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# Writing a Peer Review for an Academic Journal: Information Structure and Politeness

## KAMJE

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# Outline

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**Information for reviewers**

2

**Information structure**

3

**Making evaluations:  
politeness strategies**

4

**Useful internet sites and  
references**



# General Principles in Writing Reviewer Comments

- ✓ Comments must be stated **objectively** and **without any prejudice**.
- ✓ Comments should be made with a **collaborative tone** and spirit.
- ✓ Comments must be supportive, **constructive**, thoughtful, and fair. They should identify both **strengths and weaknesses** and offer **concrete** suggestions for improvement.
- ✓ Critical comments must be presented professionally in a **respectful manner** and should not be overly harsh or disparaging.

# Worst Peer Review Comments

# REJECTED



## Shit My Reviewers Say

Collecting the finest real specimens of reviewer comments since 1456

@yourpapersucks

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“The rest of the Introduction is just as badly done as the first paragraph so I will not continue”

#MyFirstPaper #submission



# 25 Brutally Honest Peer Review Comments From Scientists



**“The findings are not novel and the solution induces despair.”**

*Thinkstock / BuzzFeed*

The rest of this review operates from the assumption that this paper is a sincere attempt at scientific evidence and argument.

This paper is desperate. Please reject it completely and then block the author's email ID so they can't use the online system in the future.





# Information for Reviewers



## **Becoming a Better Reviewer (and Writer and Researcher, too)**

### **Characteristics of Excellent Reviews**

#### Excellent reviews

Discloses any potential conflicts of interest.

Explains the reviewer's view of his or her intended role or expertise, e.g. topic expert, methodologist, practitioner.

Is respectful.

Offers specific constructive comments.

Is appropriate in length.

Helps editors with the decision on acceptance.

Comments on how the report fits in the state of current knowledge on the topic.

Comments on the importance, impact or action related to the study.

Comments on the appropriateness of the paper for this journal.

Offers rationales for reviewer recommendations.

Supports comments with references, when possible.

Makes helpful suggestions on the general organization, format and display of data.

Points out areas that are unclear in text, tables or figures.

<http://www.annfammed.org/site/misc/pdfsanddocs/ReviewExamples.pdf>



# Information for Reviewers

## DISAPPOINTING REVIEWS

### Review that copy edits instead of evaluating content

This is a well done study that sheds light on the gap between the subjectivity of practice and the objectivity of evidence based medicine that is becoming the standard of care.

I think this is the main point of the paper and should be more emphasized. It speaks to a need for on-going education in risk assessment using an objective and evidence based approach. Also the authors should consider using a formal testing of agreement such as Kappa or other test of agreement or correlation.

2nd sentence: I suggest "economics" instead of "economic issues" – less redundant.

1st sentence: Do you mean "translating" vs "incorporating"?

4th sentence: "Human" should be "human"

2nd sentence: I suggest taking out "discussing" (eg, "updated guidelines, barriers and facilitators...")

Last sentence – "four" is mis-spelled

1st paragraph - It would look cleaner to spell out "%" each time.

3rd sentence – should "increase in age gap" be "increase in predicted age gap"?

Last sentence – too long

Isn't "thus" traditionally followed by a comma?



# Information for Reviewers

## Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery & PRS Global Open Reviewer Hand Book

Thank you for all you do as a reviewer for *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* and *PRS Global Open*. We never forget that you are donating your time, enthusiasm, and great expertise to your peers so our Journal will continue to enhance our specialty worldwide.

### Contents

- I. General Tips: Agreeing & Submitting.....2
- II. Content of the Review .....3
- III. Earning CME Credit by reviewing for PRS .....4
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# Information for Reviewers

Once your review has been submitted the review is graded by the Editorial Staff and the Editor-in-Chief before the comments are sent to the authors.

- Reviews Graded > 70 are eligible for CME credit.
  - CME Eligible Review Example
    - In this review, the reviewer answered question #11, gave honest comments and concerns about the manuscript to the Editor, and gave meaningful, constructive comments to the Authors without being negative.
  - CME Non-Eligible Review Example 3
    - “Inflammatory, insulting comments.”
    - The review is *not constructive* if it berates the authors or questions their intelligence, motivations, or character. These comments could have been said much more constructively.



