Giving and Responding to Critical Evaluations in Manuscripts

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The AJP Review Process

Managing Editor
Quality Control Screen

Editor-in-Chief and Senior Associate Editors (2)
Send it on or reject without review?

Associate Editors (22)
Send it on or reject without review?

Reviewers
Evaluate and make a recommendation

Reject  Major Revision  Minor Revision  Accept
The AJP Decision Process

Reviewers
Evaluate and make a recommendation.

Associate Editors
Consider Reviewers’ comments and make a recommendation

Editor-in-Chief and Senior Associate Editors
Consider AE’s recommendation and Reviewers’ comments and make a decision

Reject  Major Revision  Minor Revision  Accept
How Editors Handle Divergent Reviews

• It’s subjective!
• The direction to ‘lean’ depends on the journal.
• How well does the paper fit the mission of the journal?
• Are the reviewers or AE known to be tough/easy?
• How compelling are the comments of the reviewers?
Tips for a Truly Terrible Review

• Accept an invitation to review when you should not
• Submit your review late or not at all
• Provide a useless review
• Provide biased statements
• Breach confidentiality
• Ignore the ‘golden rule’

Adapted from https://www.elsevier.com/connect/reviewers-update/ten-tips-for-a-truly-terrible-peer-review
So What Makes a Helpful Review?

- Be objective and constructive
- Be realistic in your suggestions
- Be accurate and detailed
- Always provide a complete critique
  - Statistics!
- Divide evaluation into major and minor points

https://www.arrs.org/uploadedFiles/ARRS/Publications/manuscriptReviewGuide.pdf
https://www.elsevier.com.reviewers/how-to-review
So What Makes a Helpful Review?

• Don’t get hung up on grammar and punctuation
• Provide corrections that a copyeditor would miss
• Don’t state your recommendation in the review
• Re-read your review before you submit

https://www.arrs.org/uploadedFiles/ARRS/Publications/manuscriptReviewGuide.pdf
https://www.elsevier.com/reviewers/how-to-review
Some Actual Comments to Authors

• The authors make a feeble attempt to justify this.

• I doubt that the data is reproducible. It is strange, looks as if someone not familiar with the data has prepared it.

• Other authors have shown real data...

• These data...are unbelievable!

• It is unclear if the investigators are capable of properly performing [the experiments].

• It is not clear that a single time point several days after treatment provides the best opportunity to observe the described activation of the pathway.
Confidential Comments to the Editor

• Don’t repeat the Comments to Authors
• Summarize the major reasons for your recommendation
• You can be more candid, but it’s still important to be fair
It’s Your Turn Now: Receiving a Critique

It’s natural to vent…

…but then sleep on it!
How Do I Revise?

• Revise to meet all reasonable suggestions
• Seek clarification from the editor if you are truly unsure of expectations
• Keep time restrictions in mind
Preparing a Compelling Response

• Respond point by point
  • Include each reviewer comment and your response beneath

• If you can’t address a concern, explain why

• Make it easy on the editors and reviewers
  • Indicate where each change is in the manuscript

• Be careful and accurate

• Be polite but don’t overdo it

https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbio/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1005730
https://www.elsevier.com/authors-update/story/publishing-tips/3-top-tips-for-responding-to-reviewer-comments-on-your-manuscript
You Can’t Always Say What You’d Like!

You just didn’t understand what we wrote!

Several statements that we made were more ambiguous than intended, and we have revised the text to be clearer.

That experiment would take forever!

The suggested experiment is an excellent next step for the future. But it falls well outside the scope of the current study and could not be completed within the time-frame of a revision.

It Got Rejected – Is That the End?

- Reject without review
  - Due to mismatch of scope or low priority
It Got Rejected – Is That the End?

• Reject after review
  • But I can respond to all of the reviewers’ concerns!
    • Decisions are based on more than what you see
  • The reviewer made a big mistake (or several)!
    • You may appeal the decision
    • Write to the Editor
    • Be polite, calm, and objective
It’s Often Not an Easy Process…

Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as ‘quite an improvement.’

http://aimbiomedical.com/tag/manuscript-rejected/
But remember, there are plenty of good homes for your work!