#10 Tips for peer review

Contents

1) What is peer review?

There is general agreement that it is an important component of the scientific process that can help safeguard the quality, reputation and integrity of research (at the individual project level, and to some degree at the institutional, discipline, sector, national and global levels).

The basic concept of peer review is of one or more learned peers (without a conflict of interest see RIRS #09) providing independent and expert advice on specified matters (such as the merit, importance and rigour of the proposed work).

2) Peer review and the Australian Code (2018)

The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018) is the Australian standard for research integrity and includes the following Researcher Responsibility that relates to peer review:

> **R28 Participate in peer review** in a way that is fair, rigorous and timely and maintains the confidentiality of the content.

Responsibility 28 is directly relevant to researchers who serve as peer reviewers. The responsible conduct of researchers who provide and/or receive peer reviews (e.g. authors, grant applicants) should be based upon the eight principles and other responsibilities found in the Australian Code (2018). The appropriate conduct for researchers who receive peer review is discussed in 4 below (on p2). The expectations in regards to serving as a peer reviewer are discussed at 7) below (on p2-3)

At the time of writing, no announcement has been made whether there will be a good practice guide about peer review released as a companion to the 2018 Code.

The 2007 version of the Australian Code specified responsibilities of institutions, peer reviewers and researchers regarding the conduct of, and engagement with, peer review, and many of these principles are outlined in this resource guide.

3) Peer review and international standards

Many of the international jurisdictions with comparable documents to the Australian Code (2018) have similar provisions with regard to peer review, and some include directives. Documents like the Australian Code are complemented by guidance material produced by the

S u g g e s t e d r e a d i n g
1 o f 2

A Beginner's Guide to the Peer Review System – GradHacker (Carolyn Trietsch | January 2019)

Artificial intelligence in peer review: How can evolutionary computation support journal editors? (Papers: Maciej J. Mrowinski, et al | September 2017)

Career advice: how to peer review a paper – THE (Sophie Inge | February 2018)

COPE Discussion document: Who "owns" peer reviews?

The Future of Peer Review – Scholarly Kitchen (Alice Meadows | May 2017)

Journals Peer Review: Past, Present, Future – Scholarly Kitchen (Alice Meadows | September 2017)

Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (e.g. COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers).

4) Interactions with peer review

In their interaction with peer reviewers and systems, Griffith University researchers must:

(i)   be courteous and respectful;

(ii)   respond promptly and honestly;

(iii)   act with integrity and responsibly;

(iv)   disclose conflicts of interest;

(v)   adhere to the Griffith University Responsible Conduct of Research policy;

(vi)   adhere to relevant professional standards;

(vii)   comply with relevant laws and regulations; and

(viii) not seek to unduly influence/manipulate the peer review process.

5) Should I volunteer to be a peer reviewer?

Given the importance of peer review to the scholarly process, Griffith University researchers are encouraged to become peer reviewers. It is however essential to only do so in fields, methodologies, topics, populations and contexts where you have the necessary expertise and where you disclose any conflicts of interest you may have (regardless of whether its perceived, potential or actual). See RIRS#09 for more about conflicts of interest in research.

6) Should I agree to be a peer reviewer?

There are a variety of reasons a researcher, even a very early career researcher, might be invited to be a peer reviewer. An unexpected invitation might be legitimate, but it might come from a questionable publisher or other disreputable source. Before accepting such an offer, a researcher should assess the source, using the kind of tips discussed in RIRS #4 in relation to selecting a publisher. Extra care is warranted when an invitation contains grammatical or other errors, the publication title appears to have only a loose relationship to the manuscript, and where your own work is of limited relevance to the manuscript.

7) Serving as a peer reviewer

The same expectations apply for peer reviewers and for researchers whose work is subject to peer review (see 4 above)

Griffith University staff or HDR candidates who serve as peer reviewers must adhere to Researcher Responsibility 28 (see 2 above on p1), the high-level principles and Researcher Responsibilities introduced by the Australian Code (2018) and act in accordance with the list of items discussed at 4 (p2 above).

Peer reviewers must also advise the person coordinating the peer review if they have a conflict of interest (potential, perceived or actual.

8) Consequences of missteps

During the last decade the academic literature and mass media have reported cases of peer reviewers having undisclosed and unmanaged conflicts of interest[1], researchers having inappropriate influence on the peer review of their work[1], researchers failing to respond to reviewers in a timely fashion, and reviewers misappraising the work of the reviewed.[1]

The most serious of these cases result in forced retractions and findings of research misconduct, which can have serious harm to reputation and scholarly impact that can last more than ten years. Where serious missteps relate to competitive research funding it has resulted in bans[1] from future funding and even fraud proceedings. Commentary suggests the damage on a researcher's reputation and scholarly impact is greater[1] for those early on in their career.

9) Topical discussions

9.1 OPEN PEER REVIEW

There is considerable debate about the benefits/costs and the detail of open peer review, particularly the disclosure of author and referee identities to one another. Open peer review may encourage reviewers to provide more constructive feedback to authors[1], enhance the review[1], and improve the detection of reviewer's conflicts of interest[1]. Some publishers have previously, or are currently, trialling open peer review[1] as part of a commitment to open science[1].

9.2 QUESTIONABLE PUBLISHERS AND PEER REVIEW

In the last few years many commentators have shifted from talking about predatory publishers who trick inexperienced or unwary researchers with fake claims that they have peer review processes, to talk about questionable publishers who do trick some researchers, but are also used knowingly by others as a quick and easy route to publication.

10) External resources

The first source of advice on the peer review process (for reviewers and review recipients) is the body for which the review is being conducted (e.g. journal or funding body). As noted at 3 above (p1) COPE is also a source of

---

[1] We have included one article on each of the topics discussed. It is not the only item or necessarily the definitive discussion, but instead is one example

helpful and practical guidance resources.

11) Scope of this resource sheet

These guidelines apply to all Griffith University research, regardless of whether the work requires ethical or biosafety clearance, the expertise of the parties, the methodology/design used, and/or the funding for the work (if any).

All Griffith University researchers[2] who provide, receive, coordinate or otherwise participate in peer review must be aware of the guidance provided by this Resource Sheet and apply it to their practice.

12) Sources of advice

Researchers are urged to consult the other resource sheets in this series. Researchers with further questions should consult a RIA (whether in their Group or elsewhere in the University) or the Office for Research.

---

[2] This refer to Academic Staff, HDR candidates and students undertaking research as a component of their academic program, General staff and anyone conducting research under the auspices of Griffith University (as defined by Griffith University's Responsible Conduct of Research policy).