Guidelines for Reviewing for the CAR Division

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Reviewing for a conference is different from reviewing for a journal.

For a journal, you need to help the editor determine whether or not to invite a revision because it is extremely rare that you will recommend an accept ‘as is’. For a conference, there is no revise and resubmit; you are helping the program chair determine whether or not the submission should be included in the program. For a conference paper, you can, and should be more developmental, even instructive about what the author may or may not do in order to prepare it for a future journal paper submission.

Do not be overly negative – if all the submissions are rejected, there will be no conference, and no papers in journals. Editors and Program Chairs need to accept papers. While we tend to focus on the rejection and identifying faults in the manuscripts, we should highlight their worthiness and contribution – and, yes, how they can be made better.

Also, keep in mind there is a major difference between the role of a reviewer and that of Editor or Program Chair: reviewers recommend while Editors and Program Chairs decide. Do not write in your review that the paper should or shouldn’t be accepted.

Here are my three main guidelines for approaching a review:

* Be critical – but not abusive. Gone are the days that academics vent their frustration on papers under the cover of anonymity. Be kind – you could be on the receiving end. Remember: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Leviticus 19:18, later quoted in Matthew 7:12; see also Luke 6:31).
* Be developmental, help the author(s) to improve the paper. Yet, be also realistic – for example, avoid offering the illusion that the manuscript is better than it is.
* Be on time. In particular for conferences, deadlines must be met for papers to be included in the program. If you agree to do a review for a conference, follow through and do the review on time. Don’t add to the Program Chair’s stress by making him/her chase other colleagues to complete the review you promised to do.

Providing Feedback

It is important to identify issues – no one is perfect, no manuscript is perfect. The critical role is to distinguish between a manuscript that suffers from ‘fatal errors’, those that cannot be rectified by a revision, and other faults. If those can be addressed, then what remains is to calibrate the revision recommendation to the level of quality and rigor expected by the journal or conference.

*Respect the authors* – everyone deserves respect for their efforts and ideas – even if you do not like or agree with these ideas.

*Balance the tone* – don’t vent your frustrations on innocent authors. For example, it is OK to tell an author the paper contains cites without corresponding reference references but don’t belittle them for this common error. Likewise, serious ethical violations must be detailed in the review and brought to the attention of the Editor or Program Chair. Don’t shy away from bringing such ethical violations to the attention of authors and Editors/Program Chairs.

*Suggest or tell?* In principle, as a reviewer you recommend, offer ideas, which should be constructive for improving the manuscript. Yet, if there is a clear mistake, or issues like breach of ethical guidelines, you can be directive. For example, tell them to delete identifying details, such as when an author refers to “my own research has found…” and then list their own published articles.

Writing the Review

Often people don’t know how to conduct a quality review because they are unsure of where to start. One method is to begin by looking at the different parts of the manuscript.

Title – Is it informative? Does it create interest? Is it intriguing – in particular for symposia, where program chairs hope to draw a big crowd?

Abstract – Is it a concise telling of the essence of the manuscript, its contribution and something about the type and level of methodology?

Introduction – Does it tell the reader about state of art in the subject matter, indicate gap or problematize an issue? Does it tell the reader what the paper’s aim and contribution(s) are?

Literature review/theoretical underpinning—Does the paper cover the extant literature in a way that leads to worthy set of hypotheses/research questions or conceptual contribution? Is the theory sound and relevant? Will theory be expanded, challenged, or enhanced by the paper?

Method (for empirical work)—Does the paper describe the method in a clear manner? Is the sample relevant and appropriate? Does the method fit the nature of the problem or questions the manuscript tackles?

Analysis – Is it rigorous and robust?

Findings – Are the results well presented and refer to the hypotheses or research questions?

Discussion – Were the stated aims and contributions claimed in the introduction actually achieved?

References – Are the references comprehensive, updated, and relevant?

Figures and tables – Are they clear? Should there be more or less of these?

Length – Is it the right length – word-count or page-wise? While it is best is to be concise, sometimes you may need to elaborate more (e.g. qualitative work) or include supplemental materials when submitting to a journal.

Specific Criteria for Symposium Reviews

Unlike papers that are sort of a stage before submission to publication, a symposium is a special event designed to air new ideas, to have a ‘conversation’ with the community, to discuss innovative issues, and listen to what thought-leaders in the field have to say.

As a result, the criteria is different. Reviewers are tasked less with helping to shape a particular paper but instead evaluating how likely the submission will be enacted as an exciting and engaging symposium that will attract a crowd. As the conference attendees will only see the title, the abstract, and the names of the speakers, it is important that these are catchy, intriguing, pushing knowledge or new ideas further. And, yes, having reputable scholars (in other word, ‘big names’) is another highly important factor.

To make things more complicated, symposia are typically submitted to several divisions – so it is also about the ability to attract members of other divisions too. A smaller division like CAR would most likely not be able to offer a symposium just for our members – so think – is this symposium appealing to the other divisions it is submitted to?

Final Note

Why review?

It is important to review – for learning, for self-development, and for contributing to the process of knowledge creation. Reviewing is a scholarly activity. It is an essential and necessary professional activity *and* an excellent developmental activity. Reviewing determines the shape of future knowledge; and further, it can significantly impact our careers. Certainly it influences careers of others!

Another point to consider is that without reviewing, the system will collapse.

From a selfish perspective, recall that:

*Reviewing makes us better scholars as researchers and writers*. It also *makes us better colleagues and enhances our human and social capital (e.g. networking).*

*In the long run it would help us becoming better program chairs and journal editors*

Reviewing for conference papers is a great opportunity for the authors to further develop their paper towards submission. Your review would be instrumental in the process, thus you will be making a benevolent contribution to future knowledge. It is a great responsibility, and a rewarding one too.

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Yehuda is a prolific reviewer, with rich editorial experience, formerly serving as the Editor of *Group & Organization Management* and *Career Development International* and Associate Editor of *Human Resource Management* (USA). He is the founding Dean of the BAM’s Peer Review College. He is a member of 14 Editorial Review Boards, including HRM, HRMJ, JVB, and CDI, and ad-hoc reviewer for numerous journals including AMJ, AMR, and JOM. Yehuda has won numerous Best Reviewers Awards, including awards from AMLE, BJM, and many AOM divisions. He has earned a CAR’s Best Reviewer Award a total of 12 times, with consecutive wins in the last nine years. He is the co-editor of the books *Winning Reviews: A Guide for Evaluating Scholarly Writing (*Baruch, Sullivan, & Schepmyer, 2006) and *Opening the Black Box of Editorship (*Baruch, Konrad, Aguinis, & Starbuck, 2008).