

---

## Essays

---

### The art of reviewing journal articles and its advantages for reviewers

Gaurav Saini

Department of Civil Engineering, Sharda University, Uttar Pradesh, India: gauravsaini@gmail.com

DOI: 10.20316/ESE.2018.44.17011

#### Abstract

Peer-review is one of the pillars of academic publishing and helps editors in selecting the best works. Reviewers serve as a jury that evaluates submitted manuscripts and helps fellow researchers to improve their work. Unfortunately, detailed instructions or dedicated courses for the best practices in manuscript reviewing are scarce. Then how should one go about reviewing a manuscript? More importantly, why should one serve as a reviewer? The aim of this essay is to answer both these questions by providing a step-by-step procedure for manuscript review and a list of advantages of being a reviewer.

**Keywords:** peer-review, reviewer, best practices, advantages

Reviewing is an integral and critical component of the scholarly publication process.<sup>1</sup> It involves evaluating a manuscript, judging its positives and negatives, and ultimately assists the editor in making a decision. It requires the contribution from two to five researchers, depending on the journal in question, from related research disciplines and interests. These “reviewers” evaluate the manuscript on behalf of the editor and guide the judgement on its suitability for publication in the said journal.

Typically, reviewers are drawn from academia and are researchers who are working on similar themes. Reviewing is usually a voluntary exercise and does not involve any monetary compensation.<sup>2</sup> It requires time and intellectual capital. Then why should one do it? Especially when academicians are constantly besieged with teaching load, research proposal deadlines, graduate students, their own publication goals, etc.

And how should one go about this process of review? Dedicated courses on how to review a manuscript and the do's and don'ts of the process are scarce. Most journals<sup>3-4</sup> and several groups (such as ICMJE) or organizations (such as COPE)<sup>1,5</sup> provide guidelines for reviewers, however, such guidelines are not very specific and, more importantly, not enforceable. This may lead to slow, inconsistent and (potentially) biased reviews. The issue is especially problematic for researchers whose native language is not English as most journals use English as the standard language. The review process has inherent risks and limitations, however, it is also a necessary step to ensure the dissemination of quality information to the research community.

Based on my own experiences of almost a decade, I am trying to answer the two critical questions of how and why to review. What follows is derived from my own experiences. Over the years, I have received reviews. There

have been some very constructive and insightful reviews that have helped in publishing my manuscripts and also in developing a philosophy of reviewing. Assuming that one has already accepted the editor's invitation to review a manuscript article, I am outlining a few steps that can be beneficially used to carry out the review.

#### 1. Read the article comprehensively

Since the reviewer is playing the role of the jury, it is expected that he/she will be making the decisions based on the complete manuscript. Remember that the authors have spent a considerable amount of time on preparing it and they are expecting a fair deal. Thus, it is advisable that the reviewers read the manuscript thoroughly.

#### 2. Necessity and novelty of the work

The reviewer assists the editor in answering two key questions: How useful and how novel is this work? The introduction typically establishes the former and may also contain information to answer the latter, and hence should be carefully reviewed.

#### 3. Make notes

It is advisable to make notes while reading the manuscript. This is especially helpful when the reviewer cannot finish the reading/review in one go and can use the notes to get a quick summary of the work. These notes are also helpful in writing the review as the reviewer will just need to focus on the relevant sections instead of going through the entire work again.

#### 4. Highlight key points

To assist and expedite the process, the reviewer may want to make personal notes about the strengths and weaknesses of the work. Such a list is critical to the overall judgement on whether the manuscript requires modifications or should be rejected outright.

#### 5. Summarise the article and its distinguishing features

When you sit down to write the review, it always helps to make a brief summary of the work with its distinguishing features. Firstly, it gives the editor and the authors the confirmation that the reviewer has gone through the work. Secondly, it also presents a short summary of the key features of the work, which may be used by the editor to decide on the suitability of the manuscript in its current format. Many reviewers simply present a bulleted or numbered listing of their comments, without trying to encourage or engage the authors or the editor.

### 6. List major and minor comments

Before passing judgement, the reviewer should ideally present a listing of the major and/or minor concerns with the work, rather than making broad or generalized statements. The detailed issues raised by the reviewer will be the natural guide to the final editorial ruling.

