

Tips for JGIM Reviewers

Thank you for agreeing to be a reviewer for JGIM. For both new and experienced reviewers, we have a few tips for writing helpful reviews from our perspective as both editors and authors. The overriding theme is to be clear so that there is no chance for misunderstanding, or the need for guessing or interpretation on the author or editor's parts. Of course, either author or editor may disagree with you, but making your points clearly will make reduce the chances of being misunderstood.

Domains that are commonly commented on include:

1) the importance/novelty of the article. Many articles may serve to confirm (or refute) previous findings rather than being completely original. If not novel, the article needs to explain how it relates to previous research and how it contributes to current knowledge; 2) the appropriateness of the methods used; 3) the accuracy of the interpretation of the data and whether the conclusions appropriately flow from the data; 4) the generalizability and implications of the article and 5) clarity of the writing.

1) Be specific and give examples. General statements such as not a significant contribution, clinically unimportant, and poorly analyzed are not very useful without more details. Authors get frustrated trying to guess what parts of their manuscript need to be improved, and editors essentially need to do a review from scratch to fill in the void.

2) Suggest corrective actions if possible.

3) Cover the major areas. Is the paper a useful original contribution? Is the paper appropriate for the JGIM audience? Are the methods and analysis valid and clear? Are the tables and figures clear and a good use of space? Are the writing and presentation clear and concise? Is the literature review current and does it place the study in appropriate context? Are the conclusions valid? Is the discussion insightful? Most reviews are 1-3 pages in length.

4) Prioritize your concerns. It helps both author and editor to know what are the major issues that must be addressed, and which ones are minor and not as critical to the survival of a paper.

5) Be respectful of the authors. Scholarship is difficult and criticism is not pleasant to receive. Be fair and critical but make your comments in the tone that you would want to receive.

6) Be frank when making confidential comments to the editor. This section allows you to make comments that the author does not see. These comments may include your opinions about whether the manuscript is ultimately worth publishing. Only put information in the confidential comments to the editor that will inform the decision that you don't want the author to see. A common mistake is to put information in the confidential section that would help improve the manuscript and should go into the portion of the review the authors will read. If you have no confidential comments, it is perfectly fine to leave this section blank.

7) Do not convey different messages to the author and editor. It is really confusing and sometimes even hurtful to an author to have a reviewer "be kind" or even positive in his or her

comments to the author and harsh (rejecting the manuscript) to the editor. It is not being kind. Good, accurate criticism should always be provided back to the author. Moreover, if you give generally positive feedback to the authors without raising significant concerns and then recommend to the editor that the paper be rejected, you will have created a communication problem that the editor will need to fix.

8) Especially for new reviewers, do not be shy. Act as the expert. You were chosen because you have some expertise, either as a reader of the literature or a contributor to this or related literature. Do not hold back.