Science Societies

Publications update

Why should I peer review?

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This year, we celebrate Peer Review Week 2020 on 21–25 September, and the theme is as relevant as ever: “Trust in Peer Review.” In an age where dubious research can

appear on social media before it is even submitted for publication, peer review remains crucial.

Peer review is a system built on reciprocity. If you submit a paper, you review a paper.

“It should be viewed as a critical part of the scientific endeavor in which all scientists should be involved,” says Warren Dick, former ASA editor-in-chief. “If a paper has multiple authors, each author should commit to reviewing at least one other manuscript.”

But recent data show some worrying trends. Researchers are receiving more invitations to review than ever before, and editors in turn are struggling to find willing peer reviewers.

A 2018 global peer-review survey (**https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-018-06602-y**) found that reviewer acceptance and completion rates are on the decline. It also found that 10% of reviewers are responsible for 50% of peer reviews. This is troubling on two fronts: a small group is burdened by the work of reviewing papers, and many voices are left out.

Reasons to Make Time to Review

How can we help bring in those missing voices? This can be tough—many researchers feel they have little free time to devote to reviews. I asked several of our members why it is important to make time for peer review, and I received some consistent answers:

1. **It makes you a better writer.** “By reading other people’s methods, I have a better idea of what types of things can be confusing to readers, even if they are already experts in a particular study area,” says Tanya Cheeke, assistant professor, Washington State University.

2. **It improves your research.** “Peer reviewing helped me stay abreast of new science, changes in statistical methods, and learn alternative views and approaches,” says Jane Johnson, recipient of the 2018 *Agronomy Journal* Editors Citation for Excellence in Review.
3. **It can help advance your career.** “As an early career member, your promotion-and-tenure (P&T) committee will be looking for evidence of recognition. You can build your name as a reviewer, which can then lead to an invitation to serve on editorial boards, which many on P&T committees will consider evidence of your expertise as well as service to the science societies,” says Douglas Smith, editor, *Journal of Environmental Quality.*
4. **You can better understand the process.** “It’s helpful to see how manuscripts are shaped into their final form behind the scenes. The more papers I review, I get a better sense of what works and what doesn't in trying to convey research results to the wider community,” says Endang Septiningsih, associate editor, *Crop Science*.
5. **It is your duty.** “Peer review is a service activity. When I publish, there are probably at least three to five people who review my manuscript. Providing a peer review is a way to return the service offered by others,” says Laura Lindsey, technical editor, *Crop*, *Forage & Turfgrass Management.* “Any organization with a publication mandate should also include a mandate to conduct two peer reviews per publication submitted,” says Paul Scott, incoming editor, *Crop Science*.

Greater Reviewer Recognition

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA publications are increasing their recognition of reviewers. In 2020, 30 exceptional reviewers from across all of our journals were awarded with the Editor's Citation for Excellence in Review. In partnership with Wiley, our publications now offer automated reviewer recognition via Publons (publons.com), a tool that allows researchers to track and verify their peer review/journal editing history. We intend to

continue expanding such programs to better acknowledge this vital service.

Interested in becoming a reviewer for one of our publications? Contact the journal managing editor or editor (**www.agronomy.org/publications/journals/author-resources**).

Reviewer Resources

- ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Peer Review webpage: **www.agronomy.org/publications/journals/peer-review**
- Wiley Reviewer Resources: **https://authorservices.wiley.com/Reviewers/index.html**
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