

PGR Tips: Using peer review effectively

Peer review is the process that ensures quality in academia; experts in your field comment on work submitted for publication or funding. The following tips mainly apply to publications but will also be applicable to grant applications. When you send a paper to a journal, the editor will send it to reviewers who will comment on your research and recommend changes or reject it for publication.

- **proofread your work thoroughly before submission** – a reviewer will only find it distracting if they are not able to concentrate on the content because there are spelling, grammatical or factual errors. Make sure your references are perfect and in the format the journal requests, and any reference to figures or tables is correct. Spend time on your figures, tables and their legends. Get someone else to read it and comment to get an outsider's perspective and so the referee won't be the first person apart from the authors to see it.
- **make it easy for the reviewer** –Format your work as it would appear as the finished article (for example in a PDF file if the journal allows submission as this). Seeing it in the journal format may make it easier for a reviewer to see how your article will sit in the journal. Make sure you reference the work of as many possible reviewers as possible.
- **don't take it personally** –The majority of reviewer comments will be negative and may be worded curtly because of time constraints on the reviewers. As you have spent a lot of time preparing your submission this may be hard to take! However, they are unlikely to be personal (if they are they are more likely aimed at your supervisor). Take time to understand the point of the comments and use the feedback. Take heart from any positive comments.
- **don't give up** – “no” from an editor doesn't always mean “no”, it can mean “maybe”, which in turn can then be made into a “yes”. With your supervisor evaluate the potential for resubmission after editing. An editor will usually be open to arguments against comments if they are strong. In a letter to the editor address each comment and say which you will take on board (and thank the reviewer for their suggestions) and why you won't incorporate others. If resubmission is not possible you may have chosen too ambitious a journal or one in the wrong field. In this case rewrite the paper to the specifications of a different journal and resubmit there.
- **choose your critics** - often you will be given the opportunity to recommend reviewers or suggest who you would rather not review it. Use this as your supervisor will have a feel for the political landscape in the field.
- **become involved with peer reviewing the work of others**- if you want to become an academic peer review will be a substantial part of your job. Getting involved early will help you develop the skills you need. If any academics you know edit for a relevant journal, offer your services as a reviewer. Or your supervisor might delegate some of his/her reviewing to you.

For more information have a look at the Just for Postgrads section of the UK GRAD website; www.grad.ac.uk/jfp,