

Peer Review: FAQs

How to review

How to be reviewed

Jennifer Wright, Cambridge University Press



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What was your first peer review experience like? How did you get started? Is there anything you wish you'd known?*

"I knew nothing. As a result, I spent too much time on it and picked it apart too much. I almost forgot about the main thing, is the science sound?"

Postdoc, Ecology

*So-I knew nothing! My first review was as a grad student; **my advisor was asked to do the review and passed it on to me (which is a common practice but I've since learned is a bit frowned on)**. Anyway, I didn't get a lot of guidance. Later, my post doc advisor let me look at a few reviews he had written with identifiers removed, which was very helpful-I had only published one paper at that time and the review I'd received wasn't a great model to use. When I started reviewing, it took longer than I expected, and I didn't know **how detailed I needed to get with grammar, formatting, or 'bad writing'** as opposed to the scientific aspects. Further, I wasn't entirely sure **how to organize my comments/feedback** in the submitted review. I also reviewed my first paper with **zero consideration for its fit with the journal**"*

Postdoc, Biology

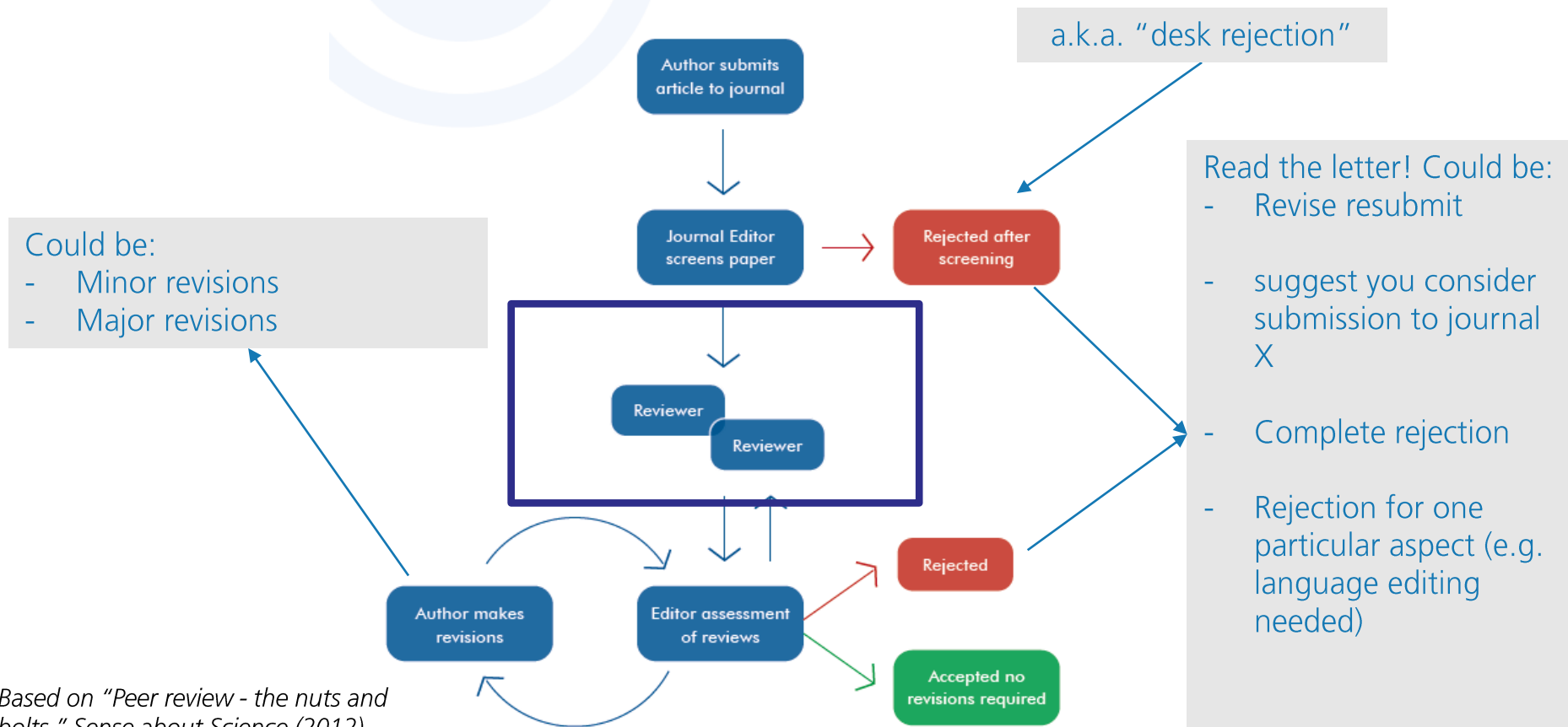
*"I followed a **guide** from AGU, and got feedback on my first review from my dissertation supervisor. **Practise** really helped"*

