

Reviewers

How long might it take to do a good review of a standard length paper?

- 15 minutes
- 30 minutes
- One hour
- Two hours
- Five hours
- Ten hours
- 24 hours
- 48 hours

Questions reviewers ask

- Add to existing knowledge?
- Methods appropriate and adequately explained?
- Results of interest?
- Discussion deals with weaknesses and limitation of study?
- Conclusions justified by findings?
- Accept for publication?

Questions reviewers ask - II

- Is the paper fundamentally flawed (wrong analysis, bias, confounders, underpowered)?
- What additions should make a better paper (major, minor criticisms)?
- Clarity of presentation?
- Tables and figures informative?
- References well chosen?

Importance of the research question

- Has the research addressed a question that had to be answered, or is it just “another brick in the wall”?
- The question matters more than the answer. If the question was important and the answer is valid, then it doesn't matter if the answer is negative or boring.
- Is this something that clinicians, policy makers, patients or the public need to know, remembering that there's more for them to know than they can possibly know?
- Is this a POEM (patient oriented evidence that matters)?

Originality of the research I

- Ideally, you will do a literature search.
- Almost all of a series of RCTs described as “the first” in major journals were not the first.
- Has this never been done before?
- If the question has been addressed before does this add importantly (for example, a much bigger or better designed study)?

Originality of the research II

- Remember that some things that are “well known” are not based on any evidence.
- If you think the research unoriginal please give us references to previous work. Don't just say “it's unoriginal.”
- If there are other important studies that the authors don't reference, please provide references

Validity of the research I

- Identify the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the study
- It isn't possible to capture all the ways that you might help us with a few questions or guidelines
- Is the design right for answering the research question?

Validity of the research II

- But don't let the best be the enemy of the good--is this the best that is possible?
- Were the data collected adequately? Was the sampling right?
- Are the methods described adequately?
- Are the analyses right? Should they be redone?
- Remember to try and be constructive

Validity of the research III

- If you are not strong on statistics say so; don't pretend that you are when you aren't
- Ideally you might add up some of the tables. You probably can't do this for them all, but if one or two are wrong it raises important questions
- Do you think that the conclusions are supported by the data?
- Do the authors go beyond the evidence in their conclusions? (This is very common.)

Ethical issues

- Do you have any ethical worries?
- Many studies make no mention of ethical issues, not even whether the research was considered by an ethics committee
- Think about the ethical aspects of the research, even if there is a mention of approval by an ethics committee

Presentation of the research I

- Don't bother telling us about spelling mistakes (except perhaps ones we might miss--eg, misspelt names)
- In the results is the balance of text, tables, and figures right [text tells the story, tables provide the data, figures illustrate the story]
- Do you have any suggestions on what might be in paper and what on the web?

Presentation of the research II

- Do the abstract and “what this study adds” box fit with the paper? (They often don’t.)
- Is the number of references about right?
- Should we commission any accompanying commentaries or editorials?

Extra points

- Do you have any anxieties about the possibility of research misconduct (if so, you might want to let us know privately)
- We will aim to give feedback
- Thank you for your hard work--it can be a thankless task, can't it?

acknowledgement

- Most of the materials in the slide courtesy BMJ training material