Becoming a Better Reviewer
Writer and Researcher too
# Annals Editorial Team

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Learning objectives

- Why be a reviewer?
- Goals of the peer review process
- Structure of the review
- Process of reviewing a manuscript
- Do’s and don’ts
Why do reviews?

- Helps authors improve their work.
- Makes you a better scientist, writer and teacher.
- Improves published reports for readers.
- Develops relationships with editors.
- Learn content and methods helpful in your work.
- Participate in the intellectual life of your field.
What do we want a review to do?

From the perspectives of

- Readers
- Authors
- Editors
Reader wants a review to:

- Separate the wheat from the chaff.
- Help improve paper.
  - Shorter – Clearer – More Relevant
Comments helpful to readers

“The level of detail in the methods section is probably not necessary for most readers; perhaps the authors can summarize and provide a good reference.”
“The background and conclusion of the abstract are too understated and could be enhanced to better engage readers.”
Authors want a review to:

- Be prompt.
- Be honest and free of bias.
- Be kind and courteous.
- Be informed.
- Help improve the paper.
  - Identify areas of possible confusion.
  - Make specific suggestions.
Editor wants a review to:

- Be prompt.
- Be honest and free of bias.
- Help accept or reject paper.
- Provide expertise.
  - Topical
  - Methodologic
- Help improve paper.
  - Shorter – Clearer – More Relevant
- Be kind and courteous.
Editor’s three questions

1. Is it new?
2. Is it true?
3. Is it useful?
Is it new?

- Is the work original?
- Does it contribute new knowledge to what is already known and published?
  - If so, what does it add?
  - If not, cite relevant references.
Is it “true”? 

- Is the research question well defined? 
- Is the study design appropriate to answer the question? 
- Evaluate the design, methods, measures, analysis. 
- Are the data valid, precise, and accurate? 
- Are the conclusions supported by the analysis? 
- Do they answer the stated research question?
Is it useful?

- So what? Does this work matter?
- To whom?
  - clinicians, patients, teachers, policymakers, researchers?
- Are the conclusions set in the relevant context of knowledge and application?
- Is the presentation clear?
- Is this journal the right audience?
What makes a good reviewer?

- **Expertise**
  - Topical knowledge - current
  - Methods
    - Clinical epidemiology
    - Research design and biostatistics

- **Practical experience**
  - Patient care, policy, program, education, research
What perspective do you bring?

- Primary care expert
- Clinician-researcher
- Transdisciplinary scholar
- Generalist
- Educator
- Behavioral scientist
Reviewer perspective

“As a practitioner who performs this procedure, I think this study adds to the field by testing the intervention in a new patient population, but I would defer to statistical review on the methods.”
Journal review process

- Author submits ms
- Editorial office check
- Editor selects reviewers
- Office assigns reviewers
- Reviewers accept assignments
- Reviewers complete reviews
- Editorial decision
- Decision letter to author
- Revision cycle
Structure of the Review

- Rate the manuscript.
- Comments to the Author(s)
- Confidential Comments to the Editor
- Recommendation on decision to publish
Invitation to review

Respond promptly to the invitation to review.

A. Read the title, author and abstract.
B. Declare conflict of interest.
C. Assess the time frame.
D. Assess your own expertise.
E. Accept or decline, maybe suggest others.
Assess the manuscript

Assess the manuscript.

1. First quick read.
2. Close second reading.
3. Make notes of concerns.
4. Study figures and tables.
5. Cross check numbers.
6. Answer specific questions from the editor.
Review manuscript content

1. Title
2. Abstract
3. Introduction
4. Methods
5. Results
6. Discussion
7. References
8. Tables and Figures
9. Disclosures of COI, prior publication, support
Background materials for review

- Review related studies
- Journal guidelines and examples
- Reporting standards (CONSORT, etc.)

http://www.equator-network.org/
Completing the review

Complete the Review Form

- Identify yourself if review is open.
- Declare any COI.
- Rate manuscript on scales.
Make comments to the author(s)

- *Brief* summary of study and its place in current knowledge on the topic.
- General comments on the research and report
- Specific comments, critiques, suggestions
  - Usually in order of presentation. Number items.
  - Note location: section, paragraph, sentence.
  - Avoid line-by-line editing.
Comments helpful to authors

“The tables would be easier to read if the rows and columns were reversed.”
Comments helpful to authors

“Please add information on response rate and sample size to the methods section.”
Comments helpful to authors

“It would be very helpful to have more information on how the intervention adds to previous studies. The authors may not be aware of the related work of: Smith et al. 2013”
Make comments to editor.

