# Top 10 Tips for Peer Reviewers

1. **Respond Promptly**
   - When you receive an invitation to review, the article's abstract will help you decide whether it's within your area of interest and expertise. Remember to respond promptly or else you might delay the process.

2. **Show Integrity**
   - Keep the contents of any manuscripts you're reviewing confidential. What's more, if you've submitted similar research of your own, or if you've reviewed the article for a different journal, let the editor know there's a conflict of interest. Agreeing to a review for personal gain is not ethical practice.

3. **Stay Within Scope**
   - When commenting, make sure your remarks stay within the scope of the paper and don't veer off subject. If you're unclear of the scope, editorial policy, presentation and submission requirements, speak to the editor or read the Author Guidelines.

4. **Be Constructive**
   - Your review should ultimately help the author improve the paper. Be sure to offer some constructive feedback, even if your recommendation ends up being to reject.

5. **Allocate Enough Time**
   - Carefully analyzing and commenting on a manuscript can take a good chunk of time. Make sure you have enough time available when taking on a review.

6. **Be Consistent**
   - Structure your comments by numbering them and dividing them into major and minor issues to help authors prioritize corrections. Make sure your comments to authors correspond to your assessment on the confidential review and review checklists/score sheets.

7. **Focus on the Research**
   - If you're reviewing a paper that's in English but wasn't written by a native speaker, it's good to be tolerant and point out elements that change the meaning, rather than commenting on the quality of their English.

8. **Look at the Conclusion**
   - Read the conclusion first. It will give you a good idea as to whether the research is an exciting development within its own field.

9. **Check the Facts**
   - Editors find it useful if you comment on the number of replicates, controls and statistical analyses. Strong statistics are crucial to determining whether the outcome is robust.

10. **Give Credit Where it’s Due**
    - If a paper you're reviewing is really good and an excellent addition to the existing literature, don’t be afraid to say so.

Find out more about how to review at [www.WileyPeerReview.com](http://www.WileyPeerReview.com)
So if you're a referee, how exactly should you ask about what doesn't think carefully: if you really have something important to say and you is enormously more valuable than a quick comment over email. So, and it might help editorial, particularly if it proves extremely difficult have the time to review, you might well be justified in giving an opinion, you also give an opinion on the paper that you are declining to review? would be suitable, scientifically, please let editorial know :-). Should some do. That typically depends on the reason for which you are a close professional connexion all the same: or, you have been asked associated with the publication record of the author(s), but you have know in the field in question? Is that “don’t-know-area” large? Then perhaps you shouldn’t review this manuscript, even if you think you know quite a lot.

3. Conflict of interest
Another clear reason for not agreeing to review is if you have a conflict of interest- either positive or negative. Perhaps you are not directly associated with the publication record of the author(s), but you have a close professional connexion all the same: or, you have been asked to read a pre-submission draft of the manuscript. Most editors check potential reviewers against the acknowledgements, but occasional oversights are only human, and sometimes a pre-submission reader is not acknowledged.

Finally to the “how”. This also seems very simple: just reply on time saying that you can’t do the review, and if you know someone who would be suitable, scientifically, please let editorial know :). Should you also give an opinion on the paper that you are declining to review? Some do. That typically depends on the reason for which you are declining to review. If you truly know the field very well, and do not have the time to review, you might well be justified in giving an opinion, and it might help editorial, particularly if it proves extremely difficult to get any reviewer to bite. However, a thorough, real, peer review is enormously more valuable than a quick comment over email. So, think carefully: if you really have something important to say and you think that it’s worth giving criticism with a constructive aim, you should probably agree instead, and try your best to make time for the review.

2. Knowing what you don’t know
The other, equally unproductive, outcome of peer review is a report that damns the work in question for unjustifiable reasons. In some cases, this can arise out of a desire to rubbish fellow scientists – which is, of course, not very noble if the peer review is anonymous; but more often it comes from being unaware of one’s own lack of knowledge in a particular area. Being aware of what we don’t know – i.e. so-called metacognition – is not so straightforward, and seems to be a significant factor in sub-optimal peer review, as observed by Sui Huang in a BioEssays Editorial. So, think carefully: do you know what you don’t know in the field in question? Is that “don’t-know-area” large? Then perhaps you shouldn’t review this manuscript, even if you think you know quite a lot.

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Posing the question
So if you’re a referee, how exactly should you ask about what doesn’t work? As soon as you’ve read the paper there will no doubt be ideas popping into your head, such as “I wonder what would have happened if they tried X or Y?”. The key here is not to be afraid to ask obvious questions or to assume that the authors did try X or Y and it didn’t work so they simply didn’t include it. If the authors have already thought about or even tested your suggestion, then it won’t be too much of a problem to answer your question. If they haven’t already thought about it, then your question will be helpful in opening up other ideas for them. Your simple question at the refereeing stage might also save someone else trying something that the authors of the current study already know doesn’t work, but they just haven’t addressed this in their paper.

Prioritizing the issues
When asking about the limitations of a study, the skill is to keep your requirements as a reviewer in perspective. You may be able to think of several things that the authors could try, but on the flip side you can’t be too demanding or expect authors to stray too far from the main scope of their study. Prioritize what you think are the most important issues; for example, if you were the editor, could you accept the paper without the authors trying X and Y? If not, why not? Make sure to clearly state this in your referee report. If you have other ideas but you wouldn’t necessarily reject the paper if they weren’t included, you can put these forward as “nice to haves”. These suggestions may be informative for the authors in thinking about future work even if they aren’t studied in depth in the current paper.

Limitations vs. inconsistencies
Another important thing to bear in mind is that limitations are very different from inconsistencies. Where data and conclusions don’t match or one set of results seems to contradict another, as a referee you have a right to closely examine and pose questions until the inconsistency is resolved. In cases where inconsistencies are very severe, you are justified in asking for more work to be done, but the natural limits of a technique shouldn’t detract too much from the results and the advances that have been made.

As an editor, there’s nothing I like to see more in a referee report than a reviewer who pushes to know just what the boundaries of a piece of work are. Therefore, I encourage everyone who reviews papers to ask about limitations and request more data where it’s necessary, but at the same time keep expectations in perspective and remember to focus on what has been achieved in a paper, as well as what hasn’t. Not every method works for every situation, so it’s important to know where the borders lie. That’s why a “negative result” is indeed still very much a result.