

Reviewer Assistance: Our Support Efforts Must Continue!

In 2008, we stated that “The success of the entire peer review process depends on excellent reviews and appropriate interactions of all involved in the publication process” [1]. Since that time, we have continued to expand our efforts to maximize reviewer quality and consistency. We continue to provide new tools on the *AJR* website. First go to www.arrs.org and select “information,” then select “reviewers,” which leads to www.arrs.org/Publications/AJR/Reviewers.aspx where you will find the online support material. We also require and provide new reviewer orientation, which we initiated in 2013. In addition, focused topic discussions became a part of the annual reviewer luncheon beginning at the 2014 ARRS annual meeting [2]. A series of focused editorials in the *AJR* can also provide additional reviewer resources. This editorial series will focus on reviewer requirements, specifically in the “Comments to the Editor” section.

Evaluation of each manuscript requires reviewers to complete several sections prior to submitting their final decision. The sections include eight Manuscript Grading Questions (scored 1–5 with 5 the highest); eight CME Questions, which must be completed for the reviewer to receive CME credit; the Comments to the Editor section, and the Comments to the Authors section. In early June, we reviewed the responses of our reviewers to each of these sections. The Manuscript Grading Questions were completed by 100% of the reviewers. Eighty percent of reviewers completed the CME questions for credit, and 20% of reviewers did not elect to receive CME credit. