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Journal of Sedimentary Research

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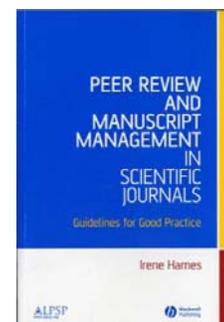
Paul McCarthy and Gene Rankey, Editors

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Peer Review and Manuscript Management in Scientific Journals—Guidelines for Good Practice, by Irene Hames, 2007. Blackwell Publishing, copublished with the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP). Paperback, 312 pages. Price GBP 19.99; USD 39.95. ISBN 9781405131599.



The scientific community in general and the authors of published papers in peer-reviewed journals thrive on the efforts of the reviewers—in spite of some “harsh judgments” and eventually “hurt feelings” engaged in the process. With almost 2 million reviewed articles published per year the necessity of “educating” newly recruited reviewers is obvious.

Being a good reviewer requires skills which develop and improve in time. The aim of a good editing job for a scientific journal includes, among others, improvement of the manuscript. This in turn upgrades *our own* level of critical thinking and scientific reasoning. A good reviewer keeps in mind the ease of reading and following the logic of the reasoning of a scientific report for readers. An experienced reviewer is very often a sincere, yet anonymous colleague, struggling to serve the authors to convey their point of view in a straightforward manner. Thoughtful peer review is a critical part of this expert advice.

It was a pleasure for me to read this book, which is a must for all who are in the tough business of peer-reviewed publications. This includes the potential authors as well as reviewers. Irene Hames has written a practical guidebook for this purpose. The book starts with the definition of peer review as a quality control of the submitted manuscripts. To reach this goal, the editor should get a clear picture of the various ethical, accuracy, and relevancy aspects of each publication. Irene Hames has described clearly her goal for putting together such a book by mentioning it as a method to strengthen the peer-review process as a powerful tool in improving the academic standard of the scholarly publications.

The book offers essential instructions for editors of all levels while a potential author will also benefit from reading it. With the major focus on peer review as a critical element in the editorial process the goals of this book are to provide expert advice to the reviewers as well as editors responsible for manuscript management in any given scientific journal. To carry out such an important issue, one must start with checking the scientific validity of the data and methods. Such a step is necessary to provide the information that editors need for their decision about the suitability of the paper for publication in their journal.

This comprehensive, authoritative, and useful book deals with important issues like how to find a suitable reviewer for a manuscript. As an important aspect of the management of the review process, it is always a delicate decision to invite/not to invite reviewers. The book deals with a logic decision-making process for such situations. Based on many years of experience of the author herself, the book is packed with practical warnings which might otherwise be missed by less experienced reviewers. This is especially true if, for example, the anonymity of the reviewer is a critical issue.

In many parts of the book, scenarios are described, for example in dealing with revisions provided by authors. Resubmission of manuscripts is another situation for which various

alternatives are considered in the required detail. The rapidly developing online submission and review of manuscripts is dealt with in the book in a proper way. Providing guidelines for good practice in such situations requires an in-depth hand-on knowledge of various online systems, something which is clearly a strong advantage of the author of the book. With a detailed list of 12 challenges in online reviewing the manuscripts, Irene Hames provides a wealth of knowledge to the beginners taking their first steps in an expanding peer-review process.

The importance of ethical issues has been discussed in detail in Chapter 8. It is rightly mentioned, as a golden rule, that everyone involved in the peer-review process must act according to the highest ethical standards. In listing the obligations and responsibilities of reviewers, the author clearly specifies the importance of objectivity and constructive attitude of the reviewer in dealing with a manuscript. This of course includes conflicts of interest and the ways to deal with them, issues that in some cases have created a lot of unwanted, and to some extent even personal, discussions that go well beyond the limits of a purely objective evaluation of a scientific text. Chapter 9 deals with misconduct in scientific research and publishing, where a golden rule specifies that even an alleged or suspected misconduct must be taken seriously. The readers should be able to evaluate the possibilities of imposing a sanction following revealing a proven case of misconduct, based on the degree of the misconduct.

Appendix I is where all the discussed golden rules are gathered to make a quick review of the rules of thumb an easy task. Appendix II deals with various types of checklists and editorial letters covering a range of examples to make sure that the various issues of importance, e.g. conflict of interest, are included for a successful peer review. To my understanding, such a book is a must for journal editors and peer reviewers. It is well written and properly supported with a range of previously published papers in the reference pages. Even seasoned editors will benefit reading this book by checking their developed review procedures.

Given that this is a well-written book, I hope that it finds a broader readership beyond reviewers. While no reputable journal could be published without their efforts, reviewers rarely get trained or are given advice how to conduct reviews. By writing a book on peer review and manuscript management, Irene Hames has helped millions of readers, thousands of authors and hundreds of reviewers and editors to reach a higher standard for scientific publications. I benefited greatly reading the book and warmly suggest every scientist to have it available as a reference book on his or her book shelf when thinking about putting together a manuscript or when invited to serve the community as a reviewer. Thanks Irene for such a great job!

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