Writing an Outstanding Review

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Agenda

• Why you should review
• Approaching the review
• Recommended review mind-set
• Maximize the impact of your review
• Writing the review
• After the decision
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Why should you review?

- Contribute to the field
- Reciprocity is how the system works
- Stay in touch with the emerging literature
- Great learning experience for writing a strong paper
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Avoid conflicts of interest

- Read these carefully in the invitation letter (each journal is different).
- If applicable, disqualify yourself and/or communicate knowledge of the authors to the editor.
- *JM*: We prefer full transparency (that you know the authors) even if you do not have an actual conflict of interest.
- If you have seen the paper elsewhere (e.g., reviewed for another journal), you should let the editor know.
You are presently a coauthor or have previously coauthored a paper with any of the authors.

Any of the authors was or is your thesis advisor.

Any of the authors is a business partner or relative.

Any of the authors was or is at the same institution at the same time as you—either as a student or faculty.

Any of the authors was or is one of your PhD students or you served on any of the authors’ dissertation committee(s).
Keep the paper confidential

- Do not share papers in the review process or your review with any outside parties. This ensures that ideas are protected when submitted to journal.
- You should never ever ask anyone to do your reviewing work for you.
- You can ask colleagues for help if you have a question. As you do, be sure to protect the ideas in the paper.
Commit the necessary time

• Doing a review can take 6-8 hours and sometimes more than a whole day. Revisions can take even longer.

• Be prepared to read other papers, consult colleagues.
Be timely and responsible

- Respond as promptly as possible to review invitations.
- If you accept a review, you are then responsible for completing it in the scheduled time frame.
- Do not cancel at the last minute, and avoid very late reviews. Both behaviors harm the review process because they either delay papers or leave authors and editors with a smaller set of reviewers.
Respect the author’s objective and not try to hijack the paper

- “Hijacking” means the review team takes too much control from the authors.
- This is generally done with the goal of helping the authors improve their contribution.
- Be careful to not take your recommendations beyond a reasonable level.
Review the paper the way you would like your own paper reviewed!
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Cut more slack for papers that address important issues, while still maintaining a threshold level of acceptability.
Be open to organic/indigenous marketing theories

- “Borrowing” theories from other disciplines is common and well accepted.
- Be open to organic/indigenous/homegrown theories. These are uniquely or largely about marketing phenomena (e.g., service quality, brand equity, market orientation).
Do not forget about conceptual rigor

• Conceptual rigor is more than using theories and frameworks from other disciplines.

• It means:
  - Being clear and precise about construct definitions and theoretical propositions/hypotheses
  - Providing strong arguments for propositions/hypotheses
  - Using terms consistently in the paper
  - Having a level of coherence across the ideas in the paper
Remember that marketing is a multidisciplinary field

- Do not insist that everyone follow a specific paradigm or set of methods (e.g., economics or psychology).
Ensure that models and empirical rigor are in the service of marketing insight, not an end in themselves.
Accept some weaknesses

- We must work to create the best papers possible while also acknowledging that all papers have limitations.
- As noted by former *JMI* editor Kohli (2011, p. 1), that “The perfect paper does not exist.”
- Similarly, former *JMR* editor Gil Churchill used to say, “There are no perfect papers—only published and unpublished papers.”
Never make it about you or your work

- Don’t be a selfish reviewer that touts your own work.
- If your important work is overlooked, you can note it to the editor or in a broader set of references offered to the authors.
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Do not recommend that every paper should be rejected

- Accept some weaknesses and work with the authors to create a stronger paper.
- Always recommending “accept” or “reject” suggests you are probably not a careful reviewer.
Explain your criticisms

- How will the problems you identify explain the pattern of ideas or results in the paper?
- Too often reviewers raise questions about a paper they consider fatal. However, absent from the review is an explanation of how the critique explains the pattern of results.
Don't criticize the paper in areas where you lack expertise

- If you feel you are in over your head, share this with the editor or ask the editor for guidance about where s/he would like you to focus. Sometimes editors will select you to focus on one aspect of the paper.
Be specific

• A lazy reviewer offers generalities.
• It is easy to offer a set of standard criticisms about papers, such as lack of conceptual framework, endogeneity threats, or lack of managerial or theoretical contributions.
• Instead, work to identify the specific problems.
Be constructive

• This means you should be willing to offer recommendations to solve some of the criticisms you raise.

• If, for example, a theory is lacking, what literature or concepts would be useful? If a model is missing a critical element, what is required to rule out competing explanations?

• This type of feedback requires you to engage deeply in the paper and helps improve the quality of papers published.
Be tolerant

- If the author does not do something the way you would, that does not mean it is wrong.
- Be tolerant of approaches that are different from yours, and do not force the author to follow your idiosyncratic choice of methods or paradigms.
Be reasonable about what you request the author to do

- For example, demanding collection of new data to correct minor flaws, or demanding additional robustness checks that take months to do may not be in the interest of the journal.

- Distinguish between things that are essential for the paper to be acceptable and those that would be nice to have in your review.
Be dispassionate

- Avoid emotionally-charged language.
- Avoid absolutes.
- Refer to, e.g., “the paper is …” or “the model is …” rather than “the authors are…”
Seek to raise your concerns as early as you can in the review process

- This will help the authors move forward efficiently and not cause major delays later in the process.
Be consistent across reviews of a paper

- Don’t flip flop unless you have had a revelation or if the authors introduce new information in between submissions that requires new comments.
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Format

- Length: 2 single-spaced pages is generally sufficient.
- Number each comment (this helps the Editor, AE, and authors).
- Do not write comments in the order in which they come up in the paper, e.g., page 1 comments.
- See next slide for one recommended order.
A typical set of review categories (and recommended order):

• A short synopsis of the paper and its findings
• Evaluate the contribution: Suggestions to improve contribution (if needed)
• Identify major conceptual strengths, weaknesses, recommendations
• Identify major empirical strengths, weaknesses, recommendations
• Evaluate readability
• Minor comments and suggestions
Take a step away and revisit your review to ensure it contributes and is reasonable.
Offer unvarnished views to the editor while being polite to authors

Writing the review
Be careful!

• Do not type your review into the box provided.

• Create it in a WORD document so you can easily proof read and spell check it.

• Only after proofing, should you paste into the box or attach.
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Seek to understand the editor’s decision

- Do not take it personally if the Editor makes a different decision than your recommendation.

- Overruling the review team's recommendations is often required to publish innovative or risky research.

- The editors are the only ones with a truly global view of the journal and its requirements.
Learn from the review

• Read the AE and Editor’s letters and see if they pointed to your comments.

• Find out what you missed and review the paper to see if you now recognize the problem.
Thank you for your service to the field and to the *Journal of Marketing*.