
The Review Process – “Converting an R&R”

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2018 ATA / KPMG Tax Doctoral Consortium

New Orleans, LA

February 15th, 2018



Sylvain  
@DevilleSy



Roses are red,
Lilies are blue,
This poem was short,
But reviewer 3 required a number of
modifications, so we had to cite many
of his own poems and also change the
title of the poem, rephrase the last few
rhymes, and replace violets by lilies

[#AcademicValentines](#)

2018-02-14, 3:22 AM

“Converting an R&R”

- Why am I here?
 - I don't know. 😊 In my career, I have been rejected 28 times.
 - But I also received 17 R&Rs. Of those, I published 14 papers.
 - 82% conversion rate.
 - Hard to interpret – journals/editors/reviewers have different bars, and probably shouldn't be 100%. Results do not always conform to priors.

- My favorite part of the process is responding to an R&R.
 - In practice, loved writing accounting policy memos. Like a lawyer with a legal brief. Objective, rational logic.
 - If it is a good process, convinces you that what think is happening really is.

Big Picture...when you get an R&R...

- **HOP** on it: **H**umility. **O**bjectivity. **P**rofessionalism.TM
- Humility:
 - ❑ Assume that your editors and reviewers are experts.
- Objectivity:
 - ❑ It is the editor/reviewer's job to be skeptical. And it is your job as well.
- Professionalism:
 - ❑ Do as much work as you possibly can.
 - ❑ It is ok to disagree with the reviewer(s) if you can back it up.
 - ❑ Tone. Tone. Tone.
- Practical Advice.



Humility

- It is easy to think “oh this reviewer/editor has no idea what I’m doing.”
 - ❑ They do. They are experts. At a minimum, they are smart.
 - ❑ **If they don’t understand, it is your fault.** Your writing/tests are not clear.
 - ❑ If they don’t understand, what hope does your paper have of making an impact?

 - Your reviewer and editor are doing you a favor. **This is a mindset.**
 - ❑ Publishing your paper doesn’t directly advance their career. But they are spending time thinking about what you are doing.
 - ❑ Think deeply about every single one of their comments. Do not blow anything off!
 - ❑ There is at least a nugget of wisdom in every comment. Be open minded.
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Humility - example

- Reviewer: “Pension accounting requires the firm to record a liability of the ABO, and then adjusts it for...”
- Initial reaction: “Not ABO, but PBO. This guy doesn’t know GAAP!”
- Dan Dhaliwal: say this “we may be misinterpreting the subtlety of your arguments, but our understanding is that... .

If we are misinterpreting, please let us know and we would be happy to address further any remaining concerns.”

Objectivity

- You are seeking the “truth.” You are not seeking a particular result.
Mary Barth, editor of TAR:
 - “Research is not advocacy or opinion. It is about evidence. Having no stake in the outcome enhances our credibility as researchers.”
 - “Academic research is known for rigor, care, and even-handedness.”
 - Your response **MUST** be candid and open-minded.
 - Openly acknowledge limitations and caveats.
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Objectivity

- You should discuss and table results (at minimum in the response documents to the reviewers) that do not work. Unless your result is mechanical, there will be results that do not work.
- The best editors and reviewers are skeptical, but also are providing you with ways to enhance your contribution.

Objectivity – example

“In the previous round your responses were 22 pages long. I, apparently like investors and analysts, suffer from inattention when given so much supplementary disclosures. ...

I prefer to read the revised paper as a stand-alone document and see if it raises any questions and concerns. I understand that you were concerned with appeasing a negative referee when you wrote up the document. However, *I actually like the paper and my intention with my comments is more to help improve the contribution. In the next round could you please try to be precise in your responses to me.*”

Professionalism

- Do as much work as you possibly can.
 - Try to add more to the paper than the reviewer/editor asked for.
 - If it isn't important enough to you to do the work, why should the reviewers and editors spend their valuable time as well?

