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The Peer Review Process

Once authors submit their manuscript to a journal, it'll then be sent out for assessment by independent experts in the field. These reviewers are asked to judge the validity, significance, and originality of the work. Peer review is the independent assessment of research paper by experts in a field. Its purpose is to evaluate the manuscript's quality and suitability for publication.

Peer review is a form of quality control for academic journals, as well as a very useful source of feedback, helping authors to improve their paper before it is published. At its best, review is a collaborative process, where authors engage in a dialogue with their peers and receive constructive support to advance their work.

Why is Peer Review Important?

Despite its flaws, peer review is vitally important for upholding the high standards of scholarly communications, for maintaining the quality of individual journals, and for support of the researchers who've authored the papers.

Every journal depends on the hard work of reviewers who test and refine each article before publication. Even for very specialist journals, the editor can't be an expert in the topic of every article submitted. So, the comments of carefully selected reviewers are an essential guide to inform the editor's decision on a manuscript.

There are also practical reasons why peer review is beneficial to you, the author. Review can alert you to any errors in your work or gaps in the literature you may have overlooked. Researchers consistently tell us that their final published article is better than the version they submitted before peer review.

Every full research article published in the *Global Review of Library and Information Science* has been through peer review. This means that its quality, validity, and relevance have been assessed by independent peers within the field. All published research articles in this journal have undergone rigorous peer review, based on initial editor screening, anonymous refereeing by independent expert referees, and consequent revision by article authors when required.

Different types of peer review

Peer review takes different forms and each type has its pros and cons. ***So, check your chosen journal's peer-review policy before you submit, to make sure you know what to expect and are comfortable with your paper being reviewed in that way.***

The most common types of peer review used by different journals and publishers are:

Single-anonymous peer review

In this model, also called ‘single-blind review’, the reviewers know that you are the author of the article, but you don’t know the identities of the reviewers. Single-anonymous review is most common for science and medicine journals.

The anonymity of the reviewers is intended to make it easier for them to give full and honest feedback on an article, without fearing that the author will hold this against them.

Critics of single-anonymous review argue that reviewers might be influenced by knowing who the author is. For example, they could be more generous about a paper if they know it has been written by a respected researcher in the field. Equally, they might be tempted to give a more critical review to an article written by someone they consider to be a rival.

Double-anonymous peer review

In this model, also called ‘double-blind review’, the reviewers don’t know that you are the author of the article. And you don’t know who the reviewers are either. Double-anonymous review is particularly common in the humanities and some social sciences.

Many researchers prefer double-anonymous review because they believe it will give their paper a fairer chance than single-anonymous. It can avoid the risk of a paper suffering from the unintended bias of reviewers who know the seniority, gender, or nationality of a paper’s author.

Open peer review

There is no one agreed definition of open peer review. Typically, it will mean that the reviewers know you are the author and also that their identity will be revealed to you at some point during the review or publication process.

Open review may also include publishing the names of the reviewers and even the reviewers’ reports alongside the article. Some open review journals also publish any earlier versions of your article, enabling the reader to see what revisions were made as a result of peer review.

The advantages for authors of open peer review is that you might receive more constructive and polite reviewer comments, if the referees know that a signed version of their report is going to be published.

There are however concerns that researchers who are invited to review may be less inclined to do so under an open model, where their name and report will be published.

Post-publication peer review

In these models, your paper may still go through one of the forms of peer review outlined above first. Alternatively, it may be published online almost immediately after some basic checks. Either way, once it is published, there will then be an opportunity for invited reviewers or even readers to add their own comments or reviews.

Post-publication review allows the opportunity to gather a wider range of perspectives on your paper. Because review doesn't end when your paper is published, it also means that your peers can add comments reflecting new developments in the future.

However, not every paper published in this way is always guaranteed to receive reviews. In other cases, especially if your article is tackling a controversial topic, it may attract a large number of comments which won't always be moderated. There are also some concerns about the risks of allowing a paper to be published without any prior review, especially in areas such as medicine.

Registered Reports Process

This process splits peer review into two parts. The first round of peer review takes place after you've designed your study but before you've collected or analyzed any data. This allows you to get feedback on both the question you're looking to answer, and the experiment you've designed to test it.

If your manuscript passes peer review, the journal will give you an in-principle acceptance (IPA). This indicates that your article will be published as long as you successfully complete your study according to the pre-registered methods and submit an evidence-based interpretation of the results.

How it works:

1. Before publication, authors are asked to suggest at least five potential reviewers who are experts in the field and can provide unbiased reports on their article.
2. Submitted articles are published rapidly, after passing a series of pre-publication checks to assess originality, readability, author eligibility, and compliance with F1000Research's policies and ethical guidelines.
3. Once the article is published, expert reviewers are formally invited to review.
4. The peer review process is entirely open and transparent: each peer review report, plus the approval status selected by the reviewer, is published with the reviewer's name and affiliation alongside the article.
5. Authors are encouraged to respond openly to the peer review reports and can publish revised versions of their article, if they wish.
6. An article remains published regardless of the reviewers' reports. Articles that pass peer review are indexed in Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar and other bibliographic databases.