Postdoc, Geophysics



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A quick intro: The basic process



A quick intro: Types of peer review

	Single Blind	Double Blind	Open	Post publication
Author	Doesn't know reviewer IDs	Doesn't know reviewer IDs	Knows reviewer IDs	Might know reviewer IDs
Reviewer	Knows author IDs	Doesn't know author IDs	Knows author IDs	Knows author IDs

Triple blind (where decision-making editors don't know the authors or reviewers) also exists, but is rare

The next 20 minutes...

What do postdocs ask us?

1. About being a peer reviewer

2. About being peer reviewed

Other resources and guidelines

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How do I become a peer reviewer?

When do you declare a conflict of interest?

How can I practise peer review?

How do you pick peer reviewers?

Do you ever “block” reviewers?

How detailed do I need to be with spelling/grammar?

Do you monitor “performance” of peer reviewers?

Is there a contract or code of conduct for peer reviewers?

Do I need to comment on fit for the journal, or just the science?

Do you reward/pay peer reviewers?

Can I make my review public?

How long should I spend doing a review?

How should I format my comments?

I'm not sure the paper's a fit for my research specialism. Should I say yes to reviewing?

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How do you pick peer reviewers?

- Editor knowledge
- References in the article
- Searches
- Journal/society databases
- Recommendations
- Industry tools



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Do you monitor “performance” of peer reviewers?

Usually, yes:

- Avoiding overwork
- Editor “scoring”
- Ensure good reviews valued
- Industry tools provide some metrics
 - Reject rate
 - Turnaround time
 - Time since last review

Do you ever “block” reviewers?

- Context dependent, but not often
- Do sometimes mark as inactive in database if:
 - They request it
 - They never respond
 - They frequently agree to review but never complete
 - They repeatedly submit inappropriate/unprofessional reviews

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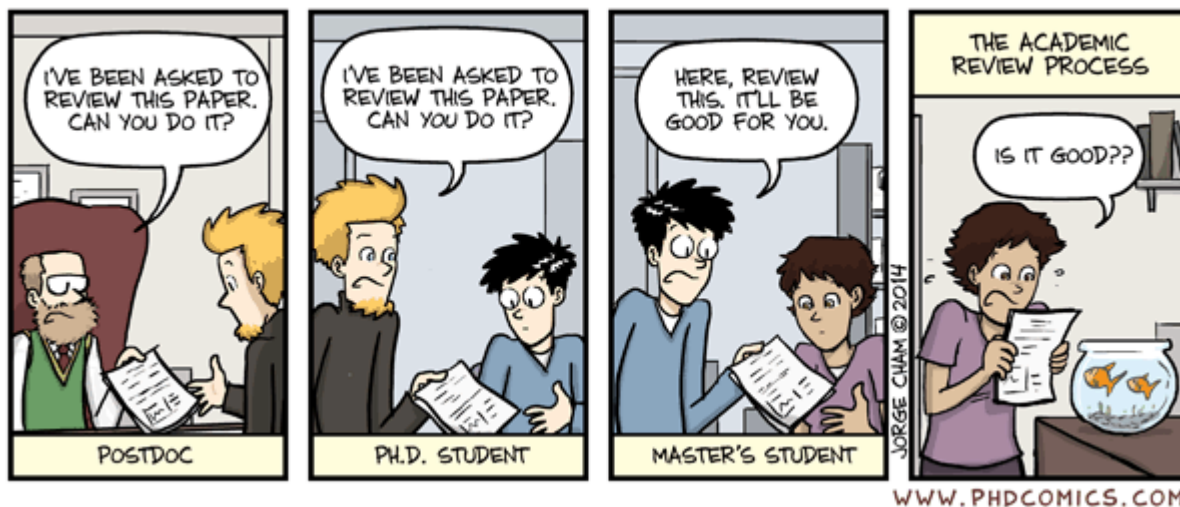
- Publish!
- Make sure your profile on department/uni/ORCID is up to date
- Be active
 - Conferences
 - Seminars
 - Societies
 - Collaborations
 - Social media/blogging
- Ask!
 - Journal editors
 - authorhub@cambridge.org
 - Supervisor



Recognizing a renowned scholar at a reception, the grad student is sucked into a black hole of panic and worthlessness.

