How to be an effective reviewer

Peer reviewing for academic journals

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"After authors, reviewers are the lifeblood of any journal."

Mike J. Smith, Editor-in-Chief, *[Journal of Maps](#)*

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75% of authors rate their satisfaction with the refereeing process at Taylor & Francis as 8 or above.*

Taylor & Francis Author Survey, 2015

*on a scale of 1-10, 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest

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What is peer review?

1. A **collaborative process:** allows submitted manuscripts to be evaluated and commented upon by **independent experts** within the same field of research.

2. *All* evaluation and critique should provide authors with **feedback to improve their work** and, critically, allows the editor to **assess the paper's suitability for publication** in the journal.

The benefits of peer review

Gives *authors*:

- **Detailed** and constructive feedback from experts in the field.

- **Highlights** any errors or gaps in literature.

- **Assists** with making the paper more applicable to the journal readership.

- **Enables** a discussion (between the author, reviewers, and editor) around a research field or topic.

Effective peer review: the aims

1. **Original**: presents original research findings which has not been previously published (nor is under consideration) by another journal.

2. **Ethical**: meets all applicable standards of ethics.

3. **Relevant**: to the journal's aims, scope, and readership.

4. **Comprehensive**: a critical review and evaluation of key literature sources for a given topic.

5. **Sound**: both methodologically and technically.

Types of peer review

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- **Single-blind**: the reviewers know the author of the article, but the author doesn't know who the reviewers are.

- **Double-blind**: neither the reviewers or the authors of the article are known to each other (*in theory*)

- **Open review**: authors and reviewers know each others' identities.

- **Post-publication open review**: after an article is published, readers can comment on it.

Why review?

- **Helping** others by applying your professional expertise.

- To be part of **maintaining** a good, rigorous peer-review process.

- **Aware** of current (emerging) research within your subject area.

- **Builds** relationships and improves your academic and professional profile.

- **Improves** your own writing skills

The view from a **journal editor**

"It's all about providing quality assurance."

Gary McCulloch,

Editor of *British Journal of Educational Studies*

"Be fast, be fair, be well-informed."

Mike Smith, Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Maps*

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Getting reviewing right:
hints & tips

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Before you say 'yes'

1. What form of review does the journal operate?
2. How you will need to submit your review?
3. Conflict of interest? Tell the editor immediately.
4. Are you struggling with the deadline? Let the editor know, so they can update the author if there is a delay.

More on ethics to come later…

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Step 1: research the journal

- Visit the journal's homepage to get a sense of the journal's published content and house style.

Q. Is the paper suitable for this journal?

- Refer to the Instructions for Authors to see if the paper meets the journal's submission criteria.

Q. Is it the right length, does it fit the journal's formatting style, does it fit the aims & scope?

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Step 2: writing your report

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- Complete the review questions or report form

Q. What are the strengths or weaknesses of the paper?

Disagree with the author's opinions? Allow them to stand, provided they are consistent with the evidence.

Remember: both positive feedback and constructive criticism are part of your role.

Some key questions for reviewers

- Is the submission **original**?

- Does it help to expand or further research in this subject area?

- Does the paper fit the **scope** of the journal?

- Is there an **abstract** and **concluding section**?

- Is the submission in **standard English** to aid the understanding of the reader?

- Is the methodology and analysis **accurate** and properly conducted?

- Are all **relevant** data, citations, or references given?

Being positive: examples of comments

"The manuscript is well-written, in an engaging and lively style."

"This manuscript ticks all the boxes we normally have in mind for an X paper, and I have no hesitation in recommending that it be accepted for publication after a few typos and other minor details have been attended to."

"Given the complexity involved, the author has produced a number of positive and welcome outcomes including the literature review which offers a useful overview of current research and policy and the resulting bibliography which provides a very useful resource for current practitioners."

Critiquing constructively

"In the "Discussion" section I would have wished to see more information on…"

"Overall I do not think that this article contains enough robust data to evidence the statement made on page X, lines Y–Z."

"I would strongly advise the author(s) of this paper to rewrite their introduction, analysis, and discussion to produce a more contextualized introduction to…"

"To make this paper publishable the author needs to respond to the following substantive points…"

Make a recommendation

Key decisions are:

- **Accept**
- **Minor revision**
- **Major revision**
- **Reject**

Whatever you decide, be specific and constructive, both of which will help the author(s) in this and all future publications.

How to get involved

1. Be an author
2. Speak to your supervisor. Could you work with them on a review?
3. Send your academic CV to a journal, with a covering letter
4. Look out for 'calls for reviewers'

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Tackling the **systems**

Online submissions systems: used to manage and track papers as they move from submission through peer review, before going into production.

Editors will use these to source and contact reviewers, and check the review process.

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Reviews can take different forms:

1. Unstructured

2. A basic checklist

3. Numerical rating scale

4. Structured form

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Mathematical Derivation

*Methodology / Materials and Methods – overall evaluation   [Instructions]

Please select a response ▼

Please select a response
Outstanding
Sound
Sound with minor or moderate revisions
Unsound or fundamentally flawed
Not applicable

Methodology / Materials and Methods – optional feedback (Limit 20000 Characters)

Character Count: 0

*Objective / Hypothesis – overall evaluation

Please select a response ▼

Objective / Hypothesis – optional feedback (Limit 20000 Characters)

Character Count: 0

*Figures and Tables – overall evaluation

Please select a response ▼

Getting help submitting a review:

- Contact the Editorial Office for the journal

- Email the Taylor & Francis Peer Review Helpdesk
  - prshelp@tandf.co.uk

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Ethics in peer review

Ethical guidelines for reviewers at Taylor & Francis

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- **Unbiased consideration**, judging paper on its merits, without regard to race, religion, nationality, sex, seniority, or institutional affiliation of the author(s).

- Must declare *any* **potential conflict of interest** before agreeing to review, including any relationship with the author that may potentially bias their review.

- Must keep the peer review process **confidential**.

- Should provide a **constructive, comprehensive, evidenced,** and appropriately substantial peer review report.

- Must avoid making any statements in their report which could be construed as impugning any person's reputation.

- Should make all reasonable effort to submit their report and recommendation in a **timely** manner.

- Reviewers should **alert the journal editor to any significant similarity** between the paper being reviewed and any published paper or submitted manuscripts of which they are aware.

Read: COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers

If you have a concern about the integrity of a paper you have been sent to review:

- Contact the Editor handling peer review for the manuscript and the Editor-in-Chief

- Explain your concerns in depth without being personal

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Questions?

Support & guidance for authors:
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View for and from editors:

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