The peer review process

Peer review follows a number of steps, beginning with submitting your article to a journal …

Step 1: Editor Assessment

When your manuscript arrives at the journal's editorial office, it will receive an initial desk assessment by the journal's editor or editorial office. They will check that it's broadly suitable for the journal, asking questions such as:

- Is this the right journal for this article? Does the paper cover a suitable topic according to the journal's aims and scope?
- Has the author followed the journal's guidelines? They will check that your paper conforms to the basic requirements of the journal, such as word count, language clarity, and format.
- Has the author included everything that's needed for peer review? They will check that there is an abstract, author affiliation details, tables and figures, if needed.
- Does it make a significant contribution to the existing literature?

If your article doesn't pass these initial checks the editor might reject the article immediately. This is known as a 'desk reject', and is a decision made at the editor's discretion based on their substantial experience and subject expertise. Having this initial screening in place can enable a quick decision if your manuscript isn't suitable for the journal, enabling you to submit your article to another journal quickly.

If your article does pass the initial assessment it will move to the next stage, and into peer review.

Step 2: First round of peer review

The editor will then find and contact other researchers who are experts in your field, asking them to review the paper. Usually a minimum of two reviewers is required for every article, but this can vary from journal to journal.

The reviewers will be asked to read and comment on your article. They may also be invited to advise the editor whether your article is suitable for publication in that journal.

So, what are they looking for? This depends on the subject area, but they will be checking that:

- your work is **original** or new;
- the study design and **methodology** are appropriate and described so that others could replicate what you've done;
- you've engaged with all the relevant **current scholarship**;
- results are appropriately and **clearly presented**;
- your **conclusions are reliable**, significant, and supported by the research;
- the paper **fits the scope** of the journal;
- the work is of a **high enough standard** to be published in the journal.

Once the editor has received and considered the reviewer reports, as well as making their own assessment of your work, they will let you know their decision. The reviewer reports will be shared with you along with any additional guidance from the editor.

If you get a straight acceptance, congratulations, your article is ready to move to publication. Note however, that this isn't common. Very often, you will need to revise your article and resubmit. Or it may be that the editor decides **your paper needs be rejected.**.

Please note that the final editorial decision on a paper and the choice of who to invite to review is always at the editor's discretion.

Step 3: Revise and resubmit

It is very common for the editor and reviewers to have suggestions about how you can improve your paper before it is ready to be published. They might have only a few straightforward recommendations ('minor amendments') or require more substantial changes before your paper will be accepted for publication ('major amendments'). The reviewers' comments can be extremely helpful, ensuring that the article is of a high quality.

During this next stage of the process you therefore have time to amend your article based on the reviewers' comments, resubmitting it with any or all changes made.

Once you resubmit your manuscript the editor will look through the revisions. They will often send it out for a second round of peer review, asking the reviewers to assess how you've responded to their comments.

After this, you may then be asked to make further revisions, or the paper might be rejected if the editor thinks that the changes you've made are not adequate. However, if your revisions have now brought the paper up to the standard required by that journal, it then moves to the next stage …

Make sure you resubmit

Some researchers don't revise and resubmit their manuscript when they receive changes in the initial peer review. This is a lost opportunity. Revisions and feedback are a natural and important part of the publishing process. It's unlikely a journal will accept your manuscript first time; just as most great novels don't get published without being edited.

Step 4: Accepted

And that's it, you've made it through peer review. The manuscript then moves to the production stage.

How long does peer review take?

Editorial teams work very hard to progress papers through peer review as quickly as possible. However, it's important to be aware that this part of the process can take some time.

The first stage is for the editor to find suitably qualified expert reviewers who are available. Given the competing demands of research life, nobody can agree to every review request they receive. It's therefore not uncommon for a paper to go through several cycles of requests before the editor finds reviewers who are both willing and able to accept. Then those reviewers have to find time alongside their own research, teaching, and writing, to give your paper thorough consideration.

Please keep this in mind if you don't receive a decision on your paper as quickly as you would like. If you've submitted your paper via an online system, then you can use it to track the progress of your paper through peer review. Otherwise, if you need an update on the status of your paper, please get in touch with the editor through mail, text or phone call.

A 360^0 view of peer review

Peer review is a process that involves various players – the author, the reviewer and the editor to name a few. And depending on which of these hats you have on, the process can look quite different.

Read interviews with an editor, author, and reviewer as we uncover the 360^0 view of peer review.

How to respond to reviewer comments

If the editor asks you to revise your article you will then be given time to make the required changes before resubmitting.

When you receive the reviewers' comments, try not to take personal offence from any criticism of your article, even though that can be hard.

Some researchers find it helpful to put the reviewer report to one side for a few days after they've read it for the first time. Once you've had chance to get used to the idea that your article requires further work, you can more easily address the reviewer comments objectively.