 - If you disagree with a reviewer, do it with evidence-based reasoning.
 - There is an editor (i.e., a judge), so they cannot be completely unreasonable.
 - Nevertheless, you should still do whatever they ask in a supplementary table

 - TONE, TONE, TONE!!!!!!!
 - Remove all traces of frustration. No insults!
 - FYI, the reviewer can read your editor letter. You can't slam them there either.
 - No typos. NONE.
-

Professionalism - example

- My dissertation.
 - Reviewer questions implicit assumptions underlying my hypotheses.
 - I could only test this by hand-collecting data on my observations.
 - Four months of messy hand collection.
 - Statistically show that my assumptions hold
 - Now have ability to do cross-sectional tests based on assumption strength
 - Created a model to show that a data limitation did not add noise to my empirical argument
 - All of that – why?
 - Because it was my last ‘best chance’ for conversion
 - And...ultimately, I’m more convinced than ever that my finding is real. Led to five or six additional papers on the topic.

Practical advice

- Step 1 – celebrate!
 - Step 2 – carefully review the editor and reviewer reports
 - Classify each comment as “writing” or “data”
 - Data person – make a specific list of action items
 - Writing person – read relevant papers and think about how to respond
 - Step 3 – create response documents
 - Copy and paste the reviewer reports
 - Fine-tune the response documents, including data to include in the paper and data to include as supplemental tables to the response documents.
 - Step 4 – create new tables and re-write the paper
 - Step 5 – edit for tone!
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Conclusion

- Rejections – 28
- Publications – 14

- If I can do it, so can you!

The Review Process – Writing a Review & Converting an R&R

~Reviewer Perspective~

- ▶ by Linda Krull, University of Oregon



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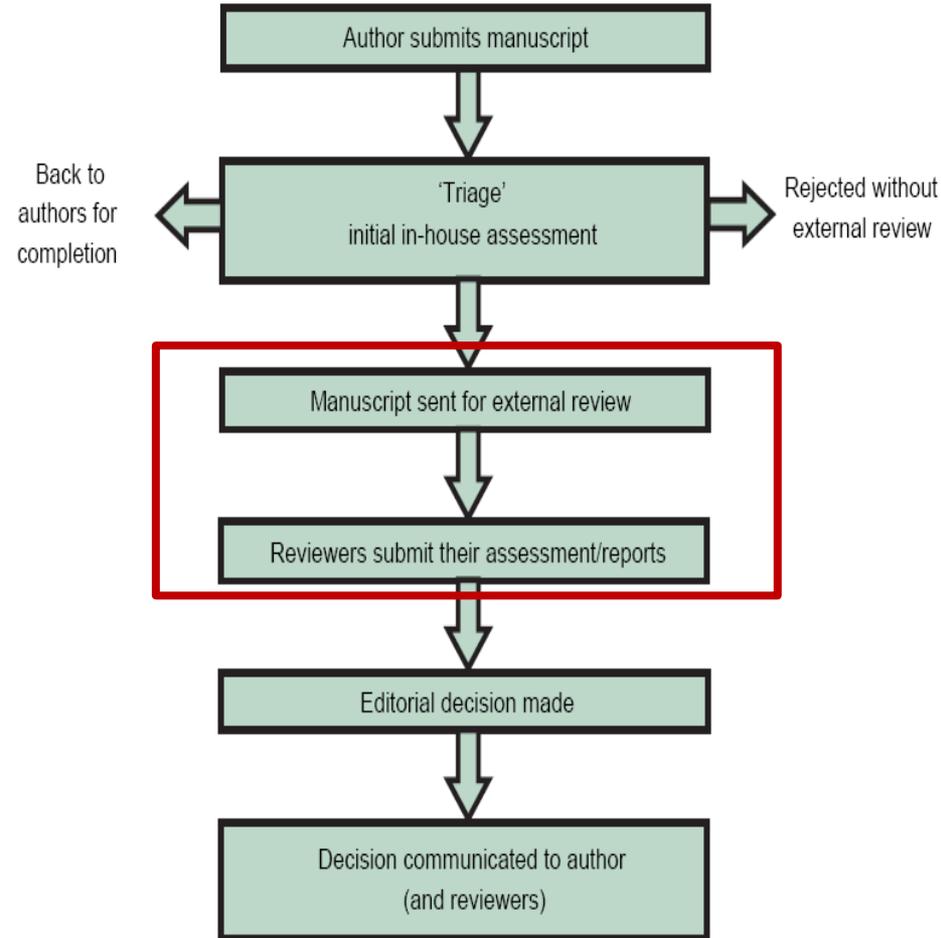
Sources/Resources

