

Succeeding in Academia – Reviewing Manuscripts for Journals

COLLEGE of
AGRICULTURE *and*
APPLIED SCIENCES
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Today

- Importance of reviewing articles for journals
- Article review process
- Review contents – early reject
- Review contents – full review
- Review suggestions
- Critiquing an article
- Critique process

Why Review Articles for Journals?

- Essential part of academic work and the peer review process
- If you wish to publish, you also need to review (give and take)
- Contribution to the public good
- Provides a look at the most recent research in your topic area
- A sign that others respect your work
- Opportunity to observe both good and bad papers
- Editors may be asked to write external evaluations for for faculty going up for tenure



Article Review Process

- **Upon receiving a review request.....**
- Read the title and abstract to determine fit and respond to the editor immediately (accept or decline)
- Graduate students and assistant professors should rarely decline a review request, unless the paper is not a good fit
 - If you are a journal associate editor, editor, or co editor you can be more selective
- If there is a conflict of interest let the editor know right away
 - Co-author, advisor, current or previous student, etc.



Article Review Process

- **Once agreed to review.....**
- Complete the review as soon as possible
 - The first reminder is okay, but don't wait till the second
 - Reading papers for review on planes is a good way to pass the time
- Start by reading the title, abstract, introduction, and conclusion sections (Stage 1)
 - Do you have a good idea of what was done?
 - Is the topic important, does it make a contribution?
 - For empirical papers, do you understand what relationships are important?
 - If no, then suggest the editor reject the paper





Review Contents – Early Reject

- Write up your review if the paper didn't pass the Stage 1 test
- Explain clearly why the paper is a non-starter
- Offer constructive ways in which the paper can be improved
- Do so in less than two pages
- Skip details such as typos, reference/citation issues, etc.

Review Contents – Full Review

- Summarize the paper in one or two short paragraphs
 - Provide your point of view on what is important in the paper
 - May differ from the authors – it may help them better describe their contribution
- Offer a numbered list of general constructive comments
 - Deal breakers, those things the authors need to do to publish the paper
 - Provide suggestions as to how the authors can address these comments
 - If you don't think the comments can be reasonably addressed, recommend rejection
- Provide a numbered list of specific comments
 - Small items the authors should do to improve the paper



Review Suggestions

- Constructive comments are comments that can actually be addressed
 - Not demeaning, err on side of being very nice
- Do not push authors to write the paper you would have
- Do not push authors to cite all of your work on the topic
 - Encourage them to cite those important to the topic at hand if not already there
- If you can think of better motivations for their work, tell them!
 - Enhances the papers citation potential



Cover Letter

- Provided to the editor and will not be shared with the authors
- Provide a recommendation
 - Reject, weak revise and resubmit, strong revise and resubmit, or accept
- Opportunity to flag potential ethical issues
 - Double dipping, publishing slightly different versions of the same paper
 - Self plagiarism
 - The paper is currently under review elsewhere
 - Potential plagiarism (others work)



Review Ethics

- If you have a conflict of interest, declare it
- If you have reviewed the paper before, let the editor know
- If you have a personal conflict with one or more of the authors and don't feel you can be objective, don't agree to review
- If you are working on the exact same topic, let the editor know
- Do not steal ideas from the papers you review
- Do not review for predatory journals





Post Review Submission

- Good editors will let you know their publication decision
 - If they don't agree with your recommendation let it go
- Do not let authors know that you have reviewed their article
- Do not break the rules, editors keep track of bad behavior
- Being a good reviewer is a good way to build a reputation as a "good citizen"