# Information for Reviewers

160202\_reviewer-comments.pdf

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Downloaded from <http://rsos.royalsocietypublishing.org/> on October 14, 2017

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## **Body reserves mediate trade-offs between life-history traits: new insights from small pelagic fish reproduction**

Pablo Brosset, Josep Lloret, Marta Muñoz, Christian Fauvel, Elisabeth Van Beveren,  
Virginie Marques, Jean-Marc Fromentin, Frédéric Ménard and Claire Saraux

### **Article citation details**

*R. Soc. open sci.* **3**: 160202.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsos.160202>

### **Review timeline**

Original submission:	21 March 2016
1 <sup>st</sup> revised submission:	27 July 2016
2 <sup>nd</sup> revised submission:	5 September 2016
Final acceptance:	5 September 2016

Note: Reports are unedited and appear as  
submitted by the referee. The review history  
appears in chronological order.

## Review History

RSOS-160202.R0 (Original submission)

Review form: Reviewer 1



# Information for Reviewers

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Past Issues



# Information for Reviewers

## HOW DOES ANNALS PROCESS MY REVIEW?

### How we edit your review

Before sharing them with authors, our editors often edit your reviews to focus on the key issues, to reduce redundancy and enhance clarity, to resolve conflicting statements between the reviews, and to promote a constructive tone. Please do not be offended if we edit or condense your comments – we are easing the burden and improving the understanding for the authors.

### How we evaluate your review

Our editors evaluate the quality of each review using the following criteria:

- The reviewer identified and commented upon major strengths and weaknesses of study design and methodology.
- The reviewer commented accurately and productively upon the quality of the author's interpretation of the data, including acknowledgment of its limitations.
- The reviewer commented upon major strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript as a written communication, independent of the design, methodology, results, and interpretation of the study.
- The reviewer provided the author with useful suggestions for improvement of the manuscript.
- The reviewer's comments to the author were constructive and professional.
- The review provided the editor the proper context and perspective to make a decision on acceptance (and/or revision) of the manuscript.



# Information structure





# What's the Focal Point?





# Stress in Speech

Word	Focus
This	This engine, not the other engine
engine	The engine, not another part of the machine
costs	Renting the engine might be much cheaper
about	I don't know the exact price
three	Not two, not four
million	Not thousand, not billion
won	Not dollars, not euros



# Focal Point in Writing?





# Information Structure

## Exercise:

- 1) Although Jaesung is a nice guy, he drinks a lot.
- 2) Although Jaesung drinks a lot, he's a nice guy.
- 3) Jaesung is a nice guy, but he drinks a lot.
- 4) Jaesung drinks a lot, but he is a nice guy.



# Basic IS Principles

## A. Main clause principle

Example: Even though it's raining, **I am going out for a walk.**

## B. End placement principle

Example: This study examined **the relationship between A and B.**

**Compare**: The relationship between A and B **was examined in this study.**





# Basic IS Principles

Example: Which sounds better?

**Question**: When are you going to take the exam?

Reply (1). I am going to take the exam next month.

Reply (2). Next month, I am going to take the exam.



# Basic IS Principles

## C. End weight principle

Which sounds better?

- 1) An increase in glucose intolerance in people over sixty-five as well as in people with a high body mass index is a common assumption in diabetes research.
- 2) A common assumption in diabetes research is that glucose intolerance increases in people over sixty-five as well as in people with a high body mass index.



# Basic IS Principles

## D. Information flow

a) Use pronouns

b) Use “*this + summary word*”

or use “*this + interpretive word*”

c) Communicate “*given information*”  
before “*new information.*”



# Use Pronouns

Example:

Within the study itself on Page 6, the authors state that the patient had the material placed in their ear canal and if the TM was not completely visualized, the physician irrigated the ear with up to 100cc of lukewarm normal saline. However, there was no mention in the study of how much irrigant was used per patient and (this/it) could make a significant difference in interpreting the results. For example, if the majority of patients cleared with the solvent and less than 20cc of irrigant while the other agent required 90 to 100cc of irrigant for a majority of the patients, one could conclude that there was a difference between agents used in the study.



