Quality of a review and responses

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What are we covering today?

• How do you define a good reviewer’s report?

• How do you write a suitable answer to the reviewers?
Exercise - Looking at examples or responses

- Form small groups of two/three
- One side will read reviewers’ reports
- Other side will read authors’ responses
- Swap reports after 20 minutes
- Make notes of whatever you notice about the reports, and think if they are good or not
1. What makes a good review?

• Report should provide **constructive** criticism
  • Aim is to help the authors improve their manuscript
  • Avoid (passive)aggressive language, or discounting the authors’ work

• **Be clear** and unambiguous with your feedback
  • Authors need to understand where the problem is, and how to fix it
  • Are the authors native (English) speakers?

• **Be balanced** with your comments
  • Say what’s wrong in your opinion, but don’t forget to highlight positive aspects to encourage authors
• Authors worked hard to write the manuscript
  • **Acknowledgment limitations** (can that data really be found and added by the authors?)
  • Consider current **state of the literature**
  • Think of how long the authors will need to respond

• Am I the right person to review this?
  • If you’ve been invited, likely
  • Ask a colleague for help if unsure, and acknowledge them according to journal’s guidelines

• Am I happy with **my own report**?
  • Would you understand your own feedback?
Still unsure?

• Ask a colleague to proof-read or check your points are appropriate (and acknowledge their contribution)
• If you have strong doubts about some points, it is possible to contact editor(s) and use the confidential comments section in your review (if present)
• Reports can be brief or verbose. Think if you covered all the key aspects
  • However: one-line reports are very unhelpful (This is great! This is terrible!)

Are you totally sure?

• Go ahead and submit!
Further observations

• Try to respect the deadline, if you agreed to review
  • Editors understand you are busy. Consider if you can submit your feedback on time
  • Better to decline an invitation than ignore it, or let editors know you can no longer complete your review
  • Asking the editors for a reasonable extension is common

• Make sure you are familiar with the journal’s policies
  • E.g. in case of Open Peer Review and if you agree with it
  • These are normally in the invitation email, but can be different between journals
Questions so far?
2. What makes a good answer to reviewers?

• Try to answer each question individually
  • Editors will normally ask for a point-by-point response.
  • Acceptable to link one answer to another, if two referees raise the same concern

• Provide track changes manuscript, in addition to clean version
  • Helps editors and reviewers quickly identify amendments

• Justify your responses
  • If you agree, or especially disagree with the reviewer, clearly say why you (did not) make that change
  • Difficult to read responses may delay the manuscript, and may cause misunderstanding
• Consider your language
  • As if you were a reviewer, it is fine to disagree, but confrontational language is not recommended

• If you are unable to perform an experiment, or disagree with the reviewer, say why
  • Is the request from the reviewer reasonable? Your chance to answer this point

• Are you concerned about some comments made by the referee? Ask the editor
  • Editors are there to keep the peer-review process fair and impartial
  • It is fine to raise a concern and ask for clarification
Are you totally sure?

• Ensure your claims are adequately backed up by data

• Is your manuscript formatted correctly (style, declarations...)

• If your manuscript (and responses) are clear, this will help decrease time needed to peer-review

• Go ahead and submit!
What happens next?

• Handling editor will check your responses, and decide whether to invite original reviewers or not

• Timelines vary according to journal. Ask for an update if you think you haven’t heard back in a while

• Hopefully your manuscript is great and accepted!
Question time

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