### 7. Be descriptive

Reviewer comments should ideally be as descriptive and specific as possible. This will ensure that the authors understand exactly what concerns the reviewer had and their causes. This will also allow the authors to answer them appropriately and assist them in improving their work if needed. Use line numbers to point out the exact location of concern within the manuscript.

### 8. Include literature references

Many reviewers make unsupported statements about the submitted work. While something may be very obvious to the reviewer, based on his/her experiences, it may not be so for the authors. It always helps if the reviewer provides literature references to support statements/concerns, as the authors will know exactly where to look for additional information.

### 9. Check figures, illustrations, and tables

Figures, illustrations, and tables act as checks and balances for a manuscript. The reviewer may want to check if the tables and figures correspond to what is claimed by the authors. A check of graphs is essential for data-based manuscripts as some statistical analysis is mandatory in most journals. A figure is worth a thousand words and hence deserves reviewer attention.

### 10. Provide some comments to the editor

The reviewers have the option of providing some comments directly to the editor which will not be seen by the authors. If needed, this option can be exercised to present a viewpoint or decision directly to the editor. This is beneficial if the reviewer feels that there could be information that the editor may need to make his/her decision, without informing the authors. Once I reviewed a manuscript that was, unfortunately, plagiarised from the authors' previous works and I simply shared my concerns and appropriate proof with the editor for his final decision.

### 11. Provide future course of action

Whenever the reviewer feels that the manuscript needs major reworking and/or is to be rejected, it is advisable that he or she outlines a future course of action. This will guide the authors in improving their work. This could be done in the form of suggestions about additional experiments, model runs, a new line of reasoning, etc.

While the steps suggested above have helped me in the review process over the years, I would also like to point out that reviewing is an ethical exercise and a reviewer should respect the following:

### 1. Be kind and gentle

The aim of the review is not only to judge a manuscript but also to help a fellow researcher improve his/her work. It is strongly suggested that reviewers be kind and gentle to the authors while making comments about their work. The review is not the place to vent out your personal feeling or biases about a topic or line of reasoning or the authors.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. Be on time with the review

The review is a time-bound exercise and the editor, as well as the authors, are counting on the reviewer for a timely decision. Many journals pride themselves on their quick turn-around time and many authors use that as a key criterion for journal selection. In many cases, the publication may be used for someone's job review and hence it is imperative that the reviewers carry out their work in a timely manner.

### 3. Review rejection

Time constraints may not always allow a willing reviewer to finish the exercise on time. A reviewer who knows they will not have time to review a manuscript should not accept the responsibility. Similarly, if the manuscript's focus area is very different from the reviewer's areas of expertise, it is expected that he/she will reject the reviewing opportunity. In either case, it is advisable to suggest the name/s of more suitable reviewers to the editor.

The review is an ethical responsibility for any researcher. Unless all authors serve as reviewers, the editors will not be able to find enough reviewers to judge the submitted manuscripts. So, as far as possible, one should serve as a reviewer to help an editor and a fellow researcher. Reviewing keeps one in the game of publishing and helps improve authorship skills.<sup>7</sup> Simply by reviewing, one can foresee the potential state of mind of reviewers and prepare one's work accordingly. Reviewers also constantly stay in touch with the requirements of different journals and editors, and this may help them choose a journal more easily for submitting their own work in future.

In addition, reading someone else's work allows researchers to stay up-to-date in their area of expertise<sup>7</sup> and to continually improve their own work. Further, reviewers are privy to the comments of other reviewers and this may provide them with an opportunity to learn about differing views about the same matter and this could be a learning exercise in itself.<sup>1</sup>

Good reviewers are difficult to find and editors are always in search of them. In fact, good reviewers are typically recognized by a number of journals every year with "Excellence in Review", "Best Reviewer", "Outstanding Reviewer", etc. awards.<sup>8-9</sup> Such awards bring international recognition to the reviewer and these can be used in one's curriculum vitae. More importantly, the editor may be cited as one of the references for any potential career opportunity, promotion, tenure-review, etc. Well-placed editors may also recommend such outstanding reviewers for jobs. Reviewing is a networking opportunity, especially for young researchers, and should be taken advantage of.

## Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express his sincere gratitude to the numerous reviewers of his own work and the editors who have had faith in his reviewing skills.

