

## **Suggestions for First-Time Reviewers and Reminders for Seasoned Experts**

### **Guidelines for Reviewing**

Here are some things you should consider as you examine a manuscript and write your review:

Look for the “intellectual plot-line” of the article. You can do this from first skimming through the manuscript and then giving it a once-over read. As you do this, ask the major questions that are central to the review process:

1. What is the purpose of this article?
2. Why is it important to investigate or examine the subject of the article?
3. How are the authors carrying out the task? Are their methods and comments appropriate and adequate to the task?
4. What do they claim to have found out? Are the findings clearly stated?
5. How does this advance knowledge in the field?

How well do the authors place their findings or comments within the context of ongoing scholarly inquiry about this topic? Look at the organization of the article. Can you find answers to the above questions quickly and easily? Can you trace the logic consistently from the opening paragraphs to the conclusion?

Then go back to the opening paragraphs of the article. Is the groundwork adequately and clearly laid to guide readers into the topic that is being addressed? Is it clear what the authors are talking about? Do they make the case that this is an important area for inquiry or examination?

An early section of many articles is usually a review of the existing literature on this topic. Do the authors present a convincing line of argument here—or does it appear that they are just name-dropping (citing sources that may be important, without a clear underlying logic for how they may be important)? Do the authors focus on ideas, or merely on discrete facts or findings? Have they given sufficient attention to theory - the cumulative attempts at prior explanations for the questions they are investigating? In short: How well do the authors set the stage for the problem or issue that they are reporting?

JWG manuscripts should critically interrogate the gender-based experiences of a particular group. Presenting a descriptive account of the experiences of women, for example, is not aligned with the mission of the journal. Rather, manuscripts should utilize a critical lens to investigate how gender shapes women's (or another group's) experiences.

The methods section is an essential part of any report of empirical research. It is essential that the study methods are clearly and thoroughly communicated, so the reader can determine whether the results of the study are valid. Reviewers should consider some the following:

1. Has the author identified the study population and how it was sampled? Who participated in the study and how were they selected? If the author is generalizing to a larger population, how well does the study sample represent that population?

2. What is the context of the study? This is particularly important when authors discuss how their work impacts the larger field of higher education. What type(s) of institution(s) provided the context for the study?
3. How were the study data collected? This process should be described in detail whether the research is qualitative or quantitative.
4. How were the study data analyzed? As with the data collection process, details should illustrate how the researcher came to the conclusions/results presented in the next section of the manuscript.
5. For qualitative research, authors should discuss the trustworthiness of the study. Additionally, make sure qualitative researchers have identified their positionality. Quantitative researchers should discuss the validity and reliability of their study.

In the case of a research article, the section presenting research results is the heart of the article. Reviewers might consider four questions here:

1. Does the results section tell a story—taking the reader from the research questions posed earlier to their answers in the data? Is the logic clear?
2. Are the tables and figures clear and succinct? Can they be “read” easily for major findings by themselves, or should there be additional information provided? Are the authors’ tables consistent with the format of currently accepted norms regarding data presentation? Are the tables and/or figures necessary?
3. Do the authors present too many tables or figures in the form of undigested findings? Are all of them necessary in order to tell the story of this research inquiry; or can some be combined? Remember that tables and figures are very expensive and can take up a lot of space. Also remember that undigested data obscure rather than advance the cumulative development of knowledge in a field.
4. Are the results presented both statistically and substantively meaningful? Have the authors stayed within the bounds of the results their data will support?
5. If the study is qualitative, do the authors include sufficient evidence for their findings? Ensure that quotes from participants or other data sources support the findings.

The discussion section of an article is the authors’ opportunity to share the most significant aspects of their work with the reader. Reviewers should consider the following questions when evaluating the discussion section:

1. Does the author bring their work into conversation with the research presented in the literature review? Does the author make clear how their work adds to what we already knew about their topic?
2. Does the author highlight findings that were presented in the results section of the manuscript? Make sure that no new findings are presented in the discussion.
3. Does the author provide implications for practice, policy, and future research in their discussion? This is essential for JWG manuscripts.

The writing style is important. Consider the three guidelines for successful communication—to be clear, concise, and correct — and whether the authors have achieved it:

1. Is the writing clear? Do the authors communicate their ideas using direct, straightforward, and unambiguous words and phrases? Have they avoided jargon (statistical or conceptual) that would interfere with the communication of their procedures or ideas? Have they clearly and satisfactorily explained the key concepts relevant to the article?
2. Is the writing concise? Are too many words or paragraphs or sections used to present what could be communicated more simply?
3. Is the writing correct? Many writers have only a rudimentary grasp of grammar and punctuation, and that results in meandering commas, clauses in complex sentences that are struggling to find their verbs, and adjectives or even nouns that remain quite ambiguous about their antecedents in the sentence. These are not merely technical issues of grammar to be somehow dealt with by a copy-editor down the line. Rather they involve the successful communication of a set of ideas to an audience; and this is the basis of scholarship today.

Your evaluation to the editor: Should this paper be (a) rejected for this journal? or (b) does it show sufficient promise for revision, in ways that you have clearly demonstrated in your review, to encourage the authors to invest significant time and energy in revision for this journal? Your bottom-line advice to the editor is crucial. Make a decision; state it clearly in your remarks to the editor in the space provided. Remember that not all of the articles submitted to a journal will be published.

Please do not include your summative review (accept, reject, revise) in your written review for the author. It is most helpful for authors if you include a tracked changes document as part of your review, which can be shared with them. This is the easiest way for you to communicate both editorial comments and larger issues in a way that authors can easily identify and address them. Please make sure you follow the steps necessary to blind your tracked changes, so your identity is protected.

### **Some reasons to reject a manuscript:**

1. The issues have already been addressed in prior studies;
2. The data have been collected in such a way as to preclude useful investigation;
3. The manuscript is not ready for publication—it is incomplete, in the improper format, or error-ridden.

### **Good Reviews and Bad Reviews**

A good review is supportive, constructive, thoughtful, and fair. It identifies both strengths and weaknesses, and offers concrete suggestions for improvements. It acknowledges the reviewer's biases where appropriate, and justifies the reviewer's conclusions.

A bad review is superficial, nasty, petty, self-serving, or arrogant. It indulges the reviewer's biases with no justification. It focuses exclusively on weaknesses and offers no specific suggestions for improvement.

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