

Tips for reviewing

Gemma C. Solomon

I got invited to review a paper - what now?

- Do something!!! Ideally as soon as you see the invitation
- 4 options:
 - Yes
 - No
 - No + suggest alternative referees
 - In principle yes + but query timing or conflict of interest

What constitutes a conflict of interest?

- “a relationship that could make a reasonable person suspect that the connection may have interfered with your judgment”
- Close friend, collaborator, published together within the last 5 years, same institution
- Competitive relationship - bad relationship and/or similar work
- Potential for financial gain

I got invited to review a paper - why should I say yes?

- You're interested in the paper & would like to carefully read it
- You really feel this is your area of expertise
- You're interested in the journal and would like to publish there
- You're feeling like doing a service for your scientific community
- You want the recognition as a reviewer

I said yes - what now?

- Ideally take a quick look straight away to make sure you really are qualified review the paper
- Make a note of the due date
- Find a time to get reading
- Keep the details confidential

Arrrrgh! Today is the due date and I haven't started

- Ask for a (realistic) extension
- Submit when you have said you will submit

Preparing for your review

- Read the paper (ideally more than once, ideally with some days in between)
- Understand the scope of the journal
- Take a look at the review form

Writing your review

- A very short review (eg 1-3 sentences) is often almost unusable whether it is positive or negative.
- Like a paper - try to highlight the most major comments so they are very clear to the reader. Rather than just having a long list with trivial and significant comments mixed up.
- Be specific - eg. Not: “the paper is generally poorly written” but “the paper is poorly written, for example ...”

Content - significance

- Very few journals will simply publish work because it is technically sound. Almost all will want you to make some comment about significance.
- This is not just unimportant opinion - remember the editor may not know the field
- Can be the question, the method or the conclusions
- Watch out for “salami slicing”

Content - technical aspects

- Are the methods sound & correct controls
- Do the results support the statements made in the abstract/conclusions
- Have the authors provided all necessary information to reproduce the results
- If you recommend additional studies - be clear on whether this is necessary for publication or just improvement

Content - quality of the presentation

- Readability - if you find the manuscript hard to follow (as an expert in the field after several reads) this is a valid criticism not just your problem
- Comment on the quality of the language if it is sub-par (how bad is too bad?)
- Comment on poor figures/too many figures
- Is the balance of content appropriate (ie no review material in a research article)
- Appropriate references

Content - SI

- You don't have to provide a detailed review of the SI
- BUT do note if parts aren't referenced in the manuscript

Author misconduct

- Inform the editor of suspected misconduct
- Data or figure manipulation/falsification
- Plagiarism/self-plagiarism
- Concurrent submission

General tips

- Use the confidential comments to the editor - you can be very frank there. Also if there is part of the work you cannot judge
- Don't get personal/abusive/patronising
- Make sure your answers on the form are consistent with your review
- If your comments don't really require re-review you can always request a copy of the authors' reply out of interest

Learn more:

<https://www.acsreviewerlab.org>