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Reviewing for Academic Journals

UCET Conference (Virtual) November, 2020

Linda la Velle (Bath Spa University)

Stephen Newman (Leeds Beckett University)

- Purposes of review
- Role of Reviewer
- Good and bad practice
- Issues with reviews
- Approaches to review
- Getting 'your head around it'
- Constructing the review

Purposes of review

- Peer review of research and scholarly output– the backbone of academe – forms the academic community
- To describe, analyse and evaluate
- Originality, Significance and Rigour
- To ‘hold up the mirror’ for reflection: gives academics the opportunity to respond to others’ interpretations, ideas and work
- Maintains the frontiers of knowledge in the field

The role of the Reviewer

- To understand the article: to read critically and analytically
- To bring experience and expertise of the field to the article: to respond to it
- To critique, validate, verify and interpret the article: to evaluate it
- To contextualise the article: to compare it
- To enquire: about the article, the author, themselves; the context

Good and Bad Practice

- Thoughtful
- Justification
- Objectivity
- Clarity
- Conciseness, sufficiency
- Formative, research based suggestion for improvement
- Casual
- Description
- bias
- vagueness
- Brevity
- Unsubstantiated critical comment

Approaching a review

- Online platforms – their communications – how they recruit reviewers – personalisation not always possible
- Scan – title, keywords, abstract, structure, conclusion.
 - Note down: main purpose of paper: RQ/topic; bottom line outcome
- Scrutinise – detailed, critical reading
 - Note down: main points from each section (what it is and what it does); questions that arise for you; discern the ‘golden thread’
 - Review notes: two columns: observations and responses -reflect – note down;

Mapping the review

- Your observations about the article:
 - Information; focus; evidence; methods; ethics; analysis; claims;
- Your responses to the article
 - Try to suspend judgement until you have made your observations
 - Ask yourself:
 - Does it fall within the journal's remit?
 - What is the subject/topic of the article? What key ideas will you outline?
 - What is the bottom line? (claim for new knowledge)
 - What evidence does the author draw on? Does it support the claims?
 - Is the 'golden thread' of argument discernible, convincing, well articulated?
 - Is the methodology robust and ethical?
 - What is the significance of the findings for the field?
 - Is it satisfactorily presented? (title, abstract, keywords, structure, English, etc.)

Writing the Review

- Try hard to keep to the time schedule: if it was your paper in review, you would appreciate quick turn-around (and so would the editor!)
- The Introduction: draft a clear statement that evaluates the article and justifies the evaluation – state final judgement
- The body of the review: organise around your responses to the key questions raised during the critical reading – OSR important
- Write as accurately and elegantly as you can: the text will be copied directly into the email to author
- Balance judgements; stay positive (even when ‘rejecting’)

The Editor's perspective

- Timely
- Appropriate
- Formative

