

## **A Peer-review resource– receiving and reviewing.**

Peer-review is an integral part of the academic and other processes. It can be done well, but it can also be done badly.

Peer-review can raise a number of emotional responses, and indeed I wrote an earlier version of this resource as a way of stopping negative feelings and tensions between a team of freelancers I was working with in a non-academic capacity, and to improve their peer-review process which seemed lacking in guidance giving rise to the aforementioned tensions but also failing to make the most of the opportunities of the peer-review.

This resource aims to:

- De-mystify the process if you are new to having your work reviewed
- Serve as a handy guide if you are new to peer-reviewing and feel a bit lost in the process.

Note: This is a live document and may be updated and improved over time, as appropriate and in response to constructive feedback.

### **What is the function of peer-review?**

The function of peer-review is to ensure quality and rigour in academic work, but it also serves as a way of helping one another by providing guidance and suggestions on your work. It is so often misunderstood as a one-way, gatekeeping process but in fact it is, and should always be considered, as a dialogue, albeit one that usually takes place through an intermediary i.e. your publisher/commissioning or series editor.

Peer-review should really be conducted anonymously in fairness to all parties.

Remember, peer-review is about the publication not the person.

## **Are peer-reviewers paid?**

This really varies from publication to publication. Sometime peer review is not paid but expected as part of being a part of the academic community. You should never feel you have to agree to peer-review for free, and especially not under narrow time constraints. Peer-review is work and to do so properly you need to give it time. Sometimes peer-review work is paid in terms of book vouchers for the publisher you are reviewing for. I've peer-reviewed without being paid and with being paid. The decision as to whether to review or not is always yours.

## **Receiving peer-review**

We can all be sensitive about our work, that's understandable – we pour love and hours of work into what we research and write. Peer-review should always be about the work and never the person. I can't say definitively there has never been any conflict over reviews but in my experience peer-reviews that I have received have been solely about my work and never about me as an individual. Likewise when I have reviewed it is always about the work in front of me – and giving the author as much support and encouragement as I can.

You won't always get positive reviews, but they should always be constructive. Take time to read the reviewer's comments, respond respectfully and remember you can agree or disagree with them. It is also a dialogue so if you feel something has been misunderstood or you are not clear about a reviewer's point(s), ask for clarity.

When you submit a revised manuscript, always provide a response to the reviewer comments and what actions you have taken. It really helps your editor as well as helping you.

## **Reviewing**

### **When should I start peer-reviewing?**

There isn't really a set answer to this. It is more a question of whether you feel ready, whether you feel you know your field well enough to comment on work in it. Some start reviewing as PhD students, others at a later stage. The time is right when it is right but never feel forced to review if you aren't comfortable to do so. Likewise if you feel the article or book manuscript is too far removed from your topic area that you couldn't do the work justice, then simply decline the offer of reviewing. If you have someone else you can recommend in your stead, then great – ask them first and then pass that on to your contact. Equally, if you'd like to review but are really pressed for time be upfront and say so. It may be that the editor can give you more time, or it may be that on that occasion the peer-review goes to someone else. Never review in a rush though, that's unfair to the person whose work you are reviewing, as well as to yourself and is more likely to result in your not being asked to review again than if you say, sorry, I'm just too busy at the moment, but perhaps next time.

### **How do I peer-review?**

Your publisher should give you some guidance but here are my tips – from peer-reviewing in and outside of academia.

### **What constitutes good practice?**

Good practice in reviewing is demonstrated in a number of ways. The following is a list of key practices, but it is not exhaustive and may be updated over time.

- Put yourself in the shoes of the person receiving the review comments – how do you feel about your work being reviewed? If you were the person receiving the feedback, what would you find helpful, what would you find unhelpful? Think about the tone and content of your responses.
- Be specific and make sure your thoughts are clearly explained. For example, if you think the author needs to do further reading, give them recommendations.

- Give clear guidance on the action to be taken and indicate what could be done differently.
- Comment only on what is necessary.
- Criticism should be constructive and helpful
- Ensure comments on the article/ manuscript are consistent with comments in the summary report – errors in either cast doubt on the work as a whole.
- Remember there is also a place for praise in peer review, acknowledging hard work that has gone into producing the papers and showcasing where an example of good/ best practice can be found.
- If you've come across examples of good practice, share them with colleagues.

### **What to avoid?**

Good practice in reviewing can also be reflected in what we don't do as well as what we do. As with the section above, the list is not exhaustive and may be updated over time.

- One-word comments e.g. easy, simple. These only raise questions and mean the recipient will have to go back and ask for clarity, which creates more work for everyone and delays the process.
- Creating unnecessary work (see the above point) through lack of clarity/explanation.
- Using large / bolded font for comments. It is better to keep a consistent font size, for example, Calibri, font 12, than to mix fonts/sizes. Avoid red or green when using different colours as these can be difficult for people with visual impairments.
- Rushing off comments because you haven't allotted sufficient time to the task.
- Taking on a peer-review that you don't really feel comfortable doing.