



SHOW NOTES

Tips on Being a Peer Reviewer

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Benefits of being a peer reviewer:

- Helps you know what is being done in your field/area of interest.
- Helps you learn what editors and journals are looking for based upon the outcome of the manuscripts you review.
- Can be a path toward building your skills and advancing to a position as an associate editor or an editor in chief (regional/national recognition in your career).
- Builds an important component of your CV demonstrating contribution in your field.

Editor Pet Peeves:

- Letting the request to peer review sit in your email inbox until the deadline; respond promptly.
- Accepting the review but not doing the review on-time; repeatedly doing this can get you kicked-out of the pool of reviewers.
- Not writing a thorough review that would address the strengths and areas for improvement.

“Every opportunity to peer review is an opportunity to mentor and teach.”

10 Tips to being a good peer reviewer:

1. Respond promptly to the editor's request for being a reviewer.
 - Be aware of the timeline of the review; be realistic about your availability and ability to complete the review on time (put yourself in the author's shoes).
 - Know that it is OK to contact the editor for specific instructions and/or training about the review process for their journal - they may be able to connect you with a mentor/collaborator in the peer review process from a different institution, growing your experience and your network.

- Decline to review if you have a conflict or bias:
 1. Work at the institution of the author.
 2. Family/friend with author.
 3. Have been involved in some aspect of the work described in the paper.
 4. Competing with the author (pubs, grants).
 5. Have a financial or legal relationship (consultant).
2. Confidentiality is key.
- Contents of any materials you receive to review are confidential and embargoed and thus cannot be shared without explicit permission from the editor to collaborate with another reviewer.
 - It's OK to ask for permission to collaborate on your review – this can help grow the pool of reviewers and editors appreciate that.
3. Be familiar with the content of the articles that the journal publishes.
- You should understand the background of the content under review and have some experience with the content (know your limits) – quantitative versus qualitative research, for example.
 - If you're not comfortable/familiar with the content, it is OK to decline the request but consider reaching out to the editor if it is a journal that is of interest to you to get some training on being a peer reviewer for them.
4. Be aware of the general process of the review.
- Know what your journal requires and the software they utilize.
 - Understand the journal's guidelines (found on their website, often under instructions to authors). This will let you know if the author has adhered to the guidelines or not.
 - There are typically *separate* fields (comment boxes) where you can provide confidential responses to the editor that are not shared with the author, and there are fields that are for your comments that *are* shared with the authors – be sure that you are typing comments in the appropriate box.
5. Be organized in your review.
- Your review should offer clarity and actionable recommendations for improving specific aspects of the manuscript (e.g., methods, lit review, results, etc.).
 - Consider numbering your comments to allow for easy referencing, both for you and the editor.
 - Consider clustering your comments into positive comments and constructive criticisms; you could subdivide them into major and minor issues (e.g., minor issues being those that would be "nice to address" and major ones being "need to address").
 - Do not explicitly state your view about your publication decision (accept, reject, major revision, minor revision) in your comments to the authors; if you want to mention your rationale for your decision, do so in the confidential comments to the editor field.
6. Focus on the research content.
- Don't worry too much about grammar as editors will provide that input.
 - If you're reviewing an international author's paper written in English, it's OK to comment on writing that may include words that might change the meaning of sentence.

7. You don't have to be a statistician but...
 - You should be familiar enough with the statistics used by the authors to be able to comment on the appropriateness of the methods used.
 - Comment on the following:
 1. Is the methodology section described in a way that allows other researchers to replicate the study experiments?
 2. If there is new methodology, is this accurate and fully explained (i.e., research design, data sources, procedures)?
 3. Are references to previously published methodology relevant to the study included?
 4. Is the sample size large enough for the study and was it selected in an appropriate way?
 - If you're not familiar with the statistics used, you may opt to decline the review since you may be unable to comment on the appropriateness of the methodology described and, ultimately, the conclusions described.
 - You can ask the editor for a statistical reviewer.
8. Etiquette related to composing your response to the author(s) and editor.
 - Every opportunity to peer review is an opportunity to mentor and teach.
 - This is about your "voice" shared with the author/editor.
 - Be respectful, clear, concise, supportive and constructive in your comments.
 - How would you provide your feedback if you were face-to-face with the authors?
 - Your review should help the author improve the manuscript, even if your ultimate recommendation to the editor is to reject the manuscript for publication.
9. NEVER use a review as an opportunity for your own personal gain.
 - This is NOT a platform to espouse your own beliefs, theories, or agenda.
10. Give credit where credit is due.
 - It's appropriate to call out to the editor that the paper is a high-quality, impactful paper that may be addressing an issue that hasn't been addressed before.
 - Avoid expanding upon your "decision" that the paper should be published; that's the editor's decision.

Key Take-Aways

- Peer reviewing is a benefit to the reviewer as well as the author(s).
- Approach reviewing as a mentoring/teaching moment.
- Your review should be candid, thorough and constructive.
- The goal of the review is to improve the scholarship and the body of literature that others rely on to make decisions about changing curriculum or assessment processes.

Resources:

[10 tips for reviewing scientific manuscripts – and 5 red flags](#) by Joseph Alpert, MD

[Step by step guide to reviewing a manuscript](#) by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.,

[How to review manuscripts — your ultimate checklist](#) by Hannah Foreman

[AAMC Review Criteria for Research Manuscripts](#) (95 page reference)

[Medical Education Research Certificate \(MERC\) Program](#)