

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
 - **Acknowledge 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

- Visit our website:
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