Description

Academic peer reviewers, also known as referees, are responsible for evaluating the work of researchers with a similar expertise as themselves. The peer review process serves as a form of self-regulation through the use of qualified persons within the relevant field. Journals use peer reviewers to evaluate papers for academic publication in order to maintain quality standards, improve the findings of a study, and to provide credibility. Ultimately, scholarly peer review is used to determine an academic paper's appropriateness for publication.

Journals typically request researchers to be reviewers of articles that they might be able to assess and constructively critique. The researchers can either accept or deny the request to be a reviewer. Academic researchers wear many hats, and one of these hats is accepting the role as a peer reviewer. Traditionally, peer reviewers remain anonymous and are thus, unrecognized. Once a paper is published the reviewers are often forgotten. In fact, a Wiley survey of 3000 reviewers reveals that reviewers, at the present time, feel that reviewing is unsatisfactorily recognized and should actually carry more weight during the evaluation process conducted by institutions.



Recognizing Peer Reviewers

Over the last few years, there has been an increasing amount of support contributing to the recognition of peer reviewers. This is highlighted by the fact that there is a global event called "Peer Review Week" that is held to celebrate the vital role that peer review plays in upholding scientific quality. The event involves individuals, institutions, and organizations that are dedicated to spreading the notion that a good peer review is critical to scholarly publications. The theme of "Peer Review Week" in 2016 was recognition for review. There is a sizable portion of the academic community that is asking for credit, and it seems that the publishers are looking to provide credit. On the other hand, it is arbitrary whether institutions want to credit people for peer review activities. For quite some time there has been a clear understanding of the importance of the peer review process, and it is only a recent occurrence that there is a firm commitment to recognizing peer reviewers.

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A number of publishers have already put together mechanisms by which they can recognize reviewers. Here, we highlight several of those.

- Elsevier boasts its Reviewer Recognition platform, which provides reviewers with a personal review profile page. Here, they can view their Elsevier journal review history and also create a public Reviewer Page that lists all their peer review activities, including those for other publishers. Reviewers are awarded statuses based on the number of reviews they complete for a specific journal. Elsevier journal editors can select reviewers based on the quality of their reviews, or they can nominate them for a "Certificate of Excellence," which complements the certificates based on the frequency of reviews. In addition, editors can publish their list of nominated reviewers on their journal homepage. Elsevier is using this as a stepping stone towards continuing to recognize reviewers in the future.
- Springer has instituted a reviewer reward program in which all reviewers who complete 5 or more high-quality reviews can request a certificate of recognition. The idea behind the certificates is that they can be used during assessment of academic achievement and/or community involvement. In addition, reviewers are offered a complimentary Springer book to acknowledge their commitment to the journal. In addition, for reviewers who complete 10 or more high-quality reviews, they can apply to join the Editorial Board by conveying their interest to the Editors-in-Chief.
- The Royal Society of Chemistry celebrated "Peer Review Week" in September 2016 by publishing a list of their top reviewers. This was a successful feat, and they announced that they would continue to recognize the contributions of their reviewers by announcing their Outstanding Reviewers every year. The reviewers were chosen based on the number, timeliness, and quality of their completed reviews over the last 12 months.

The Impact of Recognition

Globally, scientists volunteer their time to review others' manuscripts in order to help editors make publication decisions. Scientists are already busy, and taking the time to review papers is time-consuming and labor intensive. By serving as reviewers, scientists are basically taking time away from their own research and they do this despite the fact that reviews typically are not appreciated in important career-related decisions. With the establishment of these new platforms of recognition, reviewers now have a mechanism to display what they have actually contributed to the review process. Publishers are well aware of the fact that a good reviewer is not just contributing quantity, but more importantly, it is the quality of the review that matters. Assessing both of these aspects when reporting reviewer recognition is important for giving this quality a value.

Currently, it is unknown whether these new platforms will have any impact on career decisions such as hiring and tenure, but some of the reviewers participating in the platforms are hopeful that the metrics will help them advance their careers.

Category

1. Publishing Research
2. Understanding Reviews

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Author
daveishan

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