

Constructive Refereeing

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Introduction

- Refereeing is a crucial part of the academic process, playing a key role in ensuring the quality and integrity of published research.
- This presentation outlines several guiding principles to help referees contribute constructively to the scholarly community.
- These points aim to enhance the effectiveness and impact of your referee reports.

1. Be Constructive

- **Maximise Value:** Aim to provide feedback that adds substantial value to the authors' work.
- **Focus on Fixable Issues:** Highlight areas where the paper can be realistically improved. Offer actionable suggestions that can enhance the paper's quality.
- **Identify Non-fixable Issues:** It's equally important to note issues that cannot be easily addressed, helping authors understand the limitations of their work.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Recognize the strengths of the paper. Constructive criticism coupled with positive feedback encourages authors to improve without being discouraged.

2. Keep it Short

- **Conciseness is Key:** Your report should be comprehensive yet concise. Aim for 2-3 pages unless exceptional circumstances warrant more detail.
- **Efficiency in Communication:** A clear, focused report saves time for both the referee and the authors, while still conveying all essential points.
- **When Less is More:** If a paper does not meet the journal's standards, a succinct report (less than a page) is often sufficient. Provide clear reasons for your decision.
- **Referees are not co-authors:** Some referees mistakenly believe that they should have as much say over the paper as the authors. This can make the refereeing process very painful.

3. Stay on Time

- **Respect Deadlines:** Only accept a referee request if you can meet the deadline. For JEEA, this typically means a 5-week turnaround.
- **Communicate Early:** If unforeseen circumstances arise, inform the editor as soon as possible. Propose a new deadline if needed, ensuring transparency.
- **Professional Courtesy:** Timely reports are crucial for maintaining the flow of the academic publishing process, benefiting both the authors and the journal.

4. Appreciate Novelty

- **Value Innovation:** Recognizing and appreciating novel ideas is a vital skill in research. Innovation drives the field forward.
- **Open-mindedness:** Novel research may employ unconventional methods. Be open to diverse approaches that challenge traditional norms.
- **Balancing Rigour with Ambition:** When assessing the rigor of a study, consider its novelty and the ambition of its goals. High-risk, high-reward research can push the boundaries of knowledge.
- **Encouraging New Perspectives:** Support research that introduces new perspectives, even if it deviates from established methodologies. Progress in science often comes from such departures.

5. Keep it to the Essentials

- **Prioritize Feedback:** When recommending a revise and resubmit, clearly differentiate between essential and non-essential revisions.
- **Focus on Essentials:** Concentrating on essential revisions helps streamline the revision process, making it more effective for both authors and referees.
- **Clarity in Recommendations:** Ensure that your recommendations are clearly articulated and justified. This helps the authors understand the critical aspects they need to address.

6. Be Aware of Publication Biases

- **Recognize Biases:** The evaluation of research is prone to biases, particularly against null results. Be mindful of these biases in your assessment.
- **Consider Alternative Outcomes:** Reflect on how you would evaluate the research if the results were different. This helps mitigate bias and leads to a more objective review.
- **Value of Null Results:** Null results with strong methodological rigor and relevance can be just as important as significant findings, offering valuable insights and preventing publication bias.
- **Fair Evaluation:** Strive for fairness in your review, ensuring that the merit of the research is judged on its scientific value rather than the outcome alone.

7. Be Aware of Negativity Biases

- **Constructive Culture:** The culture in economics often focuses on identifying flaws in papers. While important, it's equally crucial to highlight strengths.
- **Politeness and Professionalism:** A polite and respectful tone in your report fosters a positive and constructive academic environment.
- **Balanced Feedback:** Provide balanced feedback that acknowledges the merits of the paper while offering constructive criticism.
- **Contribute Positively:** Aim to contribute positively to the authors' work, encouraging improvement rather than merely pointing out faults.

Conclusion

- **Refereeing as a Service:** Refereeing is a critical service to the academic community, helping to uphold the quality of research.
- **Guiding Principles:** Following these principles can enhance the impact of your referee reports, making them more constructive and valuable.
- **Continual Improvement:** As referees, we should continuously strive to improve the quality of our reviews, contributing to the advancement of our field.