

## How to Review or Not to Review a Paper

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### Introduction

To publish a paper in a reputable international journal is a serious business because these papers are usually kept in archives, so the information contained in the papers can influence the present as well as future generations. Hence, when a paper is submitted to a journal for possible publication, it is usually required to go through a review process. This forum discusses the review process and the roles of reviewer and editor within the review process.

### Review Process

When a journal receives a paper for possible publication, the paper is channeled through the review process. The editor of the journal will first give a preliminary review of the paper to check if it is within the scope of the journal. If it is not, the editor will return the paper to the author. The editor may also check on the standard of presentation. If the presentation is really too poor, the paper may also be returned to the author. If the paper is within the scope of the journal and is of a reasonable standard of presentation, the editor will then pass the paper to reviewers, who will then assess the paper for its suitability for publication and pass their recommendations to the editor. For some journals, there is an associate editor who acts as an intermediary between the editor and the reviewers. Based on the reviewers' recommendations, the editor will then decide whether or not the paper is acceptable for publication.

The entire review process is in fact intended for the protection of all parties concerned. First, the author is protected from publishing any unsound paper because doing so would cause his or her professional reputation to suffer. Then, the journal is protected from publishing any unsound paper because if it does, the journal's reputation would suffer. Last but not least, the readers are protected from reading any unsound paper because if they do, they may suffer consequential damages.

### Role of the Reviewer

Upon receiving a paper for review, reviewers should go through the paper in detail and give their comments. They may recommend the paper be accepted for publication or be rejected, and they may also recommend amendments to the paper so that the paper can be improved upon. After amendments, the paper may become suitable for publication. If a reviewer recommends a paper for publication, he or she must ensure that the paper is

clearly presented and contains information that is useful to the present or future generations. Together with his or her recommendation, the reviewer must clearly state what information is useful. The best type of information to publish is globally and eternally useful information (i.e., global and eternal truth). Notwithstanding the preceding, other types of information may still be publishable as long as that information is useful at a certain place for a certain period of time. The latter, however, should have a lower priority.

On the other hand, reviewers should be careful not to recommend rejection of a paper because of their ignorance. They will be doing the profession a disservice if they recommend rejection of a paper that actually contains useful information and is suitable for publication. If they are not familiar with the topic of the paper, they may decline to review the paper. Further, they should also be careful not to recommend rejection of a paper because of their personal bias, but should distinguish an approach that they do not like from an approach that is fundamentally wrong. One way to make such a distinction is for the reviewers to spell out what exactly is wrong with the paper's approach. If they cannot do that, they should not recommend rejection. The reviewers should also provide evidence to support their statements. If they comment that the content of the paper is a repetition of a published paper, they must cite the published paper and its content as evidence. The reviewers should take their task seriously as the editor will usually make a decision based on their recommendations.

### Role of the Editor

The importance of the role of the editor cannot be overemphasized because he or she does the preliminary review, selects the reviewers, and finally decides whether or not the paper is accepted for publication. The editor's loyalty must be to the readers and the profession because if the paper is accepted, its information (or misinformation) will then be available for generations to come. If the paper is not accepted, its information may never be available. In view of such consequences, the editor should ensure that reviewers give professional reviews. To do this, the editor should review the reviewers' reviews carefully. If a reviewer makes any statement that is unsupported or outside the content of the paper, that is an unprofessional review. If the editor detects such a review, he or she should ask the reviewer to substantiate or withdraw this statement, and if the reviewer refuses, the editor should proceed to invite another review. The editor should take his or her task seriously as he or she has the power to control the information that is made available to the profession.

### Summary and Conclusions

For a paper to be published in a reputable international journal, it is usually channeled through the review process, in which it is reviewed by reviewers and an editor. The entire process, is in-

tended to protect the author, the journal, and the readers from publication of unsound papers.

During the review, reviewers should go through the paper in detail. If a reviewer recommends a paper for publication, he or she must ensure that the paper is clearly presented and contains information that is useful to present or future generations. On the other hand, reviewers should not recommend rejection of a paper because of their ignorance or bias, and they should provide evidence to support their statements. The reviewers should take their task seriously as the editor will usually make his or her decision based on their recommendations.

The importance of the role of the editor cannot be overemphasized because the editor is the one who finally decides whether or not the paper is accepted for publication. In making the decision, his or her loyalty must be to the readers and the profession. Hence, the editor should ensure that reviewers give professional reviews, and if they do not, the editor should invite another review. The editor should take this task seriously as he or she has the power to control the information that is made available to the profession.