

Grant MJ (in press) *Beginners guide to peer review*. Information Professional.

Getting invited to review a piece of writing can be the first time you really engage with the idea of peer review, what it is, and whether you consider you're best placed to review the work of others. In the first part of this series I emphasised the peer aspect of peer review, that is, supporting and being supported by your peers, someone working in the same profession as yourself. I also highlighted that peer review is usually a team effort of at least two reviewers invited for their complementary interests, knowledge and skills. This team approach means that responsibility doesn't lie solely on your shoulders to spot or advise on any problems with a piece of writing, or how to give the best possible account of the work.

What to expect when invited to write a review

Any invitation you received will typically include the title of the piece of writing and an abstract. Assuming this information piques your interest, what does accepting an invitation to peer review actually entail?

When you agree to review some writing, you'll typically receive a full copy of the text, some guidance on what to look for when reviewing it, and an indication of when your comments would ideally be received. This is usually around three weeks. Often, you'll also be offered a checklist of key questions about the information presented. For example, is the reporting concise? Is the presentation logical? Or is the bibliography complete and up to date? This checklist is used by the editorial team to gain an overview of the overall clarity, quality and scope of the writing alongside any confidential comments you share with the team. For example, areas where you believe a second opinion would be useful, or concerns about the quality or origins of the writing that you'd prefer not to share directly with the authors.

Alongside the checklist, you'll be invited to provide some narrative feedback to writers. This narrative is your opportunity to provide a constructive commentary on the writing, to ask for clarification or expansion of the text, and to highlight key materials or perspectives that are absent. Your aim is to support the authors in giving the best possible account of their work, so your feedback may be quite lengthy if you have notes or queries on each section of the writing. If you have any doubts about whether you've got the right balance a quick email exchange with the editorial team can be very reassuring. And, once you're reasonably happy with your review, you cut and paste the text into the submission system along with a recommendation to accept, minor or major revisions, or reject. Again, there's usually notes available on how each of these terms is being used. Remember, you're only making a recommendation which will be read alongside the comments of a second reviewer, and discussed by the editorial team before a final decision is made.

Expressing an interest in reviewing

As mentioned in the first part of this series, rather than wait to be invited, you can proactively register your areas of interest and possible topics to review with your journal of choice. 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. And while you're waiting to receive an invitation to review, practice your critical appraisal skills in local journal clubs, or asynchronous online journal clubs such as the quarterly <https://hij.club/>, or sign up for some free training such as the Web of Science Academy's on course on peer review.

How to evidence your involvement

Getting involved in peer review is a great way of developing or having an opportunity to use transferable skills such as providing written feedback or working to externally set deadlines. One way to evidence your involvement is to register your contributions on services such as ORCID Peer Review or a Web of Science Researcher Profile. Both services provide an authenticated way to track, verify, and showcase your peer review activity anonymously. For example, the number of reviews you've undertaken are recorded but not the specific writing you've reviewed. You'll typically be offered an opportunity to opt into or out of registering your contribution as part of uploading your review.

Next time...

In the final part of this series, a range of librarians share how they got involved with peer review and how they have benefitted from the process.

References

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