

How to ... survive peer review and revise your paper

When experts in a field read your work and deem it worthy of publication, it gives an article real credibility.

This is peer review – not a perfect system, and this is not perhaps the place to discuss its weaknesses – but it has stood the test of time.

Author and reviewer remain anonymous to one another – that is why the process is referred to as blind. An article will be sent to at least one reviewer and in some cases as many as three. Meanwhile, an editor will remain in control of the overall process.

There are several potential stages after acknowledgment of receipt:

1. Editor's initial impression, possible immediate rejection.
2. Send for peer review, or return with request for revisions.
3. Reading by peers, recommendation for immediate publication (rare), for revision or rejection.
4. Further reading by editor.
5. Decision.



Getting it right first time

- Look at names on editorial board – this might help to indicate what the journal is after.
- Read publication's author guidelines.
- Conform to journal's style.

The biggest question of all, however, is:

"Does this fit the journal's aims and scope?" – What are you trying to say?

Introductions should include a paragraph in which the purpose statement is absolutely clear cut.

Ideally some background will precede a purpose statement which includes aims and objectives.



Moving on to the article itself:

It's accurate – honest!

- Is empirical data accurately recorded? Does it warrant your conclusions?
- Don't hide weaknesses – e.g. small samples, say they are not large.
- Arguments must be coherent, and claims verifiable.
- What implications of research for all stakeholders.
- What next – what could future research cover?
- Is your grammar, spelling and lay-out spot-on?

Judging a paper

- Does it add to current knowledge?
- Does it relate to previous articles?
- Are the arguments valid?
- Is it easy to read?
- Do arguments flow logically?
- Are the conclusions strong?



Strategies for success

If you think of your research and article as one day's work, the peer process would not come until the sun starts to set!

How therefore to pre-empt shortcomings?

Via the action learning set:

This involves bringing in, if you can, a group of people (ideally five) to examine your work and ask pertinent questions. Also ideally, one of them – an action set adviser – will be a kind of chair person.



Questions to ask

some of which should by now be beginning to come to you instinctively are:

- Who are the intended readers? (three to five listed by name).
- What did you do? (no more than 50 words).
- Why did you do it? (ditto 50).
- What happened? (50).
- What do the results mean in theory? (50).
- ... and in practice? (50).
- What remains unresolved? (50).
- ... AND the biggest question of all: What is the benefit to the reader?"

To avoid an over-emphasis on the research itself, academics with expertise elsewhere might be better than subject specialists.



Revision

This requires a glass half-full frame of mind.

You've not failed – you have succeeded in becoming a potential contributor.

Very few newcomers crack it first time. Other points include:

- Don't take criticism personally and (see above) view it as feedback.
- Agree a time-scale for revision and stick to it.
- Work out running order and priority list for tackling amendments.
- Re-send as separate draft.
- State in covering letter what you've done (and perhaps have not done).
- Remain courteous in all responses.

Also: consider pre-print distribution to a few subject specialists. Most people will be flattered to be asked!



* Via

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/authors/guides

... You can see reviewers' responses to a submitted article as well as an exercise on carrying out your own peer review.

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