# Use Pronouns

## Exercise:

The weather in January was much warmer than usual.

- a. *It* was the second warmest on record.
- b. *This* was the second warmest on record.
- c. *This* was even warmer than December.
- d. *It* was even warmer than December.





# Use Pronouns

## Exercise:

The weather in January was much warmer than usual.

e. *It* led to large savings in snow removal costs.

f. *This* led to large savings in snow removal costs.

g. *This* may be connected to global warming trends.

h. *It* may be connected to global warming trends.



# Use “this”+ Summary Word

Exercise:

1. Our aim was to assess the mechanisms involved in the beneficial effects of hydralazine on ventricular function in patients who have chronic aortic insufficiency. For this \_\_\_\_\_, we did a radionuclide study of ventricular function in 15 patients at rest and during supine exercise.



# Use “this”+ Summary Word

## Exercise:

2. From a long time, we have been hearing about Samsung's stretchable 9.1-inch OLED panel. This \_\_\_\_\_ has given birth to many rumors and leaks online. They have also made other smartphone manufacturers adopt this \_\_\_\_\_ in their to-be-launched phones.



## Use “this” + Summary Word

Exercise:

3. In recent years, the number of students applying to Ph.D. programs has increased steadily, while the number of places available has remained constant. This \_\_\_\_\_ has resulted in intense competition for admission.



## Use “this”+ Interpretive Word

Exercise:

4. According to a recent survey, 26% of all American adults now smoke, down from 38% 30 years ago. This \_\_\_\_\_ can be partly attributed to the mounting evidence linking smoking and fatal diseases, such as cancer.





# Given Before New

## Exercise: Which sounds better?

1. Younghee spends her Saturday nights at Sweet Bakery.  
Mr. Kim owns the bakery. He has been making pastries the French way since opening the bakery in 1995.
2. Younghee spends her Saturday nights at Sweet Bakery.  
The bakery is owned by Mr. Kim. He opened the shop in 1995 and has been making pastries the French way ever since.



# Given Before New

## ◆ Compare: Which sounds better?

3. Jingu Park received a master's degree in computer science from XXX and is now working at the Institute of Computer Technology. He is currently working on information systems as a researcher at the institute.
4. Jingu Park received a master's degree in computer science from XXX and is now working at the Institute of Computer Technology. As a researcher at the institute, he is currently working on information systems.



# IS Structure vs. Passive Voice

## ◆ Compare: IS structure vs. passive voice

1. We went to see a movie. **Steven Spielberg directed the movie.** He has made a lot of popular movies, such as ET, Jaws, Indiana Jones, and Schindler's List.
2. We went to see a movie. **The movie was directed by Steven Spielberg.** He has made a lot of popular movies, such as ET, Jaws, Indiana Jones, and Schindler's List.



# Strategic Use of IS

*Compare:*

1. **Although the risks are high**, Kaesong Industrial Complex has to be restarted immediately.
2. Kaesong Industrial Complex has to be restarted immediately **although the risks are very high**.



# Strategic Use of IS

*Compare:*

**(A) If a new report turns out to be true**, slim computers that bend and fold may sound futuristic, but they could be coming in just a few months.

**(B)** Slim computers that bend and fold may sound futuristic, but they could be coming in just a few months, **if a new report turns out to be true**.

Samsung is reportedly working on a new smartphone with a flexible, bendable screen to be released in January, according to [Sam Mobile](http://www.sam-mobile.com), a blog covering Samsung news that has a solid track record when it comes to reporting on unannounced products.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/samsung-flexible-foldable-phone-vidoes-2015-9>



# Reviewers' Comments



# Criticisms

a. *Softening Criticism: Use third person perspective*

Compare:

(x) (**You**) need to include ...

Explain/describe/add X.

(o) **This paper/The manuscript/The author**  
needs to include ...