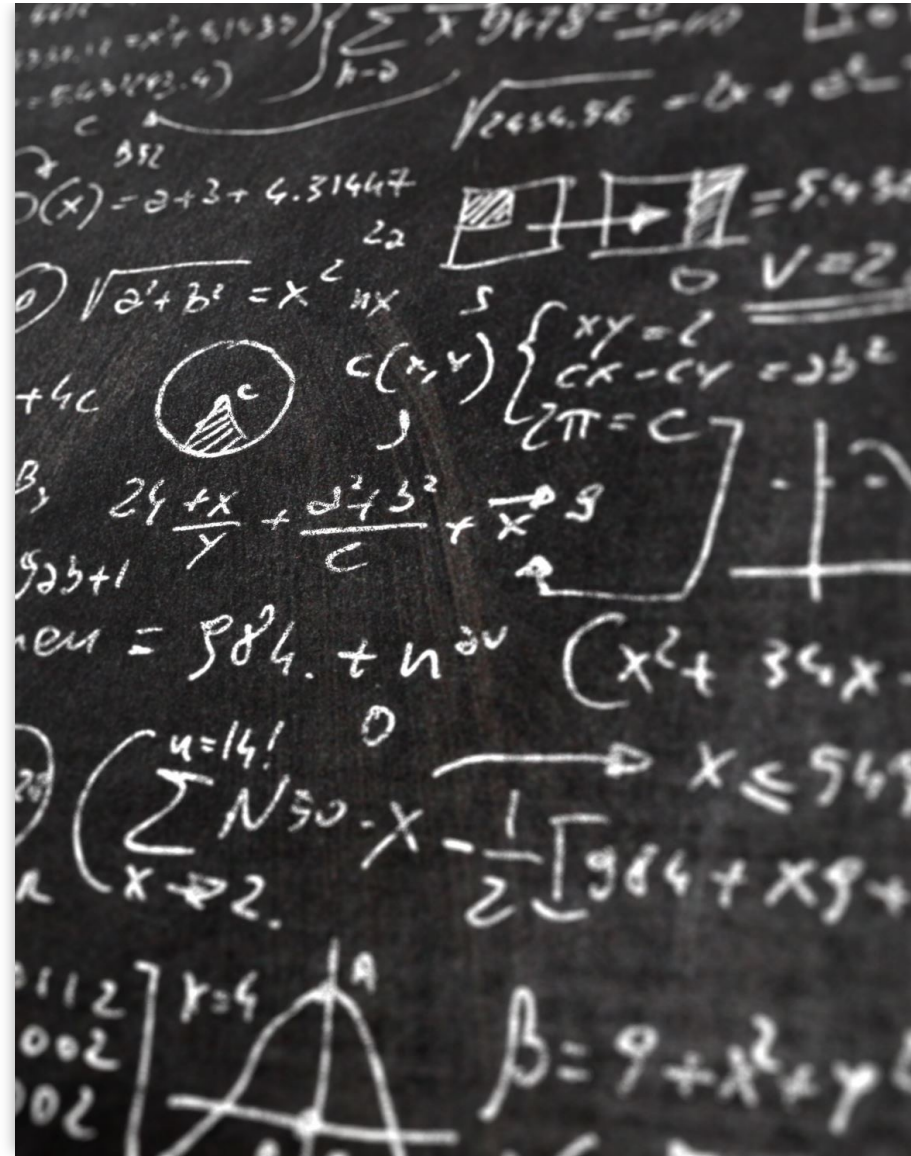
Critiquing an Article

- A critique is a rigorous analysis of the author's thesis, both its strengths and weaknesses
- It is not....
 - A complaint
Statements such as "it was boring, interesting, you didn't get it, the font size is annoying, etc." don't help
 - A book report or reiteration of what the author wrote
- Scholarship should advance our understanding of a given topic (people, process, period, etc.)
- Your job as a reviewer is to assess if the article makes a contribution (ie. advances science)



Critiquing an Article

- Strong critiques only discuss what the author failed to do, if the omission is essential to our understanding of the subject
 - Do not criticize for something not done
 - Authors must draw limits somewhere
- Things that can be criticized
 - Thesis, methods, and sources



Critique Process

- Map out the argument
 - The question(s), premises, and conclusions
 - What is the thesis?
 - List all evidence used to support the thesis
 - Is the logic and the empirics good/appropriate?
- Questions on the Thesis – looking for flaws in the argument
 - Does the conclusion follow logically from the premises?
 - Could other causes have produced the outcome under study?
 - Are the conclusions overstated?
 - Be suspicious of wording such as “groundbreaking, revolutionary, pathbreaking....”



Critique Process

- Questions on the methods
 - Are the methods appropriate for the study?
 - Could a different method produce a different and equally plausible interpretation?
 - Are the standards too high, too low, too broad or too narrow?
- Questions on the sources
 - Are the sources new or old?
 - If new, do they enhance our understanding or merely corroborate what we already knew?
 - If old, are they being viewed in a fresh light that changes our perspective?
 - Are new questions being asked of these older sources?



Next

- April 10: Time management skills
- April 24: Presenting research at academic conferences



Questions?

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