lay audience), and so authors, editors, and reviewers must have sufficient expertise to use them. |
| The number of groups, settings, or levels targeted | Groups: Users of reporting guidelines differ in their field of expertise, their experience, place of work.  Settings: Although mostly written with authoring in mind, most guideline developers may also hope their resources are used by editors or peer reviewers for checking or appraising research articles.  Guidelines are written with individuals in mind, but their efficacy is generally measured at group level (e.g. articles from a particular field published in a period time). |
| Flexibility of the intervention or its components | There is variation between guideline content, resources, and the implementation strategies that development groups, publishers, and other stakeholders employ. |