# Criticisms

## *b. Softening Criticism: Use conditionals*

Examples:

- 1) The discussion **would have been** somewhat more relevant **if** the paper **had included** more recent literature to support his views.
- 2) The article **would be** more persuasive **if** the paper **related** the findings to ...



# Criticisms

- c. *Softening criticism: present good news and bad news in pairs*

## **Compare (evaluative adjectives):**

- 1) In this **impressive** but **flawed** study, Hyland...
- 2) In this **flawed** but **impressive** study, Hyland...



# Evaluative Adjectives

## ➤ Evaluative adjectives

**P+** = very positive    **P** = positive    **0** = neutral

**N** = negative    **N+** = very negative

( <b>0</b> ) unusual	( <b>N</b> ) limited
( <b>N</b> ) small	( <b>N</b> ) restricted
( <b>P</b> ) useful	( <b>P</b> ) significant
( <b>P</b> ) careful	( <b>0</b> ) competent
( <b>0</b> ) exploratory	( <b>P+</b> ) remarkable



# Evaluative Adjectives

## ➤ Evaluative adjectives

**P+** = very positive    **P** = positive    **O** = neutral

**N** = negative    **N+** = very negative

( <b>O</b> ) ambitious	( <b>O</b> ) modest
( <b>P</b> ) important	( <b>N+</b> ) flawed
( <b>P+</b> ) innovative	( <b>P</b> ) interesting/engaging
( <b>P+</b> ) impressive	( <b>P+</b> ) elegant
( <b>O</b> ) preliminary	( <b>N</b> ) unsatisfactory



# Criticisms

c. *Softening criticism:*

*present good news and bad news in pairs*

- 1) This study is an important contribution and warrants swift publication, **but** some points need attention.

*Compare:*

- 2) Some points need attention, **but** this study is an important contribution and warrants swift publication.



# Criticisms

- 3) The ideas are clear here, but **I think** adding the following specific functions and data **would** allow the information system to be more complete.
- 4) **Although I found** the discussion of the three theories of X **very interesting**, **I found it difficult** to relate them to the rest of the paper.



# Hedging (Vague Language)

## *d. Softening criticism: Use hedging*

Types	Examples
Introductory verbs	seem, tend, appear to be, believe, suggest, think, look like
Modal auxiliary verbs	would, may, might, could
Frequency Adverbs	often, sometimes, usually, seldom
Probability adverbs	unlikely, probable, possible
Modal nouns	assumption, possibility, probability
That clauses	It could be the case that It might be suggested that
To-clause + adjective	It may be possible to obtain It is important to develop



# Hedging

## Impression made:

Native English speakers think that non-native English speakers who do not use hedging are

*“assertive, intellectually confrontational or bordering on arrogant at times”*

Non-native English speakers think that native English speakers who use hedging are

*“too cautious, non-committal or elusive”*





# Another Use of Hedging

- ❑ A politeness interpretation

Ex) I think, I feel, I found

Example:

1) **I thought** the authors did an excellent job of describing their position on the issue.

*Compare:*

2) The authors did an excellent job of describing their position on the issue.



# Sample Decision Letter

Based on my own reading of your paper, I share the reviewer's concerns about two issues in particular. First, **I thought that it would be very helpful to** the reader **if there was** some representation of the adherence data as a function of stigma levels. For example, a figure depicting how electronically-monitored adherence varied as a function of racial discrimination **might provide** a more intuitive sense of the size of the observed effect.



# Sample Decision Letter

Continued:

Second, given the proportion of participants who report a heterosexual orientation, **it might be worthwhile to address** the relationship between perceived discrimination and self-identification of sexual orientation in your sample. I also have two minor editorial suggestions regarding the Tables: 1) in order to conserve journal space, **please integrate** the data from Table 1 into the text, and 2) in Table 2, **please reserve** the asterisks for significant effects, and **consider using** a different symbol (e.g., +) to highlight marginal difference.