How can I practise peer review?

- Ask!
- Societies/publishers with practise programmes
- Pre-print servers
- Read published reviews from open peer review journals
- Peers/supervisors (but check/declare it!)
- Journal clubs



Do you reward/pay/acknowledge peer reviewers?

Yes...

- Especially for book reviews
- Publons
- Acknowledgement listings on journal website
- Naming on articles/Acknowledgements
- Your institution (some disciplines give career development credit for reviewing)
- Some publishers
 - APC discounts, access to content
 - in-house paid reviewers or data validation specialists

But...

- Mixed opinions in surveys of community whether it's a good idea or improves quality.



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Is there a contract or code of conduct for peer reviewers?

Basic principles to which peer reviewers should adhere

Peer reviewers should:

- only agree to review manuscripts for which they have the subject expertise required to carry out a proper assessment and which they can assess in a timely manner
- respect the confidentiality of peer review and not reveal any details of a manuscript or its review, during or after the peer-review process, beyond those that are released by the journal
- not use information obtained during the peer-review process for their own or any other person's or organization's advantage, or to disadvantage or discredit others
- declare all potential conflicting interests, seeking advice from the journal if they are unsure whether something constitutes a relevant interest

More at <http://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines>

When do you declare a conflict of interest as a peer reviewer?

In general, anything you feel would compromise your ability to assess the manuscript fairly and objectively.

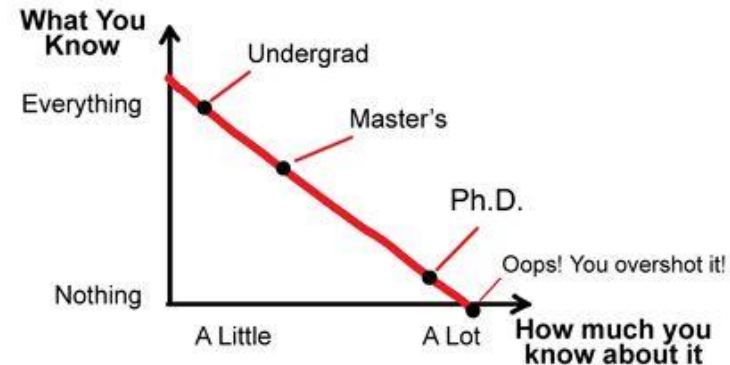
- Usually institutional/collaborative
- Personal relationships
- Financial (e.g. if reviewing a grant application)
- Conflicting public statements/positions
- Disclosure issues (e.g. related to patents, funding)
- Have reviewed the manuscript for a previous journal
- Remember declaring a Col doesn't necessarily mean you can't review

I'm not sure the paper's a fit for my research specialism / I don't feel qualified. Should I say yes to reviewing?

If in any doubt, ask!

- If it's wildly inappropriate, it could be a predatory journal
- Ask the editor and/or accept with proviso.
- Remember that at some point, all peer reviewers did their first review (and probably felt they weren't experienced enough)
- Ask editor if your supervisor or more experienced colleague can review your review (with details anonymized)
-do you have time?

What You Know vs How much you know about it



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ATTENTION

FROM NOW ON, ALL PAPER REVIEWS WILL BE DONE WITH FACEBOOK EMOTICONS



LIKE

"I LIKED YOUR PAPER BUT I'M NOT EXCITED ABOUT IT. IT'S GOOD WORK BUT NOT GROUNDBREAKING."



HEART

"I LOVED YOUR PAPER AND WANT TO SEE IT PUBLISHED RIGHT AWAY."



LOL

"DID YOU SERIOUSLY THINK THIS CRAPPY PAPER WOULD GET ACCEPTED IN THIS FANCY CONFERENCE/ JOURNAL?? LOL."



SAD FACE

"THIS PAPER IS SO BAD, I'M LOSING MY FAITH IN ACADEMIA."



ANGRY FACE

"GRRR, I WISH I HAD WRITTEN THIS PAPER."



SURPRISE

"WHOA. YOU GOT FUNDING TO DO THIS??"

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The Piled Higher & Deeper Paper Review Worksheet

Stuck reviewing papers for your advisor? Just add up the points using this helpful grade sheet to determine your recommendation.

