

Let's Review Everything

Why stop at books?

by Jeffrey Beall

For many years, readers' advisory has been a fundamental and valuable library service that has helped library patrons and others decide what books to borrow from a library or to buy from a book dealer. Librarians have also been prolific writers of book reviews, which have helped other librarians make purchasing decisions and helped readers decide what books to check out or purchase.

However, librarians' readers' advisory and reviews have been mostly limited to books. I think it's time to expand their coverage and include shorter publications, such as magazine and journal articles, essays, short stories, and even individual poems.

The ever-increasing number of journal articles means readers are overwhelmed with content. University of Manchester chemistry professor Douglas Kell recently estimated that five scientific papers are published every minute. Academics and researchers are especially in need of a *Booklist* for scholarly articles.

Also, individual journal articles are increasingly gaining equal stature with monographs; many times the only difference is length. In some scholarly fields, journal articles, given their faster publication time, are more important than monographs. So articles, like books, are equally deserving of reviews and

recommendations.

Book reviews help tell readers whether a book is worth checking out and reading, and they tell collection development librarians whether it is worth purchasing. In many cases, the library probably already has online access to many magazines and journals, eliminating the need to suggest buying them or not. Therefore, the chief purpose of journal article reviews is simply to advise which articles to read and which to skip. Readers lack the time needed to scan through them all to determine which are worth investing time in reading. Article reviews will help save the time of the reader.

Actually, anyone can write reviews of shorter works, from poems to scholarly articles. Several new Web 2.0 sites, such as WorldCat.org and Citeulike.org, allow users to add ratings and reviews to everything the sites index. However, librarians ought

to take the lead on article reviews, just as they have done with books. Libraries spend a large portion of their budgets on full-text electronic journal access, so writing article reviews is a great way to expose and promote the best of this content.

Systems need the ability to limit search results to articles with accompanying reviews, and then to sort the results in order of most positive first, using reviewers' star ratings (1–5 stars). This would help searchers easily and quickly find the

best articles and those most appropriate to their needs from among the millions available.

Reviewing reviews

Some indexes, such as WorldCat.org, include many more non-monographic titles than just magazine and journal articles. Even poems and short stories appearing in journals such as *The New Yorker* are indexed and therefore reviewable. And because sites like WorldCat index book reviews, it's even possible to write and publish reviews of reviews.

Not all articles need to be reviewed. Librarians should point out the outstanding articles to readers and they should signal the bad ones, the flawed articles that sneaked into publication because of bogus peer review (an increasing trend among open access, online journals) or flawed research.

Review journals such as *Booklist* and *Library Journal* ought to consider adding journal article review sections, organized by discipline (like they do for book reviews), such as the best science articles, the best education articles, or the best cooking articles.

Readers' advisory has a long history and a strong reputation. It's time to build on this reputation and expand readers' advisory and library reviewing to shorter works. It's time to review everything. ■

JEFFREY BEALL is metadata librarian at Auraria Library at the University of Colorado in Denver.

It's time to expand readers' advisory and library reviewing to shorter works.