# Other Language Points

☐ **Strength of claims**

☐ **Reporting verbs**



# Strength of Claim

Exercise:

Dr. Hyland found that cardiac arrhythmias  
\_\_\_\_\_ sudden death in epileptic people.

1. contributed to
2. caused
3. may have contributed to
4. were probably a major cause of
5. were one of the causes of
6. might have been a small factor in



# Reporting Verbs

High-Frequency Reporting Verbs						
Discipline	Verbs and Frequency					
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6
Biology	describe	find	report	show	suggest	observe
Physics	develop	report	study	find	expand	
Electrical engineering	propose	use	describe	show	publish	develop
Mechanical engineering	describe	show	report	discuss	give	develop
Epidemiology	find	describe	suggest	report	examine	show
Nursing	show	report	demonstrate	observe	find	suggest
Marketing	suggest	argue	find	demonstrate	propose	show
Applied linguistics	suggest	argue	show	explain	find	point out
Psychology	find	show	suggest	report	demonstrate	focus
Sociology	argue	suggest	describe	note	analyze	discuss
Education	find	suggest	note	report	demonstrate	provide

From *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (2012)

# Reporting Verbs

In academic writing, you can refer to ideas or research of others by using reporting verbs, e.g. *Brown (2011) states that....* Your choice of reporting verb can show the reader how you feel about the research you are quoting or paraphrasing, e.g. *Smith (2010) shows ...* vs. *Smith (2010) advises to....* vs. *Smith (2010) challenges ...*

## Neutral

- to show
- to demonstrate
- to investigate
- to explore
- to state
- to report
- to list

## Tentative

- to suggest
- to propose
- to advise
- to recommend
- to speculate
- to hypothesise
- to reason

## Strong (in favour)

- to assert
- to advocate
- to encourage
- to argue
- to affirm
- to believe
- to appraise

## Strong (against)

- to challenge
- to dispute
- to disagree
- to refute
- to negate
- to object
- to contradict



# Reporting Verbs

## Exercise

1. The results **indicate/establish** that there is a link between smoking and lung cancer.
2. The test results **confirm/suggest** diagnosis and guide treatment.





# Reporting Verbs

## Exercise

3. The latest series of studies **questions/challenges** the conclusions of previous research.
4. The results given in Figure 3 **validate/support** the second hypothesis.



# Reporting Verbs

## ➤ Reporting claims

Key claims	Supporting points
assert	note
claim	observe
state	point out



# Reporting Verbs

## ➤ Reporting claims

*Compare:*

1. Hyland (2016) **notes** that poor diet is a key cause of obesity. He **claims** that obesity is a major issue in developing countries.
2. Hyland (2016) **claims** that poor diet is a key cause of obesity. He **notes** that obesity is a major issue in developing countries.



# Reporting Verbs

## ➤ Reporting results

Results/findings	Conclusions
demonstrate	conclude
find	indicate
show	suggest



# Reporting Verbs

## Exercise:

In a study to investigate obesity, Hyland (2012) **suggested** that young people who ate fast food more than 3 times a week were heavier than young people who ate meals at home. This finding **shows** that obesity is associated with eating fast food.



# Common Mistakes

## 1) *Suggest/Recommend/Propose*

Examples:

(X) I suggest you to check this term throughout your manuscript.

(X) I suggest it to be simplified by taking out some....



# Common Mistakes

Correct grammatical patterns

1. suggest/recommend/propose + 'THAT' Clause
2. suggest/recommend/propose + [a person's]  
Gerund
3. suggest/recommend/propose + Noun



# Common Mistakes

## 2) Coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, so*)

Example:

(X) This study is a good addition to XXX, but it has not sufficiently cited other important research, and it is needed.





# Common Mistakes

## 3) *Transitional words (adverbs) vs. Conjunctive adverbs*

Examples:

- (X) a. The author **however** needs to check the figures one final time.
- (X) b. Overall, there is strong agreement that your paper deals with an interesting and important topic that is likely to be of considerable interest to our readership, **however**, the reviewers raise a number of important points and I believe that ...



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[Examples of decision letters]

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# Thank You!



Yunhee Whang

Managing Director

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