

## How to review a paper for Archives of Plastic Surgery, communicate as a reviewer, and handle disagreements with authors



Yong-Ha Kim

Editor-in-Chief, Archives of Plastic Surgery  
Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Yeungnam University College of Medicine, Daegu, Korea

*“What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.  
己所不欲 勿施於人 Confucius, BC 551–479”.*

Since *Archives of Plastic Surgery* (APS) is an open access journal, strict adherence to the peer review system is necessary to maintain the quality of the scientific papers it publishes. APS is an open access journal that allows users to search, read, download, and distribute papers freely, while the author pays for the publication and distribution of the paper. The actual budget for publication consists of payments made by the author, most commonly from the author’s research grant or employer, financial support from the Korean Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, and a grant from the Korean Federation of Science and Technology Societies. Despite the many advantages of this model, a lack of quality control is possible, especially when only economic profit is considered in the business model or when papers are not properly peer-reviewed.

### ATTITUDE OF THE REVIEWER

A good reviewer needs to be sincere and open-minded. The most basic virtue required is responsibility and integrity, despite being busy with operations, patients, and conferences, even at dawn or late at night. He or she shows objectivity and sincerity, even when reviewing a poorly written, marginal manuscript. Moreover, good reviewers tend to be curious, excited, and inspired to learn about new theories and information. With an optimistic belief in the progress of science, they have the goal of advocating for and championing their highly specialized field [1].

### THE ROLE OF THE REVIEWER

The role of the reviewer is to help the authors make the work more rigorous, complete, and clearly presented. Another important role as a consultant to the editor is to aid in the selection of manuscripts for publication. The primary decision is to accept a given paper, mandate a major revision, or reject it [2].

### ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION

The goal of the peer review process can be stated as follows: “the valid article is accepted, the messy article improved, and the invalid article rejected” [3].

The first and third decisions are clear and relatively easy to make.

Reasons to accept an article include the following: papers with a high probability of being cited as a timely paper in relation to a topic of recent interest, well-written papers, clearly understood and logical papers, and papers with well-designed and excellent methodology [4].

The following are reasons for a rapid rejection: the subject being investigated is not interesting; the question has already been answered properly; the question has not been asked before, but the answer is obviously known in the field; the study clearly lacks strength; and the manuscript contradicts itself, with partial inconsistencies across the hypothesis, method, outcome, and conclusions [5].

The problem is the second category of decision-making, improvement. The reviewers should communicate with the au-

thors and help them improve the quality of the paper by ensuring that they present their research more strictly, clearly, and completely, thereby satisfying the principles of scientific writing.

## HOW TO REVIEW

The review process that many people recommend is a 4-step process: accept for review, first reading, second reading, and write-up [2,4,6]. You should first decide whether you want to review the article or not, and notify the journal of your decision quickly. If you have any personal reasons or conflicts of interest, you should promptly refuse to review the article.

The following methods exist for reading science or social theory texts. First, preview it via a quick scan and catch the main idea. After that, re-read the necessary and important core areas, and explore the relevant information with the goal of expanding the scope of your understanding. Then read it again and think about the text with critical and creative eyes. Using this technique, you will see dramatic improvements in information acquisition, comprehension, and memory. Applying this method when reviewing manuscripts may be useful.

After agreeing to review the article, the first reading, second reading, and write-up processes must be planned. Do the first reading quickly, similarly to how you scan texts. You can use a moment during the break between operations, time spent writing another article, or even time spent waiting for a friend at the bar. It takes less than 30 minutes. Focus on the big-picture issues, such as the meaning and importance of the research question and the originality of the paper. Keep the paper in your mind for a day or more. Think objectively about the paper, like the Stoa philosophers who want to have a view from 100 m or 1,000 m, expecting insights and new perspectives to occur on their own.

Then go through the second reading, while studying the specific theoretical background of the paper by consulting sources such as reference materials or Wikipedia. In this process, the reviewer should consider each section carefully, and prepare specific comments and recommendations with a critical and creative eye.

Then, either a successive or simultaneous write-up is performed. A down-to-earth approach is recommended when writing a review [4,7,8].

The first sentence should describe the intent and value of the paper. Then, scientific aspects should be pointed out in the following order: methods, results, discussion, introduction, references, abstract, and title page.

Very rarely, some reviewers irresponsibly check 'accept' or 'reject' and do not write a review. To help reviewers write effective

reviews, APS provides a pop-up window with the title "How to review a manuscript submitted to APS?" in the Reviewer Center on the APS homepage. However, the method we provide is not perfect. I am very thankful that our creative, sensitive, and excellent reviewers have provided comments beyond this framework and sent much better reviews than I expected.

