

University of Connecticut
Writing Center
Peer Review

Goal of Peer Review

The goal of peer review is to determine if a manuscript meets the standards to be published in an academic journal according to the author's peer in the field. A second, but no less important goal is to help the authors develop the paper into the best form possible.

Peer review can also be a useful process when writing papers for class by giving the author useful feedback and the reviewer a chance to hone their own writing by examining the problems or successes of other writers.

Your goal as a peer reviewer is to help the writer compose the best possible final draft. Direct all your comments toward that end.

Identify what needs revision

Read the draft to identify strengths and weaknesses. Your main goal is to determine how the overall paper comes off. At this point avoid editing for formatting, typos or grammar. It's easy to be distracted by line edits and miss important things like structure and content. Concentrate on how the draft strikes you as a reader. Indicate ideas or phrases that confuse you or appear undeveloped, but don't try to rewrite anything; that is the job of the writer.

After reading each paragraph, read it again. If there is a problem just identify where you had a problem and why; the author can usually take it from there.

Keep the big picture in mind. Focus on giving feedback on content, organization, and clarity. Your main goal is to evaluate whether the writing hangs together and makes sense. Look over the entire draft both before and after you have made specific comments.

Helping the writer revise

Your task is to help the writer figure out how to construct a clear, substantive final draft. An effective way to accomplish this is to point out the areas that are confusing to you and ask the writer questions, such as "What are you trying to say here?" or "Can you explain how this conclusion relates to your data?". As a peer reviewer, your job isn't to provide answers. You raise important questions about the draft, and the writer decides how to revise. Be courteous, but be honest as well.

When you run into difficult writing, make constructive comments and avoid criticism without substance. Give specific evidence as to why the writing doesn't work ("I could use a clearer transition between paragraphs 1 and 2") rather than making personal judgments ("Paragraphs 1 and 2 made no sense"). Give the kinds of comments as a reviewer that you would like to receive as an author.

Identify positive aspects of the paper as well as areas that need improvement (“the example here was really helpful”; “wow, you condensed that argument beautifully”). By doing so, you’re not just being nice, you’re highlighting the author’s writing strengths.

Avoid empty comments that the author can’t use (“Looks fine”, “Interesting paper”). Instead, make specific observations or suggestions for changes.

When you are done reading the paper summarize your general comments and point the writer to problems that appear often or detract from the impact of the paper.

When summarizing your comments on a paper begin with positive feedback and then describe the significant weaknesses in the draft. It may help to organize them into categories such as organization, content, and style. This will help you organize your comments and help the writer deal with each issue in context.

