

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY QUARTERLY

Reviewing Guidelines

Journals rely upon scholarly reviews to increase the quality of research published in their field. Reviewers benefit as well, albeit indirectly. They: get a glimpse at what other scholars are doing; come to understand the ways to make contributions stand out and to create a “package” for arguments and data; enhance their own skills in creating publishable papers. Importantly, being a reviewer is an excellent way to continue your own education as a scholar. The following are things to think about in crafting a critically constructive review.

What to look for:

1. What is the contribution of the paper? What are the researchers trying to find out and why is it important to understand? How does this advance knowledge?
2. How carefully crafted is the argument? Consider whether appropriate literatures are reviewed and the cogency of the arguments underlying the “hypotheses” or major themes under investigation.
3. How appropriate are the methods to the topic under investigation? Do the authors provide adequate information on sampling, measures, analytical strategy so that the study could readily be replicated?
4. What do the authors claim to have found out? Are the results presented in a manner that ties together the theoretical and empirical portions of the paper?
5. Does the paper have a compelling “story line” (i.e., are parts well integrated)? Does the manuscript conclude with a concise analysis of the findings and how they fit with what is known, what needs to be known, and what is problematic about their analysis (i.e., the limitations)? If not, could one be created?
6. Does the manuscript fit with the intended audience?

How to approach the manuscript and the review:

1. Read the abstract and quickly skim the paper to get a gist of the substance of the paper, then do a more thorough reading (of text, footnotes, tables).
2. Introduce your review with a brief statement of what the paper is about and summary of the manuscript’s strengths. Then proceed to evaluate/critique (not just summarize the sections of) the paper.
3. Identify the “big picture” or main issues regarding theory, methods, results, and discussion. (Avoid lists of page-by-page comments, without any overall evaluation or distinction between major and minor problems.) When possible, offer ways to rectify the problems that you see.

4. Comment on smaller issues only if they compromise the meaning of what you think that the author is trying to convey.
5. Consider the clarity of writing of the manuscript (but don't be nit-picky! There are copy-editors!).
6. Think about the feedback that you would like to receive from a reviewer about your own work. And think about how you would like that feedback conveyed (i.e., in a constructive and respectful tone.) Be principled and fair with praise when warranted but keep in mind that the point of the review is to improve the manuscript.
7. Recognize that to fully do the job of a reviewer in a professional manner will require more than a few gut-level sentences of criticism. Good reviews are typically 1-3 pages long. (Responses to a successfully revised manuscript, however, may be much shorter.)

Communicating with the “Author” and the Editor:

1. Be sure to make your comments to the author consistent with your recommendation to the Editor. (For example, don't write a highly critical review and then suggest a “conditional accept” or write a glowing review and then suggest a “reject.”)
2. Keep in mind that the Editor will have at least two, but probably more, reviews and will base his/her decision on the cumulated information and assessment (plus their own reading). Thus while it is totally appropriate to communicate privately to the editor explicitly why you rejected or accepted a paper, do **not** explicitly state your recommendation (to accept, reject, or revise/resubmit) to the editor in the text of the comments to the author.
3. Keep reviews and communications professional and constructive at all times. (Avoid hostile comments, gratuitous insults, or even reflections on your own state of mind while writing the review!)
4. Preserve the full anonymity of the review process. Do not identify yourself (or your guess of who the author is). Never send a review to a presumed author. Consider the manuscript a confidential document.
5. Be timely in your review! Most journals suggest a 3-4 week turn-around time and send (automated) reminders. If you anticipate being late with a review, let the editor know.

Know that editors and authors appreciate the work of their colleagues in the reviewing process!!