

Grant MJ (in press) *Are you peer review curious?* Information Professional.

We often hear the phrase *peer review* mentioned, but what is it in practical terms and how or why might you want to get involved?

When I recently asked a group of librarians what they believe is the purpose of peer review they offered the following comments:

"To ensure the methodology is robust... and the conclusions make sense..."

"To make constructive comments on where/how the article could be improved..."

"To highlight any work that hasn't been referenced..."

I agree with all of the above. At its best, peer review is simply about a piece of writing or research being studied and commented upon by someone in the same profession. That person, the reviewer, will usually provide a short commentary of the piece of writing and, if needed, provide constructive feedback on how it might be improved. The intention is very simple, to help writers give the best possible account of their work.

When peer review goes well, authors welcome the opportunity for constructive dialogue and the opportunity to further develop their ideas. And in a piece of work I completed recently authors even went so far as saying "The reviewer is your friend!" So, in practical terms, what does it take to become an author's virtual friend?

Knowledge and Skills

As you may have noticed above, as the name suggests, peer review is all about supporting and being supported by your peers, someone working in the same sector as you. You don't have to be an academic or work in higher education to share your expertise. As a practitioner you have a myriad of interests and experiences which you can use to help your colleagues, which includes other practitioners, at whatever your stage of career.

Peer review typically involves two or more reviewers feeding back on the same piece of writing, which means you don't have to be experts in all aspects of a topic before getting involved, though a familiarity with the subject is helpful. Reviewers will have been carefully invited to cover a range of perspectives, knowledge and experience relating to the paper's topic and approach. And if you're not confident in an aspect of a paper, for example, the methodology used or statistical analysis, you can simply tell the editorial team about areas that merit closer reading by someone else, while being confident that they're already likely to have considered it when inviting the team of reviewers. It's good to know that responsibility doesn't rest solely on your shoulders.

Also good to know is that feedback is usually anonymous, both from the author and reviewers' perspective (double-blind peer review), which means you can give a full and honest commentary without fear of the author taking Umbridge. And if you really don't think a paper is in your area of interest or experience you can simply decline the invitation.

What are the benefits of getting involved?

Getting involved in peer review can provide opportunities to gain experience or demonstrate transferable skills in ways which may not be available in your workplace, or to practice them in a different setting. For example, applying your critical appraisal skills in relation to as yet unpublished articles, employing your writing skills to provide impartial and constructive feedback, and paying attention to detail within a previously agreed external time frame. And, given where you're reading this, professional engagement within the wider information and knowledge sector. The skills outlined are all important dimensions of professional practice if or when you're looking to make that next move.

How to get involved?

Rather than wait to be invited, you can sign up for free training such as the Web of Science Academy on peer review (<https://clarivate.com/web-of-science-academy/>), take part in a local or asynchronous online journal club such as the quarterly <https://hilj.club/>, or take a closer look at journals publishing in your areas of professional context and register your areas of interest. Most journals use an electronic submission system and, selecting from a keyword list, this is where you can register your interests. Alternatively, you can contact the Assistant Editor or Editorial Office to ask how you can get involved in reviewing for their publication.

Next time...

This is the first of a series of papers on peer review. Next time I'll be further demystifying the peer review process, discussing what makes a good review, and how you can evidence your skills and professional engagement.

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