

Effective peer review

A best-practice guide for peer reviewers

Peer review is an essential part of the scholarly research cycle, and helps to make sure that published articles are of the highest standard possible. If you're thinking of getting involved in peer review (and there are lots of reasons why you should), here are our tips for making it a success.

Get to know the journal

Being familiar with the journal's content and house style will help you decide if the article you are reviewing is a good fit, as well as whether it meets the submission criteria in the Instructions for Authors. Some journals also have a specific format in which reviews should be submitted – make sure you've read any guidelines before you get started.

Declare any conflict of interest

Tell the journal editor about any conflicts of interest immediately, so they can find an alternative reviewer if necessary. If there is someone suitable you can recommend this can save the editor time, and keep the review process on track.

Check for originality, presentation, relevance, and significance

Articles should bring something new to the field, and do it in clear language that is appropriate for the readership of the journal.

Provide positive and constructive criticism, and detailed comments

Positive comments are as important as critical ones, so make sure to highlight what the authors have done well. When offering criticism, remember that you are aiming to help the authors improve their article, so be as detailed and helpful as possible. Your comments can cover content, style, or presentation.

Complete your review in a timely manner, and request an extension if needed

Peer review can be one of the longest and most frustrating parts of the academic writing process for authors, so keeping to an agreed timetable is important. Delays can affect the reputation of the journal, not to mention making life difficult for the editor. If you know you will need more time to complete your review, ask the journal editor for an extension as soon as possible, so they can let the author(s) know and factor it into their issue planning.

Make a recommendation

Let the editor know your overall opinion on whether the paper should be accepted, needs revisions (minor or major), or if it isn't suitable for publication in its current form.

Sleep on it, and revise before you submit

The editor is relying on your judgment to help them keep the quality of content in their journal as high as possible. Take your time to make sure your comments are thorough and your recommendation is considered.

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