

A Primer for How to Peer Review a Manuscript for JSR

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Initial Considerations

- First, know your role. You are a peer reviewer, not the author. You are to assess if the manuscript merits publication. If the manuscript merits publication, your role as the reviewer is to help the authors make this a better publication. Your role is not to tear apart the manuscript.
- Determine if you can objectively review the manuscript. Do you have a relationship, good or bad, with the authors? Are you in conflict with the authors or the subject matter?
- Determine if you have the appropriate expertise to review the manuscript.
- Determine if you have time to review the manuscript. If you do not have time to provide an adequate review, do not accept the invitation to review.
- Last, your role as the reviewer is also to enhance the quality and reputation of the journal. Good reviews are the key to a good journal.

Writing Up Your Review

- Write up your comments in an objective, polite, respectful, and professional manner. Avoid derisive comments, insults, demeaning comments, and sarcasm. Do not humiliate or demean the authors.
- Be careful not to let your own preexisting bias on a topic or published result skew a review of a manuscript that contains opposing or controversial results.
- Make your comments concise and clear. When providing criticism, include your rationale and provide examples of how the authors can revise the manuscript to improve its quality.
- Be critical, but also be constructive with your comments.
- Be sure that your text is submitted to the editors with correct spelling and grammar. This is especially important when you recommend that the text of the manuscript needs re-editing for improvements in the usage of the English language.

Format of Your Review

- Start by writing a short summary paragraph of the manuscript.
- Follow by providing constructive comments, separated into major versus minor concerns.
- Provide comments within each section (major vs. minor) according to the section of the manuscript (i.e., abstract, introduction, methods, results, etc).
- Be sure to number all of your specific comments.

General Comments

- Remember, this is not your manuscript. Your role is to provide an objective assessment about the appropriateness of publication of this manuscript.

- Be realistic with your comments and the extent of revision you will request. Determine if revision can improve the manuscript and make it meritorious for publication. If the manuscript would need a complete re-write or extensive additional experimentation, it is probably not appropriate for publication at that time and should be rejected.
- Give concise recommendations about items that need to be added or changed in the manuscript to make this a publishable paper (e.g., “An additional control group is needed consisting of animals injected with vehicle only. The study results cannot be evaluated properly without this additional comparison group.”)
- Do not write comments to the authors about whether the manuscript should be published. Those comments can be conveyed to the editor. Remember, the role of the peer reviewer is to provide constructive comments to the authors, and a recommendation about publication to the editor. The role of the editor is to determine if the manuscript should be accepted, revised, or rejected.
- Do not provide a laundry list of typographical and grammatical errors. Just state that typographical and grammatical errors exist and that the manuscript would benefit from careful editing.
- A manuscript review should take no more than 3 hours of your time. Time spent reviewing the manuscript beyond that has not been found to improve the quality of the review (Black et al, JAMA, 1998, 280:231-233).

Specific Comments

- Start by reading the article in its entirety. Is the article well-written, logical, and easy to follow?
- Determine if the study has scientific merit, and is hypothesis driven.
- Determine if this manuscript will add important information to the existing body of knowledge.
- Be sure that this work is not redundant of earlier published work from the authors, or a duplication of efforts from other published studies.
- Abstract
 - Does the abstract reflect the major findings of the manuscript? The abstract should be able to stand alone and serve as a summary for the manuscript. Many readers will only read the abstract.
 - Does the abstract clearly describe the purpose or hypothesis of the paper?
 - Is the abstract formatted appropriately for the journal? Does it follow the word count limit set by the journal?
 - Is the conclusion of the abstract appropriate and supported by the data presented in the paper? Is the conclusion overstated? (An often encountered problem.)
- Introduction
 - Does the introduction adequately identify the problem being studied and the rationale for the study? The hypothesis, purpose, goals or aims should be clearly stated.

- Methods
 - Are the methods adequate for the study being conducted?
 - Are important details of the methods section missing?
 - Can someone independently reproduce the studies being conducted with the information provided in the methods section?
 - Are the methods appropriate and valid for the experiments being conducted? If describing a new methodology, has it been validated?
 - Was IRB or ACUC approval obtained and clearly stated, if indicated?
 - If describing devices or special materials, the sources should be clearly identified.
 - Are the statistics appropriate?
- Results
 - The results section should be clearly presented using subheadings that are logical.
 - The authors should only include results and data in this section and should not include methods or discussion.
 - Are the “n” numbers sufficient and adequate? Is the sample size large enough?
 - Were appropriate controls included? Were statistics provided? Was the rationale for each experiment clear?
 - Do the data presented in the results section match the figures/tables? Do the numbers add up appropriately?
- Figures/Tables
 - All figures and tables should be necessary and easy to follow.
 - All figures should contain appropriate labels and statistics.
 - Figure legends should contain enough detail to describe the figure without making the reader refer to the text.
- Discussion
 - Do the authors compare and contrast their data with existing data, and discuss why their data may be unique or different from prior studies?
 - Do the authors discuss outliers, and odd features of their data?
 - The authors should limit the discussion to studies that are relevant to their topic matter.
 - Do the authors address limitations of their study?
 - The authors should have a concluding paragraph in which the conclusions are appropriate based on the data provided. Be sure that the authors do not overstate conclusions, have contradictions, unwarranted conclusions, or inappropriate extrapolations.
- References
 - Are the references appropriate?
 - Are any references missing?
 - Are any references erroneous?
 - Are any references misquoted or misspelled?

- General Considerations
 - Are the authors redundant in presenting the data?
 - Is there irrelevant or unnecessary information?
 - Is the logic circular?
 - Are all terms defined? Do the authors limit their use of non-standard abbreviations?
 - Is the article poorly focused?
 - Is the length appropriate?

Comments to the Editors

- Provide a succinct summary of the manuscript to the editor. Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript. For the weaknesses, list the major concerns/criticisms in descending order of importance, without relisting the detailed comments to the authors.
- Comment on the scientific merit of the publication, and if this publication will add to the existing body of knowledge in a meaningful way.
- If you have any concerns about a conflict of interest among the authors, convey this concern to the editor.
- If you suspect duplication of efforts, plagiarism, redundancies, etc, convey this concern to the editor.
- Convey to the editor if you have any ethical concerns about the methodology or results.
- Convey to the editor if you have concerns about the statistical methodology.
- You may convey to the editor your *recommendation* for publication, i.e., acceptance, revision, or rejection. Currently, the Journal of Surgical Research accepts less than 25% of all submissions, excluding meeting-related submission. Is this article in the top quartile?

Suggested Readings

1. Alexandrov AV, Hennerici, MG, Norrving B. Suggestions for reviewing manuscripts. *Cerebrovasc Dis* 2009;28:243–246.
2. Black N, van Rooyen S, Godlee F, Smith R, Evans S. What makes a good reviewer and a good review for a general medical journal? *JAMA*. 1998;280:231-233.
3. Drubin DG. Any jackass can trash a manuscript, but it takes good scholarship to create one (how MBoC promotes civil and constructive peer review); *MBOC* 2011; 22:525-527.
4. Garmel GM. Reviewing manuscripts for biomedical journals. *Permanente J* 2010; 14(1):32-40.
5. Hoppin FG. How I review an original scientific article. *Am J Respir Crit Care Med* 2002; 166:1019–1023.
6. Lovejoy TI, Revenson TA, France CR. Reviewing manuscripts for peer-review journals: A primer for novice and seasoned reviewers. *Ann Behav Med* 2011 Apr 20. [Epub ahead of print] PMID: 21505912

7. Mark Spigta M., Arts ICW. How to review a manuscript. *J Clin Epidemiol* 2010; 63:1385-1390.
8. Provenzale JM. Revising a manuscript: Ten principles to guide success for publication. *AJR* 2010; 195:W382–W387.
9. Roberts WL, Coverdale J, Edenharder K, Louie A. How to review a manuscript: A “down-to-earth” approach. *Academic Psychiatry*, 2004; 28(2): 81-87.