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Becoming a Reviewer for a Peer-Reviewed Journal

Many times I am asked how someone can become a reviewer for a peer-reviewed journal. The challenges of peer review are many and it takes time and effort to become an effective reviewer that will not only elevate the status of the journal to which you are reviewing but also mentor the author to become a better writer and ultimately publish a more profound paper. The need for thorough, highly capable peer reviewers is essential to the growth of any journal. In addition, with new science evolving in areas outside of the "normal" scope of dental hygiene practice, it is becoming increasingly important to have a broad range of expertise represented on the review board.

A professional who wishes to hone their skills as a peer reviewer or to begin the process of being considered for this role with a respected scientific publication needs to do several things. First, it is essential that a potential peer reviewer is familiar with research methodology and statistical methods. This does not mean that every reviewer needs to be a statistician, but having a basic course in statistics is beneficial. In addition, reviewers should have knowledge regarding how to conduct an original research project. There is no better teacher about research than doing it yourself. Taking the steps to actually plan, implement and publish the results of a project is the best way to learn about the scientific method. It also helps a reviewer know what an author has or has not done to produce a project and paper worth publishing.

Second, it is important that reviewers are active readers and authors themselves. Reading scientific publications should be commonplace for reviewers. They should stay up to date in the latest science in their field. Being active in professional organizations such as the American Dental Hygienists' Association, American Dental Education Association, American/International Association for Dental Research and other professional groups that host poster and oral presentations of the latest research is important in building skills and knowledge for peer review.

Once a professional is a reviewer or on a formal editorial review board, several things are important to note:

- 1. Respond to review requests in a timely manner.** When asked to review a paper, respond to editorial staff as soon as possible. This does not mean that you have to accept every request - just respond.
- 2. Meet the deadlines.** We ask reviewers to return the review in three weeks. This helps us respond in a timely manner to authors.
- 3. Write reviews as you would want to receive them.** Blunt, offensive comments have no place in a professional review process. It will leave the author with a negative impression of the journal and it also places the editor and editorial staff in an awkward position.
- 4. Provide feedback to authors, both positive and negative.** Feedback is essential, as is prioritizing comments. There may be many changes that you would like to see but make it clear which ones are the most important.
- 5. Start from a positive place.** A good reviewer should be a critical reader but not necessarily to only find fault. The reviewer should be knowledgeable enough in the subject area to look for important aspects, such as whether the author has included the most important references, structured the study appropriately, used the correct statistical methods or utilized the discussion section to "bring it all together," and make important suggestions for future studies.

Becoming a peer reviewer is important to the advancement of the profession and also to the career development of the professional. Being a reviewer for a professional journal can be very rewarding and stimulating. It is a vital part of mentoring the future leaders of the profession and it elevates personal growth as well.

Sincerely,

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Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Dental Hygiene