

## Podcast\_20231109: “Peer Review: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”

Given the breadths of the scientific fields, the editors commonly rely on the expertise of external reviewers to assess the scientific merit of the manuscripts. Consequently, the reviewers are an essential part of the scientific publications. With the plethora of biomedical journals, there is a mounting demand for reviewer’s time. Most are willing to offer their scientific expertise and assist the editors in deciding the dispositions of the manuscripts.

Most reviewers are superb. They offer their opinions impartially and help the authors and the editors to improve the scientific content of the manuscripts. They discuss the strengths and the weaknesses of the study and offer their impression about the robustness of the findings and the validity of the conclusions. They may also suggest a key experiment that is necessary to support the conclusion of the study. However, they do not mandate experiments or revisions. They make the suggestions and leave it to the discretion of the editors to relay the necessary revisions to the authors. The *JCA* editors deeply appreciate the scientific contributions of our great reviewers.

Occasionally, a reviewer provides a few cursory comments and recommends acceptance of the manuscript with minimal or no revisions. This often happens when a reviewer is a friend of the authors and is recommended by the authors. Such a reviewer helps neither the authors, the editors, nor the scientific community by failing to point out the glaring shortcomings and even errors. The editors of the *JCA* discredit the recommendations of such superficial reviewers.

Rarely, a reviewer is excessively harsh if not hostile to the authors. Such an ardent reviewer is typically scientifically immature and expects the authors to comply with his/her demands, no matter how irrelevant the demand might be. The comment of Hidde Ploegh to “End the wasteful tyranny of reviewer experiments” perfectly applies to this category of reviewers. It is the job of the editors to identify such recalcitrant reviewers and remove them from the review process.

The peer review process is a secretive black box. Consequently, most authors in order not to roughen the reviewer’s feathers, oblige and perform the unnecessary “reviewer experiments”. The editors of the *JCA* suggest that the authors directly communicate with the editors if they believe the reviewer’s request is not justified, scientifically invalid, or based on misinterpretation of the data. The *JCA* editors evaluate the concern(s) and judge the scientific merit of the data independently.

To expose the good, the bad, and the ugly reviews, the editors of the *JCA* post all reviewers’ comments and the authors’ point-by-point responses for each manuscript on the Journal’s website. The readers can independently judge the merit of the critiques and the properness of the authors’ responses. Transparency is essential and is encouraged in all aspects of scientific publishing.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Ali J. Marian  
Editor-in-Chief of the *JCA*