No reading necessary!

Paper title uses witty pun, colon or begins with "On..." (+10 pt)	
Paper has pretty graphics and/or 3D plots (+10 pt)	
Paper has lots of equations (+10 pt) (add +5 if they look like gibberish to you)	
Author is a labmate (+10 pt)	
Author is on your thesis committee (+60 pt)	
Paper is on same topic as your thesis (-30 pt)	
Paper cites your work (+20 pt)	
Paper scooped your results (-1000 pt)	
TOTAL	

Points	Recommendation
< 0	Recommend, but write scathing review that'll take them months to rebuff.
0-120	Recommend, but insist your work be cited more prominently.
> 120	Recommended and deserving of an award

Might be tempting, but probably not this!



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How detailed do I need to be with spelling/grammar?

1. Check reviewer instructions

Really can't understand the paper enough to review

Return to editor with initial impression, but explain language issue and suggest language editing service

Some instances where language obscures meaning

Review as usual, but flag in text where meaning is obscured, and mention issues in comments to editor. No need to copyedit!

I could have written this better / I think this person's lazy

Just review it objectively in line with any criteria from the journal or editor.

 Shit Academics Say
28 December 2016 · 🌐

The surest way to find typos is to click submit.

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

👍 😂 🤔 13k

Top comments ·

 Shit Academics Say
6 December 2016 · 🌐

Review unto others as you would have them review unto you.



How should I format my comments?

- Follow instructions for reviewers
- Quote line numbers
- Some journals accept in-document comments
- Some use collaborative editing software
- Collaborative peer review

From the British Ecological Society Peer Review guide:

Best practice

- Does the research follow logically from prior knowledge? Is it timely, and does it have the potential to advance the field?
- Is the article appropriately structured and clearly presented?
- Can you easily summarise the key message in the article?
- Does the title reflect the contents and is it engaging?
- Does the article fit with the scope of the journal that has asked you to review it?
- Does it take account of relevant recent and past research in the field?
- Is there significant overlap with material that has previously been published?

Your answers to these questions should form the opening comments in your report.

Detailed comments

Most articles are structured into sections commonly labelled 'summary/abstract', 'introduction', 'methods', 'results' and 'discussion'. There may also be a 'conclusion'. It is recommended that you take a methodical approach to assessing the article by appraising each section in turn. In your comments remember to provide evidence for the statements you make, whether positive or negative.

Do I need to comment on fit for the journal, or just the science?

- Look for any specific instructions in your invitation to review
- Or Editor's instructions
- Or the journal's Instructions for reviewers
- If no guidance available, just do the science
- You can include your opinion, with reasons, in your comments to the editor – but it's the editor's call.

How long should I spend doing a review?

- Your familiarity with the topic
- Complexity of paper
- Length of article
- Your experience as a reviewer
- Clarity of presentation of article



Median: 5hrs,
Mean: 9hrs
(Ware,
(2008))

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Can I / should I make my review public or “sign” my review?

- In general, no
 - Not just your decision
 - Usually dictated by journal policy
 - Some reviewers “sign” their comments to the author, but the content not made public
- ...but increasingly yes
- Things to consider:
 - Publons
 - The author’s wishes
 - Other reviewers



The next 10 minutes...

What do postdocs ask us?

1. About being a peer reviewer

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Other resources and guidelines

Suggested reviewers/non-reviewers, what do you do with those names?

How long should peer review for a journal article take before I can get annoyed?

How should I format my cover letter? How long should it be?

What percentage of papers are rejected before peer review?

If I disagree with a reviewer's comment, how should I respond?

What if reviewers' comments contradict one another?

Which is best; single blind or double blind? Should it affect my decision about where to submit?

Can I challenge the decision (accept/reject/revise&resubmit?)

I've guessed who one of the reviewers is and she's trying to block my work - what can I do?

How many rounds of review would be acceptable for articles in your journal?

Do I have to address every single comment?

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- Editor's call (even with suggested non reviewers)
- Generally only use 1 of them
- If you're not asked to recommend reviewers, you can do, but still editor's call
- Useful to provide explanation of named reviewers or non-reviewers

What percentage of papers are rejected before peer review?

- **Totally varies!**
- **Common reasons for desk rejection**
 - Language issues
 - Out of scope
 - Wrong type of article (e.g. review, rather than original research)
 - Technically unsuitable (missing necessary information, incompatible format)
 - Clearly unsound science
 - Plagiarism scan

Which is best; single blind or double blind? Should it affect my decision about where to submit?

