

MGH Office for Research Career Development
Responsible Conduct of Research Series: Peer Review of Journal Manuscripts
December 12, 2013
Notes from Dr. Dennis Brown's presentation

How to Review a Manuscript

1. Why do I review?
 - Citizenship, giving back to the community
 - To keep current in the field, scientific interest in latest developments
 - Academic advancement

2. Should I review?
 - Do I have sufficient expertise in the subject matter?
 - Can I complete the review in a timely manner?
 - Do I have any conflicts of interest?

3. How do I review manuscripts?
 - Read once quickly, then slowly in more detail
 - Keep two files open on desktop, one for the text, one for the figures
 - Make notes as you go through the text
 - Try to help the authors improve their study as needed
 - Don't be lazy in reviewing. If you have a problem, write it down
 - Make sure your comments to authors reflect your recommendation to the editor
 - Comments should take into account the level/impact of the journal
 - If a manuscript is poor, you should not make very detailed comments to which the authors might be able to respond individually. Look at the big picture and make general comments that are difficult to rebut if the manuscript is not of good quality
 - Do not use offensive ad hominem or personal comments in reviews. Be professional.

4. Question of significance
 - read the instructions to reviewers for each journal when asked to review
 - Some journals do not require comments on significance of the work (e. g., PLoSOne)
 - Is the study novel or is it incremental or descriptive?
 - Is the work appropriate for the particular journal?

5. Other points for reviewing
 - Are the data of good quality. Would you publish these data?
 - Is there any evidence of figure manipulation. Check gels and images carefully for duplication and excessive manipulation/enhancement
 - Are gels cropped too closely?
 - Are controls adequate?
 - Do the conclusions follow logically from the results?
 - Is there excessive and unwarranted speculation?
 - Is the appropriate literature cited - are the authors biased in their citations?
 - Is the use of animals appropriate and is an institutional animal welfare protocol mentioned? Same for human studies.