



## Learning to Review

Robert Freedman, MD

Editor in Chief of *The American Journal of Psychiatry*

My mentor, Daniel X. Freedman, editor of the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, referred to journal reviewers as “the great college without walls of academic psychiatry.” Despite the constraints of anonymity, the intellectual vivacity of the dialogue between authors and reviewers is one that is impressive to witness, now from my own editorial seat. Although reviewing is an unpaid and often unrecognized academic role, senior faculty are extremely generous in giving their time and effort to the important task of ensuring that our psychiatric journals publish the best possible papers. For junior faculty and residents, there need to

be opportunities to enter this dialogue. Because journal editors recognize reviewers’ time and effort as a limited resource, we reject papers without review if we judge that they are not likely to be publishable, even with revision. Similarly, we do not send papers for review to junior reviewers, because we want to ensure that the articles that we do publish receive review from the experts best able to judge their strengths and weaknesses. Neither of these processes seems to leave room for novices to learn.

Most research and clinical groups incorporate review of papers into their efforts to allow junior colleagues within the

group to receive advice about their papers from more senior members. Many faculty bring papers that they are reviewing for journals to junior colleagues and trainees to critique. A jointly authored review, reflecting the efforts of both a junior and a senior investigator, is quite acceptable to most journals. We look for the junior reviewer to hone down on the technical merit of the paper, while the senior reviewer offers perspective on whether or not the paper is clearly written and makes a substantive contribution to the field. Either of these activities, review of a draft paper from within the group or review of a paper submitted to a journal, can make stimulating classroom activities. I am frequently pleased to discover that my senior resident class in psychopharmacology has picked up a problem with a paper that I have missed in my own review.

Learning to write and review need not be an activity that is undertaken only after a young person has completed his or her first research study. Writing, reviewing, and editing are skills that can be learned early in training. Good writing skills

increase the chances that a first paper will actually be published. For residents and fellows, *The American Journal of Psychiatry* has the Residents' Journal, a Web-based publication that is hosted on the *Journal's* Web site (<http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org>). Published monthly, the Residents' Journal has editorials, interviews, case reports, research reports, and book reviews written by residents and fellows and reviewed and edited by their peers. It was started to give people this opportunity to participate in their own college of writers and reviewers without walls early in their career. Further details about how to participate in the Residents' Journal are available on the AJP Web site.

**Author affiliation:** Departments of Psychiatry and Pharmacology, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Denver. **Financial disclosure:** None reported. **Funding/support:** Dr Freedman receives compensation for his role as Editor of *The American Journal of Psychiatry*. **Corresponding author:** Robert Freedman, MD, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, 4200 E 9th Avenue, Denver, CO 80262 (Robert.Freedman@uchsc.edu). doi:10.4088/JCP.09com05628whi  
© Copyright 2009 Physicians Postgraduate Press, Inc.