

Writing a report

Whether you recommend accepting or rejecting the manuscript, keep in mind that one of your goals is to help the authors improve this and future manuscripts—not to make them give up in despair. Avoid overly negative wording or personal comments, point out the main strengths of the manuscript as well as its weaknesses, and suggest specific ways to fix the problems you identify. Also, avoid making overly brief and direct comments, as these can give your report an unfriendly tone. Reviewers are anonymous, so avoid comments that could make your identity obvious to the authors.

The reviewer report should be divided into two parts:

- comments to be read only by the editor, and
- comments to be read by both the editor and the authors.

Comments for only the editor:

In this section, give the editor your recommendation for the manuscript and, more importantly, your reasons behind it. These usually have to do with the manuscript's scientific soundness, novelty, quality, importance, and suitability for the journal. Editors take many factors into consideration when deciding whether a manuscript is right for the journal so providing evidence or reasoning for your recommendation is extremely helpful.

TIP: Recommendations are usually one of the following: accept manuscript in its current form, publish with minor changes, publish only if major improvements are made, or reject the paper.

Comments for both the editor and authors:

In this section, write a detailed report reviewing the different parts of the manuscript. Start with the short summary of the manuscript you wrote after your first reading. Then, in a numbered list, explain each of the issues you found that need to be addressed. Divide the list into two sections: major issues and minor issues. First, write about the major issues, including problems with the study's method or analysis. Next, write about the minor issues, which might include parts that need more explanation or suggestions to delete unnecessary text. If you think the English language of the manuscript is not suitable for publication, try to give specific examples so that the authors know what and how to address the problems.

Be as specific as you can about the manuscript's weaknesses and how to address them. For example, instead of, "The explanation of the proposed mechanism is not clear." You might write, "The explanation of the proposed mechanism should be more detailed. Consider referring to the work of Li and Smith, et al. (2008) and Stein and Burdak, et al. (2010)."

Keep in mind that the authors—and even the editor—may not be native English speakers. Read over your comments after you finish writing them to check that you've used clear, simple wording, and that the reasons for your proposed changes are clear.

After the review

After you submit a review, you should receive a notification that the review was successfully received.

If the authors revise and resubmit the manuscript after review, the editor will often review the changes to decide if the reviewer comments have been fully addressed.

Sometimes, however, the editor will send the manuscript back to the original reviewers to get their feedback about the acceptability of the revised manuscript.

- If this happens, focus on if the authors have resolved the problems you pointed out in your first review.
- Try to avoid raising new problems unless they have to do with the author's revisions. For example, if you asked the authors to explain their methods more clearly, and can now see problems with the experimental design that were not apparent before, it is still appropriate to mention them.

If the authors decided not to follow one or more of your suggestions, and explained why in their response letter, evaluate their reasons fairly and decide if you agree with their decision.

- If your suggestion arose from a misunderstanding of the manuscript, check to see if the authors have revised the relevant section to make it clearer or if they have explained a particular problem as a limitation of the study. Be fair.
- If you still feel strongly that the manuscript should not be published because of a problem that has not been addressed, you should indicate this to the editor and explain why a particular change or addition is necessary.