

Guidelines for Peer Review

The peer review process is one of the staples of the scientific community. Work is constantly evaluated by peers, from a project's infancy as ideas are being formulated through informal discussions to the presentation of the final work in the submission process before publication. In this course, each of your papers will go through peer review. There are several goals for going through this review process: to help the writer in clarifying his/her ideas and improve their writing skills and to help the reviewer develop critical thinking skills as well as expose them to writing styles and ideas different from their own. To effectively review a colleague's paper, here are some general guidelines to follow:

1. First, read the entire paper without making any comments to get a feel for the flow of ideas in the paper. Ask yourself these general questions:

What is the overall message of the paper?

Is the argument compelling and convincing?

Is the argument logical?

Are there sections that you would like to see developed more or that are redundant or repetitive?

· What do you like about the paper?

2. Read the paper again. This time read the paper more carefully with the intent of giving specific answers to the questions above. Minor corrections and suggestions can be made directly on the essay. More substantive comments should be jotted down on a separate sheet of paper. If the comments are relevant to specific parts of the paper, number them and put the corresponding numbers directly on the paper. To give comments that are constructive, be sure to:

Identify inconsistencies in logic or confusing aspects of the organization of the paper

Identify missing or superfluous information

Consider the ideas in the paper. Are they a new synthesis or a recapitulation of background material? Are there probing questions that you could ask that would stimulate the writer to better synthesize the material?

Consider the summary of the paper. Does it tie the paper together or leave the reader hanging?

Finally, pay attention to the syntax and grammar. Note words, phrases and sentences that seem poorly structured or ambiguous.

3. Throughout the review process there are important things to consider:

How would you like your review to be conducted? Give your colleague the same respect that you would expect and appreciate.

Show respect by taking the process seriously and doing a careful and thoughtful review.

Show respect through comments that are direct but not hurtful.

Don't be shy. You may feel that as a colleague and not an "expert" in writing or evolutionary biology that you won't have useful comments. You will!

Point out good points of the essay. Looking for good aspects of the paper can contribute to your writing skills as well!

4. The mechanics for peer review will be:

Bring two copies of your paper to class. On the front page of your paper identify specific areas that you would like your reviewer to focus on.

Pairs of reviewers will be randomly selected in class. Papers will be exchanged and reviews will either be conducted in or outside class.

Write reviews on separate sheets of paper. The reviews will be returned to the writer the next class period (Writing Assignment 1 will be the same class period). Final drafts, along with first drafts and reviews will be turned in the following class period.