



Peer Review Perspective for Early Career Psychiatrists

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Peer review is an integral and essential part of modern science. It plays a crucial role in decisions about funding research and what is published in the scientific literature.

Why should an early career academic psychiatrist, with a huge burden of time pressures, consider reviewing manuscripts for journals? It offers no financial reward and carries little value for promotion or tenure. Yet reviewing manuscripts for journals is part of professional networking, with implications for future grant applications and letters of reference. In addition, reviewing other scientists' manuscripts will make you a better writer of grant applications and manuscripts yourself. It will expand your knowledge, keep you abreast of developments in the field, and hone critical thinking skills in your area.

There are also the matters of altruism and academic citizenship. No one—certainly not a department chairperson or editor—expects a junior researcher to always say yes to requests to serve as a reviewer. This would be a flagrant waste of your time. By the same token, don't always say no, and certainly never be rude. Our community is small, and a person you offend today may review your grant application, proposal for academic promotion, or pivotal manuscript tomorrow. Beyond that element of self-interest, remember why society funds your institution and why doctors and scholars are usually held in high regard—to support our promise of extending knowledge and improving life.

When you do accept an invitation to review for a journal, remember that the author is a scholar much like you. He or she is doing his/her best to be productive and contribute to knowledge. Criticize the science as you see fit, but steer clear of *ad hominem* statements. As your kindergarten teacher said,

"Be nice." You do not want to gain a reputation as someone who's mean spirited.

Some peer reviewers, on the other hand, wind up being "too nice." They bend over so far backward to avoid giving offense that their opinions wind up having little value. Remember who is the "end user" of medical journal articles—the patient. Doctors and scientists write these manuscripts, which in *JCP*'s case are read by practicing physicians. The practitioners then apply the information to their care of sick people—our patients. As Editor of *JCP*, I never want to withhold information that could be helpful to patients and enhance their care. Whether to accept a submitted article hinges greatly on an assessment of whether the information will change care for the better. But my greatest fear is publishing material that could misinform and diminish the quality of health care. As a peer reviewer, you would be a vital member of a team that seeks to improve care and, at the same time, enhance patient safety. So, be nice—but love tough.

The journal peer-review system is part of a complex ballet that is choreographed ultimately to combat disease and improve health. Put on your dancing shoes and join us.

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