	Single Blind	Double Blind	Open
Pros	Honest, critical reviews without fear of reprisal from author	Reduces bias that may result from knowing who author is	Greater accountability, reviewers can receive public credit for work
Cons	Hard to avoid unconscious bias! Lack of accountability may allow unscrupulous reviewers to submit unwarranted negative reviews	Often difficult to make a manuscript genuinely anonymous	Reviewers may be more likely to decline to review Concerns that it may lead to damaged relationships/repercussions Cultural considerations

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Do I have to address every single comment?

- Yes! But synthesise where appropriate
- It's ok to argue why you *haven't* changed something in response to a reviewer comment
- Summarise main changes in cover letter, follow cover letter with detailed responses
- Make it easy for editor, refer to line numbers, address comments in sequential order



Image from medium.com

How should I format my cover letter? How long should it be?

- Very context dependent....
- General outline for first submission cover letter
 - Summarize main findings and type of article
 - Why it's a good fit for the journal (specifically!)
 - Assurance that it's original, declare any conflicts of interest, suggest reviewers
 - Thank editor for time
- General outline for responding to review cover letter:
 - Thank editor and reviewers for their time
 - Summarise main changes, refer to attachment/following detailed changes and responses
 - End politely ("we look forward to hearing from you")

If I disagree with a reviewer's comment, how should I respond?

- Clearly
- Objectively
- Professionally
- Support your argument / offer evidence
- ..pick your battles



Post from Facebook, 2016

What if reviewers' comments contradict one another?

- If it's fundamental, the editor really should have picked this up and solicited further reviews
- Highlight in cover letter to editor with your responses
- Treat it the same way as if you disagree with a comment—explain your position on the matter and support that with evidence.



Post from Facebook, 2016

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- Yes!
- But it's rare - only for good, clearly expressed and supported reasons



C. CASSANDRA

How long should peer review for a journal article take before I can get annoyed?

- Check you actually received a confirmation of submission email
- Check the journal's specified turnaround times, if available
- ScholarOne/Editorial Manager usually show status
- Bear in mind publishers have different procedures for updating you (some tell you in great detail, others only at milestones)
- Be aware that public holidays apply to reviewers and editors too!

How many rounds of review would be acceptable for articles?

- Depends on the journal, and article type, and editor...
- 1-2 is probably normal

CUP record: 6 has been known, but this isn't normal!

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Do

- Consider that you might be wrong!!
- Some soul-searching
- Look objectively alongside other reviewer comments
- Raise concern professionally with editor
- Decide which types of peer review (open, blind) you are comfortable with for future work

Don't

- Contact them or confront them yourself
- Bad-mouth the reviewer during tea breaks with peers
- Reciprocate..!

The final leg

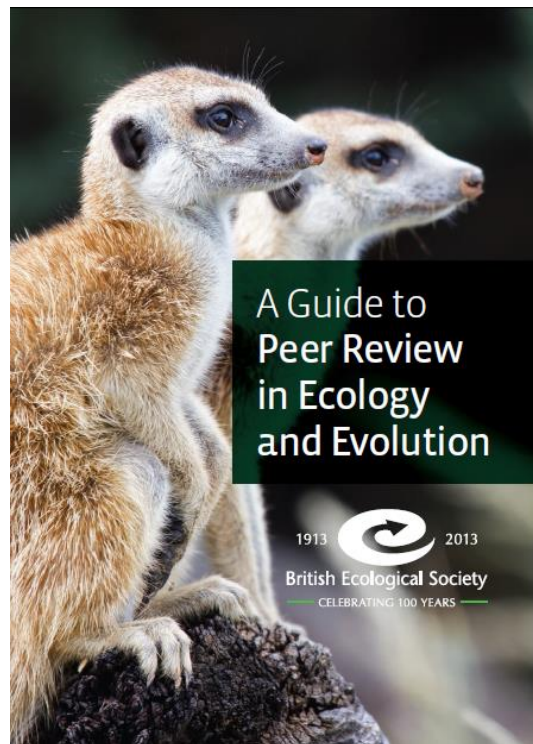
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Your community



Scholarly societies

Author Workshop

17 December 2015, 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

San Francisco Marriott Marquis - Salons 1-2

Event Type:

[Workshop](#)

Event For:


[All Attendees](#), [All Registrants](#), [Early Career Scientist](#), [Editors/Authors](#), [Grad Students](#), [Scientists](#), [Students](#)

Join Dolores Knipp, Editor in Chief of *Space Weather*; Brooks Hanson, AGU Director of Publications; Fiona Sme, Editor, Wiley; and Sarah Garfunkel, Senior Marketing Manager, Wiley as they provide insight into publishing with the AGU.

