Reviews: How to Give and Take

Editor’s Workshop

IAGLR 2016 -- Guelph, Ontario

June 6-10

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Overview

• Peer review process
• How are reviewers selected?
• Why you should be a reviewer
• For reviewers
  – How to write a review
  – What makes a good review (or a bad one)
• For authors
  – How authors should approach the reviews they receive
The peer review process

1. Scientists study something.

2. Scientists write about their results.

3. Journal editor receives an article and sends it out for peer review.

4. Peer reviewers read the article and provide feedback to the editor.

5. If an article finally meets editorial and peer standards it is published in a journal.

Editor may send reviewer comments to the scientists who may then revise and resubmit the article for further review. If an article does not maintain sufficiently high scientific standards, it may be rejected at this point.

http://undsci.berkeley.edu/article/howscienceworks_16
Peer Review Process

• Time consuming
  – For authors, working through the process
  – For reviewers, time to work on review(s)

• JGLR stats
  – 2013-2015 we received over 770 papers and accepted 60% of these papers
  – If we get 2 reviewers for every paper submitted, that's 1500 reviewers needed for that 3-year period or 500 reviewers/year

• Not perfect process but ...
  – Publishing industry standard for ensuring quality control
  – Helps those unfamiliar with topic to know your paper met standards
What are the benefits of a review?

• Evaluates a manuscript and provides constructive criticism for technical and interpretative aspects

• Strengthens impact of a manuscript by ensuring and identifying relevance of research

• Improves abstract, readability, quality of figures, appropriate references
How reviewers are selected by the JGLR

• Journal office
  – Invites an associate editor (AE) with broad knowledge of field appropriate to manuscript

• AE
  – Invites two (required) or more reviewers they consider to be expert on the topic in the manuscript

• Reviewers
  – Chosen from personal knowledge of AE of individuals, people active (publishing) in the field of science AND
  – From JGLR reviewer database of people who have published in JGLR AND
  – From researchers volunteering to join the database of reviewers
What does it take to be a reviewer

• Expertise in your field
• Time
  – Journals request reviews are completed within a certain time period
• Attitude and motivation
• And.....it takes a lot of people to make it happen

Hoppin 2002
Why you should become a reviewer

• Rewarding process & builds your confidence
  – You’re considered someone who know this topic
  – Reviewers “mentor” authors by giving constructive feedback

• Learn about and contribute to your field

• Sharpens your writing skills

• Help further your career

Estrada et. al 2006; Lucey 2013
Reviewer Recognition by Elsevier

- New to the JGLR
- Collect review certificates
  - Manually enter reviews for other journals
- Download yearly list of your reviews
  - Track reviews you’ve done
  - Becoming more common to have reviews acknowledged similar to manuscripts written
- For more information, visit
  www.reviewerrecognition.elsevier.com
For Reviewers

What to do when you have accepted an invitation to be a reviewer
JGLR Guidelines

• For authors submitting manuscripts
• For reviewers submitting a review
• It’s important to follow these guidelines
  – Insure you address journal requirements
  – Make sure you don’t miss an important element
  – Help AEs quickly process your manuscript or review
Steps in writing a review

• Invitation to review a manuscript
• Read the paper (a few times)
• Write the review
• Send recommendations to editor
Steps in writing a review

• **Invitation to review**
  - Reply to invitation in timely manner to speed the process
  - Don’t hesitate to ask for more time; communicate to AE
  - You can choose not to do a review
    • Time constraints
    • Believe you can’t judge the research, out of field, conflict of interest, etc.
    • **Do** offer other names who could do the review

Hoppin 2002, Estrada et. al 2006
Steps in writing a review
JGLR Review Checklist Highlights

- New information, suitable for our journal?
- Methods and quality control described?
- Results and conclusion correct?
- Title and abstract describe the paper?
- Manuscript’s organization and writing
- Tables and figures appropriate and understandable?
Steps in writing a review

• **Reading**
  – Organize your concerns
  – Refer to items in JGLR checklist
  – Identify strengths and weaknesses
  – Look for
    • Problems with the science
    • Problems with the presentation
  – Be specific and give examples from the paper