- ▶ My own experience as a referee and an author
- ▶ Preparing a Referee Report: Guidelines and Perspectives, by Jonathan Berk, Campbell Harvey, and David Hirshleifer
- ▶ Guidelines on Writing Referee Reports, by William Thomson
- ▶ Omer et al. (2004) and Kachelmeier (2004) – January 2004 JATA
- ▶ Instructions to Reviewers on Journal websites



Your Job as a Referee

- ▶ Remember where you are in the process
- ▶ Your job is to make a recommendation to the editor by assessing:
 - ▶ The paper's contribution
 - ▶ Its appropriateness for the journal
 - ▶ The appropriateness and rigor of the research design
 - ▶ The appropriateness of the conclusions drawn
 - ▶ And the quality of writing



First Things First

- ▶ Your first job is to accept or decline the review
 - ▶ You will accept most requests
 - ▶ But you should decline if you have a conflict of interest
 - ▶ Conflicts: an author is a current or former co-author, current or former colleague, current or former advisor or student, or personal friend
 - ▶ You have a competing paper or the paper criticizes your work
 - ▶ Also let the editor know if
 - ▶ You have reviewed the paper before
 - ▶ You can not finish the review within the time requested
 - ▶ Don't actively try to find out the identity of the authors.
- ▶ Respond promptly
- ▶ If decline: offer to review another paper



Read, Read, Read!

- ▶ The next thing you should do is read the paper.
- ▶ Also read background papers.



PEER REVIEW
(BBC RADIO4 "SCIENCE BETRAYED")



Write

- ▶ Start with a summary of the paper in your own words
- ▶ Then list and explain your major comments: Things that are necessary in order to make the paper publishable.
 - ▶ Try to stick to 3 to 5 major comments here.
 - ▶ One of these points (probably the first) should comment on the incremental contribution of the paper. This could also be stated as part of the summary.
- ▶ Then list and describe minor comments: Things that will help improve the paper but aren't necessary to make the paper published.



Content of the Review

- ▶ Discuss contribution:
 - ▶ What do we learn from this paper that we did not already know from existing literature? Will it change the way we do something or change the way we think about something?
 - ▶ Is it important enough to warrant publication in the journal you are refereeing for?
- ▶ Is the discussion of existing research accurate?
- ▶ Do the hypotheses follow from the hypothesis development?
 - ▶ Do the authors make all of the links?
 - ▶ Do they make sense?
 - ▶ Is it obvious?



Content of Review, Cont'd

- ▶ Have the authors designed tests that rigorously test the hypotheses?
 - ▶ Have they measured the relevant constructs in a believable way?
 - ▶ Are there plausible alternative explanations that must be ruled out?
 - ▶ Do the empirical tests test the hypotheses?
- ▶ Are the conclusions drawn appropriate? Interesting?
 - ▶ Economically significant?
 - ▶ Reasonable?
- ▶ Make suggestions for improvement when possible.



Make a Recommendation

- ▶ Based on your review of the paper, make a recommendation to accept, revise, or reject
- ▶ In your correspondence to the editor it helps to:
 - ▶ Give a level of your conviction:
 - ▶ I strongly recommend rejection
 - ▶ I was on the fence but ultimately decided to recommend (reject, revise) because...
 - ▶ Briefly describe the main reasons for your recommendation



Round Two and Beyond

- ▶ If you recommend a revision, then you will most likely be asked to review the paper again (and sometimes when you reject)
- ▶ Follow the same process: read, write, recommend in the context of the editor's letter
- ▶ Added step: Did the authors adequately (thoroughly) address your comments in the manuscript



Important Do's

- ▶ Read, read, read!
- ▶ Make sure your main comments will improve the paper and are necessary to make the paper publishable
- ▶ **Encourage and allow new ideas and perspectives**
- ▶ Make sure you raise all important issues in the first round
- ▶ **Be on time**
- ▶ **Be professional, be objective, and be civil**
- ▶ Be constructive by offering solutions
- ▶ Remember that all research is flawed
- ▶ **Sleep on it**



Important Don'ts

- ▶ Don't be wrong
- ▶ Don't get lost in the trees or fixated on one single tree
 - ▶ Keep in mind all the things the authors did right
- ▶ Don't micromanage – remember you are a referee not an author
- ▶ Don't try to impress the editor



I'M NOT RIGHT IN THE HEAD.COM

The Most Important Things

- ▶ Get some practice and feedback before you finish your degree.
- ▶ Remember the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

