

Understanding the Peer-reviewing Process

Here you can learn about

- **the peer-reviewing process.**

An associated worksheet with sentences you can use when corresponding with editors is available.

The Peer-reviewing Process

Once you have sent your paper to a peer-reviewed journal, it lands on an editor's desk. The editor (or a sub-editor) briefly looks at your paper to see whether it should be sent on to a peer reviewer or directly rejected. The peer reviewer(s) job is then to read and assess the paper and make recommendations for improvement/acceptance/rejection. Generally, if the paper is acceptable, you are then requested to make the suggested improvement(s) before returning the paper to the editor. This improvement step can be repeated more than once before final acceptance.

An Editor's Task

Editors have many tasks, one of which is to increase the journal's readership. Their success at this task is measured by how often the journal's papers are cited and the journal's ranking. To achieve this success, they have to quickly decide whether the many papers that land on their desks would be interesting for their readers. They base their decision on (some of) the following questions:

Tip:
If possible when submitting the paper, use an accompanying e-mail to highlight why your paper is suitable for the journal.

Does the paper

- contain anything new?
- cover a topic currently of interest to potential readers?
- follow journal guidelines?
- appear to have a sound method's section?
- have any references to the journal? – This criterion is often used as a quick indication of whether the paper is suited to the journal.

Be sure to answer these questions in your paper, in particular in your abstract.



A Peer Reviewer's Task

Editors cannot normally be experts in all areas covered by a journal, and so they rely on peer reviewers to assess the suitability of a paper for the journal. Generally, papers will have two to four reviewers. The reviewing process is either open (both the author(s) and the reviewer(s) know who each other are), single-blinded (the reviewers know who the author(s) are but not vice versa) or double-blinded (theoretically, neither the reviewers nor the authors know who each other are). Apart from generally reviewing and commenting on a paper's scientific soundness and presentation, peer reviewers are normally asked to consider the following two questions:

- Is the paper's contribution new?
- Is the paper's contribution significant?

They will also be asked to give a final judgement on whether the paper is excellent, good, or poor. Their review is sent to the editor(s), for a final decision on whether the paper is accepted (with or without recommended changes).

Responding to Peer Reviewers' Comments

You can decide not to re-submit a paper but to use the reviewer comments to improve it and send it to another journal. But do write to the original journal telling them of your decision.

You should consider the peer reviewers as colleagues who are giving you free advice (even if it is sometimes difficult to imagine). You must respond to all their comments. If you decide not to take up a suggestion, say why. If you have made changes in light of their suggestions, make clear what you have changed. And thank them for the suggestions. A worksheet is available with sentences you could use in your response.

Useful Resources

Curry, M.J. & Lillis, T. 2013. *A Scholar's Guide to Getting Published in English: Critical Choices and Practical Strategies*. Bristol, Multilingual Matters.

Montgomery, S.L. 2017. *The Chicago Guide to Communication Science*. 2nd ed. Chapter 6, Chicago, University of Chicago.

Paltridge, B. & Starfield, S. 2016. *Getting Published in Academic Journals: Navigating the Publication Process*. Michigan, University of Michigan.

GS GS has further files about peer reviewing

Final Comments/Tips

- In the 3rd year of your PhD? Consider becoming a peer reviewer. Let suitable journals know you would be willing to peer review. You can learn a lot from the process, and the work can be included on your CV – even if it isn't paid.



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