

Writing a Good Peer Review in Family and Consumer Sciences

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The purpose of this paper was to illustrate how to write a good peer review. The paper provided definitions of peer reviews and blind reviews. It also provides an understanding of what to include in a peer review. Moreover, it recommends how to write a qualitative and quantitative peer review and different factors to avoid. The paper also illustrates how to write a review for a conceptual article. The paper concludes on how the peer review process contributes to scholarship and how the process makes a difference.

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As a new scholar, I can remember anxiously awaiting feedback and a decision on a manuscript that I had submitted to a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal. During my graduate school training, I had learned about the importance of the review process. Similar to my research as a scholar, peer reviews have a major impact on thousands of scholars every year.

I have participated as a peer reviewer for almost 15 years for scholarly journals in the family field. Every year, thousands of manuscripts are peer reviewed across the world. However, often people do not know what the review process encompasses. A scholarly peer review or blind review is “the process that journals use to ensure the articles they publish represent the best scholarship currently available” (University of Texas at Austin, 2011). After a manuscript is submitted to a journal, the editor will send the manuscript to other scholars for their review and evaluation. The key to the process is that neither the reviewer nor the author knows each other’s identity. This process is also used for referred professional meetings or conferences.

IMPORTANT FACTORS TO CONSIDER

At the beginning of the review, it is suggested that the reviewer provides a summary of his or her interpretation of the review. For example, starting with the strengths of the manuscript is advised. This gives the author a sense of what he or she successfully accomplished in the manuscript. After the strengths have been identified, the reviewer should discuss whether he or she has recommended that the article be accepted, deemed a revise and resubmit, or

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rejected/denied. It is important to point out that a manuscript can be recommended for "acceptance pending revisions," which can be minor or relatively extensive. If a manuscript is recommended for "revise and resubmit," this means the author will have to revise and resubmit and this can occur more than once. Also, at this stage, a manuscript can be rejected if revisions are not satisfactory. If a manuscript is "rejected," this indicates to the author that the manuscript is not acceptable for publication. However, a rejection could mean that the manuscript did not fit the aims or scope of the journal or it did not meet the standards established by the journal. If the reviewer can provide constructive feedback on how to improve the manuscript or suggest other scholarly journals that may be a better fit, these actions can be very helpful to the author. It also demonstrates professional courtesy in the scholarly review process.

As a new scholar, I distinctly remember being rejected/denied by a journal. It was difficult to accept that my research would not be published in this particular journal. However, the outcome of this experience was positive. The reviewers and editor provided me with substantial feedback and recommendations for other journals to explore for publication. Their feedback was accurate, and my article was eventually published in one of the journals that was recommended.

I suggest that each section of the manuscript should receive constructive feedback. Including page numbers with feedback in the review helps the author find the specific section that needs revision and/or editing. There is no specified length that is recommended for the review as long as the reviewer provides the feedback that is needed to justify the recommendation assigned to the manuscript (e.g., accept, revise, and reject).

TYPES OF REVIEWS

It is important for reviewers to have the expertise and/or knowledge base to accurately evaluate the research. There is no shame in informing an editor that one does not have the training to review a certain manuscript.

Qualitative manuscripts have their roots in anthropological work. However, today, almost every scholarly discipline conducts qualitative research. Ranging from ethnography to focus groups, the foundations of a strong qualitative manuscript are consistent. The author of a qualitative manuscript should provide a strong foundation in the introduction, literature review, and theory section to substantiate the data collection and findings. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative writings are not based on sample size. For example, six life histories of Latino migrant workers in North Central Indiana could produce substantially more data than forty 1-hr semi-structured interviews. The same can be argued for a single case study of a rural family in New Mexico. Thus, the reviewer's focus should be on the rich data produced from the respondents and not on the number of respondents. Another factor to consider is how trustworthiness was established in the research. Reviewers may want to check recommendations for determining rigor and reliability in qualitative research manuals if they are uncertain on how to evaluate the reliability of a qualitative study. Information on how respondents were recruited, how confidentiality was established, and how data were collected and analyzed are important to consider in writing the review.

It is also important for the author of a quantitative manuscript to establish a foundation through the introduction, literature review, and theory sections that will justify the findings. Sample size has different implications than even 20 years ago. Currently, a reviewer may be asked to review a manuscript with a sample size of more than 10,000 respondents. In a quantitative peer review, it is critical to determine whether the appropriate statistical methods were utilized. The size of the sample will influence whether power levels or significance levels that were used were appropriate to results.

Usually, conceptual articles do not include hypotheses or research questions. Thus, when writing a review of a conceptual article, it is important to consider whether the concept or theory was explained logically. If the manuscript focuses on an applied topic, it is important to determine whether the program or intervention was explained in detail.

In summary, the goal of this paper was to provide concise points that would help in writing a strong review. Whether the manuscript is qualitative, quantitative, or conceptual, the reviewer should be objective but also open to intellectual creativity. Finally, it is an honor to serve as a reviewer because the reviewer is contributing to the dissemination of knowledge. I believe a good review can help produce quality research that is likely to have an impact on individuals, families, and communities. I would like to close with the African-American family proverb of "Knowledge is power." Several years ago, I reviewed a manuscript that eventually was published. At the time, I believed that this manuscript could potentially make a difference in research and outreach. To date, this manuscript is still being cited by researchers and practitioners as an important source of knowledge.

REFERENCE

University of Texas at Austin Life Science Library. (2011). *Peer reviews*. Austin, TX: University of Texas at Austin Life Science Library.