## References

- 1 International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Responsibilities in the submission and peer-review process. Available at: <http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/responsibilities-in-the-submission-and-peer-peview-process.html#three> (accessed 21 June 2017)
- 2 Palmer-Cooper E. Bad Press for Peer Review: is it deserved? *European Science Editing*, 2016, 42(3):70.
- 3 Wiley- Learned Publishing. Guide for Reviewers. 2017. Available at: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/\(ISSN\)1741-4857/homepage/guide\\_for\\_reviewers.htm](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)1741-4857/homepage/guide_for_reviewers.htm). (accessed 16 June 2017)
- 4 Pain E. How to Review a Paper. *Science Mag*. September 2016. Available at: <http://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2016/09/how-review-paper>. (accessed 16 June, 2017)
- 5 Committee on Publication Ethics. COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers. March 2013. Available at: [https://publicationethics.org/files/Peer%20review%20guidelines\\_0.pdf](https://publicationethics.org/files/Peer%20review%20guidelines_0.pdf) (accessed on 21 June 2017)
- 6 Hernandez L. Becoming a reviewer is good for you- the Peer-review process. *Gastrointestinal Endoscopy*, 2009, 70(6): 1159-1160.
- 7 Annesley T. Seven reasons not to be a peer reviewer-and why all these reasons are wrong. *Clinical Chemistry*, 2012, 58(4): 677-679.
- 8 Elsevier. 2016 Best Reviewers. 2016. Available at: <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/international-journal-of-electrical-power-and-energy-systems/news/2016-best-reviewers>. (accessed 16 June 2017)
- 9 Springer. 2016 Excellence in Review Awards for Frontiers of Environmental Science & Engineering. 2016. Available at: <http://www.springer.com/environment/journal/11783>. (accessed 16 June 2017)

### European Association of Science Editors 14th General Assembly and Conference

University of Bucharest, Romania  
8-10 June 2018

#### Balancing Innovation and Tradition in Science Editing

### Call for Posters

EASE welcomes the submission of abstracts for the poster session at the forthcoming conference in Bucharest. These may address any aspect of scientific editing or publishing. Posters will be displayed throughout the conference. Prizes for the best medical and non-medical posters have been donated by *The Lancet* and the *Annals of Botany*, respectively.

Each abstract should include an informative title and be about 200 words.

Submission deadline is 1 April 2018.

Email to: Tea Marasovic, EASE Secretariat  
secretary@ease.org.uk

## A smart editorial board system: an effort to enhance the quality of manuscripts, scientific journals and publishers

### Masoud Negahdary

Department of Research and Development, Lexis Publisher, Iran; Yazd Cardiovascular Research Center, Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd, Iran; Nanomedicine and Nanobiology Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran  
editor@lexispublisher.com

DOI: 10.20316/ESE.2018.44.17010

### Abstract

In scientific journals, smart management systems play a crucial role in qualitative progress of publishing. Journals and publishers have different strategies for accepting papers in order to maintain and enhance publishing quality. A new smart and efficient system to manage the editorial board of journals has been implemented and is introduced in this essay. This system is designed on a web-based platform and uses advanced software technologies for needs assessment, designing, and implementation. This system has many advantages, such as: higher quality management of journals and publishers; identifying and ranking editorial board members; evaluating the accuracy of journals; and providing a system for smart scientometrics of journals, publishers, editors and reviewers. This system is designed to be compatible with future extensibility and can be used as a global database for managing an editorial board in journals and publishing houses.

**Keywords:** editorial board, smart journals, quality of publishing, promotion of scientometrics, journal management system.

### Introduction

Currently, editorial board members of journals are asked to evaluate submitted manuscripts according to traditional methods, such as the editor-in-chief's opinion and their specific competence, then the manuscripts are sent to peer reviewers.<sup>1,2</sup> In multidisciplinary journals that cover broader topics or in journals with a large number of editorial members, the choice of reviewers is a complicated task. In this situation, there is a greater risk for human errors.<sup>2,3</sup> Professional and fair evaluation of submitted manuscripts, evaluation of editors' and reviewers' activities and ultimately evaluation of any further activity related to submitted manuscripts are only possible through a smart system for managing editorial boards. The best known and most widespread systems for managing journals are: Editorial Manager, Scholar One and the Elsevier editorial system. In this essay, I introduce an advanced and applicable journal management system (Lexis Publisher system) for smart management of editors and reviewers in journals that can be an important step in journal development.