The workshop will include guidance on preparing a paper for submission, navigating the intricacies of the peer review process, responding to reviewers, how editors make decisions, publication ethics, available author services, and enhancing the impact of your published paper. Lunch will be provided.


An AGU conference session

Publications

LOOK INSIDE
Barbara Gastel and Robert Day

How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper
EIGHTH EDITION

How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper
8th Edition
AUTHORS:
Barbara Gastel, Texas A & M University
Robert A. Day, University of Delaware
PUBLICATION PLANNED FOR: February 2017
AVAILABILITY: Not yet published - available from February 2017
FORMAT: Paperback
ISBN: 9781316640432
[Rate & review](#)

Eos, Vol. 92, No. 28, 12 July 2011


EOS, TRANSACTIONS, AMERICAN GEOPHYSICAL UNION

VOLUME 92 NUMBER 28
12 JULY 2011
PAGES 233–240

A Quick Guide to Writing a Solid Peer Review

PAGES 233–234

Scientific integrity and consensus rely on the peer review process, a defining feature of scientific discourse that subjects the literature forming the foundation of credible knowledge in a scientific field to rigorous scrutiny. However, there is surprise

Considering a Request to Serve as a Reviewer

When you receive a request from an editor to review a manuscript, there are several issues to consider, including how your expertise matches what the editor is looking for, whether you can be unbiased, and whether

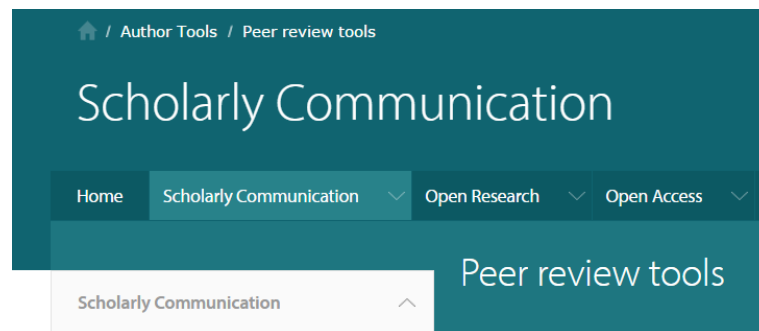
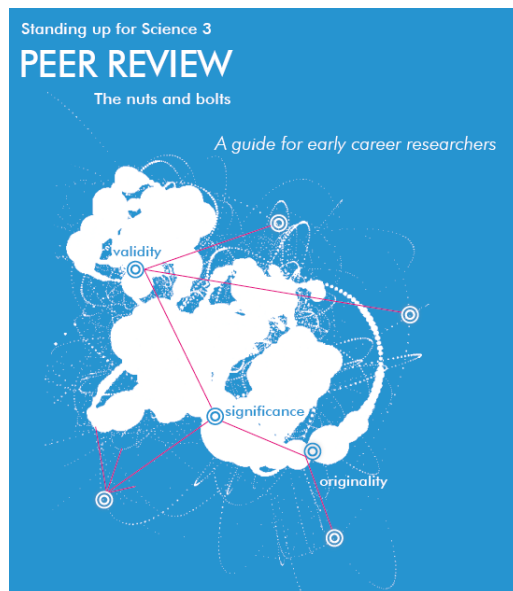
to the field, it may be best to pass. However, if your expertise allows you to comment meaningfully on key sections of the paper, you can offer to review these areas and let the editor know you cannot comment on other aspects outside your expertise.

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Reviewer	Knows author ID	Doesn't know author ID	Knows author IDs	Knows author IDs
Review content	Author sees both reviews, reviewers (usually) only see their own	Author sees both reviews, reviewers (usually) only see their own	Sometimes publicly available	Usually publicly available
Prevalence Preference Perceived Effectiveness	Most common 25% (Ware, 2008) 45% (Mulligan et al, 2013)	2 nd 56% (Ware, 2008). 76% (Mulligan et al, 2013)	3 rd 13% (Ware, 2008) 20% (Mulligan et al, 2013)	4 th 5% n/a

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