HOW DOES PEER REVIEW WORK?

Steven Swift MD
Editor
International Urogynecology Journal
Professor
Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology
Medical University of South Carolina
swifts@musc.edu

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THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS: MY PERSPECTIVE

- Manuscripts are randomly assigned to editors
- Editors are given the name of one Editorial Board member and then select two other reviewers and 3-4 alternative reviewers.
  - I select reviewers based on:
    - their personal preference
    - their “Editors Scores”
THE REVIEW PROCESS

- The selected reviewers have:
  - 1 week to reply
  - 2 weeks to review

- The Editor reads and grades the reviews;
  - Read the paper to determine if I agree w/ reviews
  - Make my own comments if not included in reviews
  - Stress necessary changes for acceptance

- Sends decision back to the author

THINGS TO RECOGNIZE

- Don’t argue with the reviewers comments.
  - The editor has read and edited the review.

- Don’t mistake “accept with major changes” as accepted.
  - If the editor writes that the paper will not be accepted unless certain changes are made; they mean it.

- You can have your rejected manuscript re-reviewed through the appeals process
  - We don’t publish this for obvious reasons.
HELPFUL HINTS IF YOU ARE ASKED TO REVIEW

✦ The most helpful review is one that articulates the strengths of a paper while also assiduously identifying the limitations of the manuscript that can be addressed in a revision.

✦ Nevertheless, even if a paper is well received overall, reviewer comments on manuscripts are commonly "negative".

Roberts et al. Academ Psych 2004; 28: 81-87

SHOULD YOU ACCEPT?

✦ When a reviewer is contacted an abstract is usually provided or should be reviewed first.

✦ Some things to considered before deciding whether or not to accept an invitation to review.
  + Be honest
  + Do you have any conflict of interest that prevents a fair and objective review? If yes recuse yourself.
  + Is the topic inside your area of expertise? If no recuse yourself.
  + Finally, Can you complete the review on time? If no recuse yourself.

✦ Remember all manuscripts sent to reviewers are confidential, and they should not be discussed with others until they are published.
SOME TIPS FOR REVIEWING

1). Read the manuscript through once for an overall impression.
   - Was it interesting and readable? Did they authors ask an important question and did they answer it?
     Was it too long or confusing? Was it organized and did it flow logically?

2). After you have formed your impression go back to consolidate your thoughts.
   - Look for examples that lead to your impressions?
   - Ask questions of the authors?

REVIEW OF AN “INTRODUCTION”

- It should be short and sweet.
  - 4-5 paragraphs
  - A logical and concise discussion leading the reader to the hypothesis or concern being addressed.

- It should set up the concern (one or two paragraphs).
  - Going from broad to specific

- It should describe how these concerns can be addressed (one or two paragraphs)
  - What are the specific problems and how can they be addressed.

- It should state how this manuscript will assess a hypothesis or address the concerns (one paragraph).
HOW TO REVIEW “METHODS”

- The Methods should be clear and accurate.
  - Another investigator should be able to use this section to exactly reproduce the experiment.
  - If in the reading the order of events (i.e., how subjects were selected, how and when data was collected) it is not clear the reviewer should question the authors.

- The study population should be characterized clearly.
  - This will allow readers to determine its generalizability.

- Sample size is important and its size should be justified.
  - Avoid type 2 or Beta errors (a difference exists but none is found because the sample size is too small).

- A discussion of any instruments used to include;
  - Validity (the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure) and reliability (the extent to which an instrument provides consistent measurements).

HOW TO REVIEW “RESULTS”

- The Results should be clear.

- Important findings should be emphasized in a table or figure.
  - Less important information should be in the text.
  - No data should be presented in full in both places.

- Common weaknesses of manuscripts are inappropriate or incomplete statistics, omission of data, inconsistent or inaccurate data, and defective or unclear tables or figures.
  - If you have concerns about statistics we have a statistical consultant that can be requested.
HOW TO REVIEW ‘DISCUSSION’

- The Discussion section should honestly assess strengths and limitations of the research.

- The reviewer should comment as to whether the conclusions are adequately supported by the data presented.

- Overstating results is a common practice.
  + Speculative, unsubstantiated, or unsupported comments should be noted by the reviewer.

HOW TO REVIEW “ABSTRACT AND REFERENCES”

- The abstract should be assessed for its accuracy as a summary of the manuscript.
  + It should be read again after the manuscript has been read to make certain it is accurate.

- Reviewers should judge the adequacy of the references.
  + I look at the dates of the cited papers
  + If papers cited are >10 years old I run a quick Google Scholar search.
SUMMARY

❑ A review is a critique.
❑ It is almost by definition somewhat critical but this should never be viewed as a negative.
❑ Avoid reviewing manuscripts you have no interest in.
❑ Write clear questions for authors to address in order to make their manuscript stronger.