## REVIEWERS VERSUS AUTHORS

When editing a messy paper, it is common to improve the clarity, transparency, accuracy, and utility of selected submissions without rejecting them. In such cases, communication between reviewers and authors is important.

From the author's point of view, acceptance is pleasant. The reviewers seem to be wise and gentle people. However, receiving a major revision or rejection is different. The hurt author feels overwhelmed by what he or she may perceive as the anonymous power of the reviewer. Regarding a reviewer's points, one can feel as though the reviewer is a narrow-minded, impetuous, arrogant, and self-assertive fellow. Nonetheless, most reviewers are devoted, love scholarship, and observe the principles of good scholarship.

From the reviewer's point of view, it can be difficult to communicate with the author during the revision process. If the reviewer's comments are well received, the author seems to be wise and adaptive. However, when there are many conflicting opinions and the author makes changes that are not what the reviewer wants, or when the answer is ambiguous or irreverent, it is different. The reviewer may then feel that the author is stubborn, narrow-minded, irresponsible, and immature.

It would be helpful if there were common standards that could be used to communicate with each other. Authors are recommended to refer to the reporting guidelines according to the specific study design in the Author Information section on the APS homepage. The reviewers could also use these guidelines, checking off items to determine whether the author's logic has proceeded properly. If authors and reviewers both use these guidelines, it will be easier to communicate. Study designs commonly encountered in APS include observational studies, randomized controlled studies, and systematic literature reviews. The guidelines for each of these are Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE, <http://www.strobe-statement.org>), Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT, <http://www.consort-statement.org>), and Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA, <http://www.prisma-statement.org>), respectively.

You can access the APS homepage to use or download the

necessary lists. Depending on the type of the study, detailed items regarding the process, such as Title and Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, and other information, are provided. This can be used as a reference by authors when writing a manuscript, and also by reviewers as a reference. Exceptions and other types of research are possible.

## CONCLUSIONS

Communication between reviewers and authors is one of the most important processes in scientific research. Authors should keep in mind that the review process is strict and rigorous, and should sincerely strive to produce a clear and complete paper to the greatest extent possible. At the same time, the reviewer should evaluate the manuscript fairly, regardless of whether the author contributed a clear and complete article. As a reviewer, you can experience the opportunity to carry out the role of a scholar who praises the high ideal standards for academic inquiry, and to joyfully advocate for future specializations that provide opportunities for new knowledge to emerge.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

## ORCID

Yong-Ha Kim <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1804-9086>

## REFERENCES

1. Drubin DG. Any jackass can trash a manuscript, but it takes good scholarship to create one (how MBoC promotes civil and constructive peer review). *Mol Biol Cell* 2011;22:525-7.
2. Hoppin FG Jr. How i review an original scientific article. *Am J Respir Crit Care Med* 2002;166:1019-23.
3. Bornmann L, Daniel HD. The manuscript reviewing process: empirical research on review requests, review sequences, and decision rules in peer review. *Libr Inf Sci Res* 2010; 32:5-12.
4. Provenzale JM, Stanley RJ. A systematic guide to reviewing a manuscript. *AJR Am J Roentgenol* 2005;185:848-54.
5. Wenzel V, Dunser WM, Lindner KH. A step by step guide to writing a scientific manuscript [Internet]. San Francisco: Scribd Inc; 2017 [cited 2017 Oct 10]. Available from: <https://www.scribd.com/document/62777886/A-Step-by-Step-Guide-to-Writing-a-Scientific-Manuscript>.
6. Allen TW. Peer review guidance: how do you write a good review? *J Am Osteopath Assoc* 2013;113:916-20.
7. Roberts LW, Coverdale J, Edenharder K, et al. How to review a manuscript: a “down-to-earth” approach. *Acad Psychiatry* 2004;28:81-7.
8. Lee SY. Tips on writing and reviewing articles as a non-english speaking medical doctor. *Arch Plast Surg*. 2015;42:1-3.

---

**Correspondence:** Yong-Ha Kim  
Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Yeungnam University College of Medicine,  
170 Hyeonchung-ro, Nam-gu, Daegu 42415, Korea  
Tel: +82-53-620-3481, Fax: +82-53-626-0705, E-mail: kimyon@ynu.ac.kr

Received: 27 Nov 2017 • Revised: 28 Nov 2017 • Accepted: 28 Nov 2017  
pISSN: 2234-6163 • eISSN: 2234-6171  
<https://doi.org/10.5999/aps.2017.01711> • Arch Plast Surg 2018;45:1-3

---