Hoppin 2002, Estrada et. al 2006
Steps in writing a review

- **Writing review**
  - Use journal guidelines/instructions
  - Provide constructive suggestions
  - Comment on completeness of methods
    - Could you replicate this research based on methods described?
  - Comment on interpretation of results
    - Can you suggest alternative interpretations based on your knowledge of the topic?
  - Does Discussion summarize research and point to next steps

_Hoppin 2002, Estrada et. al 2006_
Steps in writing a review

- **Recommendations**
  - Overall recommendation
    - **Accept, major revision, minor revision, reject**
  - Detailed comments to the Authors
  - If needed, comment directly to editor in confidence
    - But make sure your comments to editor parallel those to authors

*Hoppin 2002, Estrada et. al 2006*
Tips for writing the review

• Be professional and respectful
• Be pleasant
  – But.....don’t hold back or be shy
  – You can suggest a paper is rejected while still being positive and offering constructive criticism
• Be helpful
  – Give suggestions when you point out faults
  – What type of feedback would you appreciate to further your manuscript?
Tips for writing the review

• Judge the science and don’t try to be the proof reader
• Be organized in your comments
• Be on time or don’t participate in the first place
  – Better to say you can’t do the review than be two months late getting your comments back

Estrada et. al 2006, Lucey 2013
For Authors

You’ve just received some **reviews** of your paper, now what?

Or

How to pick yourself up and move forward after getting critiques of your work

“Reviewers have asked him to reproduce the experiment.”
How authors should approach the reviews they receive

• Take a breathe
  – This can be a difficult process
  – Read comments more than once
  – Then, wait a bit

• Appreciate reviewers’ work in peer-review process
  – Volunteers sharing their knowledge
  – Trying to ensure good science
Your paper’s status after the review process

- Accept
- Accept with minor revisions
- Accept with major revisions
- Reject
  - Sometimes a rejection does not mean your idea is rejected
  - AEs can advise that a major rework is needed but that idea and/or approach is interesting or novel
How to respond

• Develop game plan to address reviewer’s comments
• Address all concerns, point by point
• Be polite; reviewers should have been too!
• Give evidence or rationale for methods, decisions, etc.
• Use headings like “Reviewer 1” to point to a specific point
  – Restate reviewer’s comment when responding

http://www.editage.com/insights/how-to-respond-to-comments-by-peer-reviewers
How to respond
Be prepared to make changes!

• Cut text, condense paper, consolidate figures or tables

• Word count reductions
  – Shortage of journal “space” but more often reviewer and reader patience might be exhausted;
  – Just too long and may be better as 2 papers

• Need additional data, analyses or text
  – May get request to “append” large dataset or program code
How to respond
Be prepared to make changes!

• But take care **not** to write a “new paper”
• If revisions comes back with too much that is new (and unrequested by reviewers) this can add to decision time and extra revisions

http://www.editage.com/insights/how-to-respond-to-comments-by-peer-reviewers
How to respond

• Reviewers are experts but not always right
• Editors don’t expect you to incorporate all reviewers suggestions
  – But explain why not
• Conflicting feedback from reviewers
  – Follow advice of reviewer you agree with more
  – You may request editor give you another opinion
  – Give explanation of your choices; editor makes final call but is more likely to take your direction if you explain it
DO

• Consult coauthors
• Address each comment
• If something is out of scope of study, say it
• Disagree, politely, if necessary
• Cite reference or supplementary data to support your position
• Resubmit in timely manner
DO NOT

- **Do not** resubmit rejected paper to another journal without addressing concerns of reviewers
  - Same flaws will likely be noted again OR same reviewers could get your paper again!
- **Do not** skip through comments and ignore suggestions
  - Spend time and give thoughts to your responses
- **Do not** be overly emotional
  - Express gratitude to reviewers and editors
DO NOT

• Do not disagree with everything
• Do not take a negative comment as personal attack
• Do not deny request for original or raw data if needed to confirm a result or support an interpretation
Remember.....

• Peer review process is intended to produce better research
• Reviewers are volunteers
• Everyone, authors and reviewers, are contributing to the scientific literature
• To ensure this process is successful, everyone needs to communicate in a timely manner
• And....everyone needs to participate
Citations


• Lucey, B. 2013. Ten tips from an editor on undertaking academic peer review for journals. Available at SSRN 2331281.

OUR ENTIRE MENU IS ORGANIC, FREE-RANGE, AND PEER-REVIEWED.