

### **A “do” and “don’t” list for manuscript reviewing**

- DO think about your favorite articles and what made them strong and compelling to you.
- DO meet the Editor’s deadline. Respond quickly, especially if you decide you cannot review the manuscript yourself, and please
- DO suggest one or two alternate reviewers if you’re too busy or not interested.
- DON’T review a manuscript you recognize because you’ve read a previous draft or are buddies with the author, unless you are extremely confident of your ability to be fair. Always disclose such connections to the Editor before you agree to do the review.
- DO set yourself a specific amount of time for reading the manuscript (90-120 minutes).
- DO set yourself a specific amount of time for writing your comments (60-90 minutes, plus some time to reread, think it over, and revise).
- DON’T drive yourself crazy with “Can this paper be saved?” reasoning. It’s OK to reject manuscripts with a good idea but a poor execution, and manuscripts that are crafted well but offer little original to scholarship. In your comments to the Editor, suggest other, more appropriate journals if the manuscript is not right for this one.
- DO mark the manuscript, if it helps you to read and comment efficiently. But unless you have a compelling reason to think it will really help the author, for some strange reason you have a lot of time on your hands, and you are willing to return the marked-up manuscript,
- DON’T edit, copyedit, revise, or rewrite the manuscript yourself!
- DO spend the first paragraph of the review focusing on the strengths and contributions you see in the manuscript. The author should at least feel certain you understand what s/he was trying to do. One efficient way to convey that is to state what you think the paper is “really about” or what the author seems to want to do (sometimes this is the most helpful part of a review, for an author who is “too close” to the work).
- DO be specific without being overly picky. General comments are much less useful than particulars about an argument and evidence, both for the author and for the Editor. However,
- DON’T give page after page of line-by-line “corrections.”
- DO read the tables or figures! Ask yourself (and the author) two questions: Do the tables “say” the same thing as the text? Could they be formatted to array the data more readably?
- DON’T produce a detailed summary of the entire manuscript.
- DON’T pillory the author for not writing the paper you would have written or otherwise second-guess the author.
- DON’T distribute or cite the manuscript (it is a confidential document), identify yourself in the review (unless you are willing to sign it), or try to figure out the author’s identity.
- DON’T make your recommendation to the Editor (reject, accept, revise and resubmit, etc.) in the text of your comments to the author.
- DON’T forget that reviewing serves a considerable gate-keeping function.
- DO be principled, fair, and generous with praise when it is warranted.
- DON’T lose sleep over the exact categorization of your recommendation to the Editor. It is much less important than the substance of your review, which should provide both the author and the Editor with a good sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript.
- DO remember that reviewing is important professional service. Be choosy about the burdens you take on before tenure even as you allow yourself to enjoy the intellectual stimulation and feelings of satisfaction that come from helping people do their best work in a growing field.

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