Then take time to read through the editor and reviewers' advice carefully, deciding what changes you will make to your article in response. Taking their points on board will ensure your final article is as robust and impactful as possible. Please make sure that you address all the reviewer and editor comments in your revisions.
It may be helpful to resubmit your article along with a two-column grid outlining how you've revised your manuscript. On one side of the grid list each of the reviewers' comments and opposite them detail the alterations you've made in response. This method can help you to order your thoughts, and clearly demonstrates to the editor and reviewers that you've considered all of their feedback.

What if there are reviewers' comments an author doesn't agree with?

If there's a review comment that you don't agree with, it is important that you don't ignore it. Instead, include an explanation of why you haven't made that change with your resubmission. The editor can then make an assessment and include your explanation when the amended article is sent back to the reviewers.

You are entitled to defend your position but, when you do, make sure that the tone of your explanation is assertive and persuasive, rather than defensive or aggressive. If there are any review comments which you don't understand or don't know how to respond to, please get in touch with the journal's editor and ask for their advice.

What If a paper is rejected?

Nobody enjoys having their paper rejected by a journal, but it is a fact of academic life. It happens to almost all researchers at some point in their career. So, it's important not to let the experience knock you back. Instead, try to use it as a valuable learning opportunity.

Take time to understand why your paper has been rejected

If a journal rejects your manuscript, it may be for one of many reasons. Make sure that you understand why your paper has been rejected so that you can learn from the experience. This is especially important if you are intending to submit the same article to a different journal.

Are there fundamental changes that need to be made before the paper is ready to be published or was this simply a case of submitting to the wrong journal? If you are unsure why your article has been rejected, then please contact the journal's editor for advice.

Some of the common reasons manuscripts are rejected include:

1. The author has submitted their paper to the wrong journal: it doesn't fit the aims and scope of the journal or fails to engage with issues addressed by the journal.
2. The manuscript is not a true journal article, for instance it is too journalistic or clearly a thesis chapter.
3. The manuscript is too long or too short.
4. There is poor regard of the journal's conventions, or for academic writing in general.
5. Poor style, grammar, punctuation or English throughout the manuscript.
6. The manuscript does not make any new contribution to the subject.
7. The research has not been properly contextualized.
8. There is a poor theoretical framework used.
9. The manuscript is poorly presented.
10. The manuscript is libelous or unethical.

Carefully consider where to submit next

When you made your original submission, you will probably have had a shortlist of journals you were considering. Return to that list but, before you move to your second choice, you may wish to assess whether any feedback you've received during peer review has changed your opinion. Your article may also be quite different if it has been through any rounds of revision.

Once you've selected which journal to submit to next, make sure that you read through its Information for Authors and reformat your article to fit its requirements. Again, it's important to use the feedback from the peer review process to your advantage as you rewrite and reformat the manuscript.

Why you should become a peer reviewer

Reviewers are the lifeblood of any journal. When you're not in the middle of submitting or revising your own article, you should consider becoming a reviewer yourself.

There are many demands on a researcher's time today and so it is a legitimate question to ask why some of that precious time should be spent reviewing someone else's work. How does being a reviewer help you in your career? Here are some top ways that you can benefit.

Keep up with the latest thinking: As a reviewer you get an early view of the exciting new research being done in your field. Not only that, peer review gives you a role in helping to evaluate and improve this new work.

Improve your own writing: Carefully reviewing articles written by other researchers can give you an insight into how you can make your own better. Unlike when you are reading articles as part of your research, the process of reviewing encourages you to think critically about what makes an article good (or not so good). This could be related to writing style, presentation, or the clarity of explanations.

Boost your career: While a lot of reviewing is anonymous, there are schemes to recognize the important contribution of reviewers. You can also include your reviewing work on your resumé. Your work as a reviewer will be of interest to appointment or promotion committees who are looking for evidence of service to the profession.

Become part of a journal's community: Many journals act as the center of a network of researchers who are in conversation about key themes and developments in the field. Becoming a reviewer is a great way to get involved with that group. This can give you the opportunity to build new connections for future collaborations. Being a regular reviewer may also be the first step to becoming a member of the journal's editorial board.

Of course, being a reviewer is not just about the benefits it can bring you. These are the top 3 reasons why researchers choose to review:

Playing a part as a member of the academic community: Peer review is the bedrock of academic publishing. The work of reviewers is essential in helping every piece of research to

become as good as it can be. By being a reviewer, you will play a vital part in advancing the research area that you care about.

Reciprocating the benefit: Researchers regularly talk about the benefits to their own work from being reviewed by others. Gratitude to the reviewers who have improved your work is a great motivation to make one's own contribution of service to the community.

Enjoying being able to help improve papers: Reviewing is often anonymous, with only the editor knowing the important contribution you've made. However, many reviewers attest that it is work that makes them feel good, knowing that they have been able to support a fellow researcher.