5 Tips for Reviewing a Review Article

Posted by Kelechi Amakoh | Published May 06, 2020

Unlike research articles, most review articles lack methods or data sections. Rather than reporting a new method or discovery, they aim to introduce and say something new about a topic. Knowing this, there are certain things to consider when peer reviewing a review article.

1. Understand the journal's requirements

The journal has invited you to peer review a review article because you are someone who knows the field well and could be a regular contributor to the journal. Before you start your review, it is important to understand the journal's peer review requirements. They will be your overarching guide for the feedback you provide. For example, review articles written for Trends in Biotechnology are required to include recent work but don't need to cite every paper ever published in the field. When in doubt, seek clarification of requirements from the editor of the journal. A clear understanding enables you to be efficient and provide a thorough assessment of the review article.

2. Keep in mind that review articles are for a wide audience

The aim of review articles is to introduce a non-expert, average expert, or new researcher to a topic, and in some cases, review articles are multidisciplinary in approach. As a result, review articles are written for a wider audience than research articles. Overall, the review article should provide a broad understanding of a topic. Therefore, clear communication of the topic is essential for a review, and you should make this a focus of your feedback.

3. Determine the review article's message

A well-written review delivers an overarching message throughout the various sections of the article. It should clearly explain the key concepts, terminologies, and debates in the literature, but also provide a new perspective. Overall, a reader should not be misled by the article. If there are unclear sections of the review article, you should point this out to the author(s) in your feedback. Could the message be made clearer by reorganizing the information? In addition to structure, consider the timeliness of the message – this is key to the relevance of the review article.

4. Be professional and constructive in your comments

When providing comments on a review article, remember to keep it professional. As Matt puts it: "Be nice. Use professional courtesy. Do unto the authors as you'd have them do to you." Ensure that you provide insightful and courteous comments on ways to improve the manuscript before publication. Constructive feedback is highly recommended: you should focus on addressing problems rather than

reasons why the article should not be published. Your suggestions will go a long way in helping the journal editor and the author(s) publish the best content that they can.

5. Keep your feedback consistent and content-focused

As a reviewer, you should make sure your feedback is consistent. Your comments on the article should agree with the recommendations you provide for improvement. This consistency will make it easier for author(s) to consider how to make changes, not only what needs to change. This should be the crux of your recommendations as a reviewer. Additionally, you should focus your recommendations on the content, not the style, of the article. Think about the author's perspective and delivery. As long as the point is clear, less attention should be given to the grammar usage, punctuation, style inconsistencies, and reference formatting, as this will be taken care of by the journal's editor before publication.