Reviewing and surviving reviews

Marcel W.M. Post
Associate Editor Spinal Cord
Section Editor Archives PRM
Goals of this presentation

• Thank our current reviewers

• Attract new reviewers

• Guide authors whose paper has been reviewed
Reviewing

• Peer review is a cornerstone of science

• Goals of peer review of journal articles:
  • Select good quality papers for the journal
  • Advise on how to improve papers, if applicable

• Types of review
  • Double-blind
  • Single-blind
  • Open
Peer review is imperfect, but the best we have

- Reviewers can be biased (+/-)
  - We avoid colleagues / collaborators as reviewers
  - We do not automatically use reviewers suggested by the authors
  - Authors can mention people who should not be invited as reviewer

- Peer review is unreliable
  - We organize multiple reviews
  - We use a mix of people with content and methodological expertise

- We rely on our reviewers
Finding reviewers

- Editorial board members
- Database previous reviewers
- References
- Pubmed, etc.

- People interested in becoming a reviewer are invited to contact the Editor in Chief / Editorial Office
If you get an invitation

• Authoring is reviewing
• Think it over first
  • Is the topic of the paper your field of expertise (topic, or method or clinical experience)?
  • Will you have time in the next few weeks?
  • Maybe you have a conflict of interest?
• React quickly (accept/decline)
• Mentioning alternative reviewers is appreciated in case of a decline
What do we ask reviewers

• Provide an overall rating of the paper
  • Accept
  • Acceptable with revision *not* requiring reconsideration by referee
  • Acceptable with revision *but* requiring reconsideration by referee
  • Not suitable for publication

• Provide comments to the author / Editor (optional)
  • Address importance, originality, design, organization, English,..
    • Strengths
    • Weaknesses
http://www.nature.com/authors/policies/peer_review.html

Peer review

The editors would like to thank the 37,464 individuals who served as reviewers on the Nature journals during 2016. Their thoughtful comments and critiques are essential to the quality of the articles we publish. Their willingness to offer their time and expertise is greatly appreciated.

The Nature journals’ peer-review policy and process are explained on this page.
### Review comments - an example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Merit (Required)</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Merit</th>
<th>Willingness to look at the paper again</th>
<th>Indicated that they are prepared to make their individual participant data publicly available?</th>
<th>Question or subject important?</th>
<th>Work Original?</th>
<th>Sound design?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer #1</td>
<td>Not suitable for publication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Not original</td>
<td>Not sound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer #2</td>
<td>Acceptable with revision not requiring consideration by referee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Very original</td>
<td>Very sound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer #3</td>
<td>Not suitable for publication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Not original</td>
<td>Not sound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Conclusions and interpretation reasonable?
- Not reasonable
- Very reasonable
- Not reasonable

### Article and Editorial Note
- No
- No
- No

### Paper well organised?
- Not organised
- Very well organised
- Somewhat organised

### English require attention?
- A lot of attention
- No attention
- A small amount of attention

### Tables and Figures Necessary?
- None necessary
- Some necessary
- Some necessary

### Figures of good quality?
- Poor quality
- High quality
- Poor quality

### Urgency for publication?
- No urgency
- No urgency
- No urgency

### Is the length of the manuscript appropriate?
- Too long
- Appropriate
- Appropriate
Possible flaws in review reports

- No comments at all (can happen but is rarely appropriate)
- Superficial or very general comments
- No indication of strengths
- Discrepancies between comments to the Editor and to the authors
- Discrepancies between overall rating and comments
- Inappropriate or offensive language
The perfect review

• Indicates both the strong and the weak points of the paper
• Distincts major and minor issues
• Is itemized
• Is clear and specific about what the authors should or can change
• Is respectful *(you don't want to do to others... what you would not be done to you)*
• Is on time

• You do not have to agree with everything in the paper
• Good is good enough
Common issues to look at as reviewer

• Added value of the paper
  • What does the study add?
  • Do the authors describe what the study adds? (*check the literature*)
  • Is the research question clear and specific?

• Execution of the study
  • Design, sample size, representativeness
  • Statistical analyses
  • Results (*check figures*)
  • Appropriateness of the conclusion

• Writing style, English, length

“Data don’t make any sense, we will have to resort to statistics.”
Reviewing a revision

• Please accept!!
• Read the response letter carefully *(check with your comments)*
• Read the comments by the other reviewers and the authors response
• Access the track-changes version of the revision
• Focus in you new comments on how the authors dealt with your own comments *(check with the manuscript)*
• Be reluctant to provide new comments on old text
Dealing with review comments

“Editor says the manuscript would serve some purpose if it were written on toilet paper.”
Receiving a review

• Everyone receives rejections
• An invitation to submit a revision implies a good chance of ultimate acceptance
• Criticism is more common than praise
• Stay calm, sleep it over
• Remind yourself that the reviewer is a busy volunteer who put effort in your paper
• Tell yourself that peer review improves papers in 90% of cases
Writing a revision+ rebuttal

• Copy/paste reviewers comments, itemize these if necessary
• Be respectful
• Use reviewer comments to improve your paper
  • You do not have to adopt comments you cannot agree with
• Provide an itemized response, address all comments
  • Make clear whether you adopt or (partly) reject the comment
  • Insert the revised tekst in the rebuttal, or at least indicate where to find it
  • Provide justification of rejected comments
• Provide a track-changes version of your manuscript
Thank you