- Summative comments
  - Your assessment of the work.
  - Is it new, true, useful?

- Special comments
  - Answer any questions from editor.
  - Special concerns: duplicate publication, COI, etc.
  - Potential for editorial, journal club, etc.?
Comments helpful to editors

“This is a well designed update on the incidence and treatment of pheochromocytoma, however it may be better suited to a specialty journal.”
Comments helpful to editors

“I’m a little concerned that one of the authors is chairman of XYZ Corp and the intervention uses a commercial product.”
“Although the introduction and discussion need to be more concise, the methods are good and it is highly relevant to primary care. I think it can be successfully revised..”
Publish, revise or reject?

- Make your recommendation to the editor.
  - Accept as is
  - Accept with minor revisions
  - Reconsider after major revisions
  - Reject
Review your review

- Is it clear and specific?
- Is it constructive?
- Does it answer the editor’s 3 questions?
- What did you contribute to the evaluation?
- Re-check your ratings and recommendation.
After the review

Await editor’s decision letter to the author.
- Decision on publication
- See the other reviews.
- Revision of manuscript. Possible re-review.
- Final publication.
Reviewers recommend. Editors decide.

Not all worthy manuscripts get published.

- The paper is better suited to a different journal.
- “So What?” Doesn’t lead to change in practice.
- Limited generalizability.
- Limitations in methods are not ‘fixable.’
- Recently published papers on a similar topic
- Simply not enough space - long wait for publication
Reviews and rejection

Your review may help authors even if their manuscript is rejected.

- Guide revisions for another journal.
- Understand the limitations of their study.
- Learn about related research.
- Gain perspective and context.
Reviewing qualitative research

Sample
- Varied sample for full range of relevant perspectives?
- Iterative approach used?
- Participants appropriate for answering the research question?
- Did authors likely reach saturation?

Data Collection
- Best qualitative data collection method for research question?
- Interviews for understanding attitudes, experiences, beliefs
- Observation for studying work processes, communication patterns
Reviewing qualitative research

- Interviews
  - Interview guide included if interview methods used?
  - Evaluate interview guide. Are the questions:
    - Appropriate for answering the research question?
    - Open-ended?
    - Leading?
    - Likely to lead to rich responses?

- Observational research
  - Enough data to answer study questions?
Reviewing qualitative research

Analysis

- Did authors adequately describe steps used to analyze data?
- Are the findings rich and robust?
- Do the authors support their claims with evidence?
- Is the amount of data included in the manuscript adequate?
- Do the findings ring true?
- Are the findings superficial (a laundry list) or have the authors conducted a deep analysis that portrays the phenomenon of interest in its complexity, capturing all likely variation.

Provide comments that authors can use to strengthen their manuscript in these areas.
Reviewing essays

- **Topic**
  - Interesting?
  - Relevant to primary care?
  - Either timely or timeless?

- **Literary quality**
  - Clearly written?
  - Appropriate length?
  - Sufficient detail?
Reviewing essays

- Does the essay stand out for at least one of these reasons:
  - Unique topic
  - Hot topic
  - Well written
Review do’s

1. Do respond ASAP to the invitation to review.
2. Do declare any potential conflict of interest.
3. Do complete the review within the requested time frame.
4. Do make your comments to authors constructive.
5. Do make a clear recommendation to the editor.
Review do’s

6. Do keep the content and process confidential.
7. Do state your limitations to the editor.
8. Do support your comments with references.
9. Do be specific in your critique.
10. Do point to sections that are not clear.
Reviewer don’ts

1. Don’t take on a review you cannot do in time.
2. Don’t make snide comments or criticisms.
3. Don’t use the data.
4. Don’t contact the authors.
5. Don’t put recommendations for publication in your comments to the authors.
6. Don’t copyedit the manuscript.
Resources

- Reviewer resource list
- Characteristics of good reviews
- Example reviews
- Annals reviewer registration form