

Psych. 311W, Fall 2013

## Writing a Peer Review

Your job is to read your classmate's paper (title page, intro, method, & references) as a reviewer/editor. You are to make comments on the actual manuscript using the reviewing toolbar in Microsoft Word AND write a 2-3 page (double-spaced, typed) review. **Please submit via Blackboard the following: (1) the review, and (2) the paper you reviewed, with comments made using the reviewing toolbar (and changes using "track changes").** Consider the following as you read:

### Title page

- Does the title accurately describe the study? Is it concise? (recommended length: 12 words or fewer)
- Has the author followed APA style guidelines?

### Introduction

- Does the author open with a strong paragraph? (i.e., something other than, "Research has shown...") Does the paper immediately grab your attention? Does the author state the goal(s) of the paper?
- Is the literature presented important and relevant to the author's hypothesis? Has the author clearly read at least 6-8 empirical articles and presented only information directly related to the proposed study?
- Is the introduction well-organized? Does the research presented flow in a logical order? Are there strong transitions between paragraphs? If not, provide some suggestions for improvement.
- Has the author avoided simply telling a story of who did what when, and let the ideas determine the order of presentation?
- Has the author paraphrased the ideas of other researchers rather than quoting directly?
- Would the use of subheadings improve the organization of the intro? Are there too many or too few subheadings? (Should not have just one paragraph beneath a subheading.) Perhaps provide some suggestions.
- Does the author provide a concise overview of the current study and clearly describe its hypothesis(es)?
- Is the rationale behind the hypotheses clear? It should be obvious what the author was going to hypothesize, given the research that s/he already presented. If there are any missing links in the logic, suggest improvements.

### Method

- Does the author include all relevant information in the Participants section (planned number of participants, gender, age range (and *M* and *SD* for age), how they were recruited, how they were compensated)? [Since the study hasn't yet been run, does the author leave blanks for this information?]
- Are the materials adequately described? Does the author describe the questionnaires and stimulus materials used in enough detail? If not, provide suggestions about what else should be included.
- Could someone replicate the study after having read the Procedure section? If not, what does the author need to add?
- Is there any redundancy between the Procedure and the Materials sections? If so, how could the author fix it?
- Will the author be able to address the hypothesis properly with the design chosen?
- Are there any threats to validity in the study? Any extraneous variables that could affect interpretation of the results? Any confounds? Any demand characteristics or bias problems?
- Could the study be improved? If so, how? Can you provide suggestions of alternative approaches? These suggestions may help the author write a strong discussion section.

### References

- Are the references presented in alphabetical order?
- Are the references in proper format (first initials instead of first names; "&" used; only first letter of first word and first letter of first word following a colon capitalized in article titles; journal and volume # in italics; *dois* included)
- Is there a one-to-one correspondence between the articles cited in the paper and the articles that appear in the References section?

### Writing

- Are ideas presented in a logical order with no redundancy?
- Does the author provide smooth transitions between ideas?
- Are statements adequately backed up with evidence from the literature?
- Are critical terms clearly defined?
- Is anything confusing or ambiguous?
- Are there any spelling or grammatical errors?
- Does the paper conform to APA style guidelines? (e.g., proper headings, correct page breaks)
- Is all research cited properly?

**What to Include in the 2-3 Page (Double-spaced) Written Review**

1. Reviewers of journal articles often begin their review with a 3-4 sentence summary of the author's study. The summary lets the author know that the reviewer has understood what the author has said. I suggest that you follow this convention.
2. Next, lead off with positive feedback. What are the strengths of the paper and the study?
3. The bulk of your review should be focused on major comments (e.g., organization of the paper, whether the author has provided sufficient rationale for the hypotheses, major criticisms of the design or procedure) or suggestions (e.g., how the design might be improved, other literature to cite to support the hypotheses).
4. Don't talk about individual spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors; you can mark those on the paper itself. However, if you notice that the author makes the same error repeatedly (e.g., mixing up "effect" and "affect"), you should call the author's attention to this problem.

**Rules to Live By**

1. Treat others as you want to be treated. Provide the author with *constructive* comments (e.g., "I think you might want to consider putting information about X earlier in the introduction," NOT "Your organization is terrible!")
2. Be specific. Don't write, "I don't get this." Instead, write, "I think this sentence may be confusing to readers; it is unclear exactly what information the experimenter is giving to participants."
3. Be honest. You have a responsibility to help your classmate write the best paper s/he can write.
4. Take pride in your reviewing. Take the time to do the job right. Remember, someone else is doing the same for you.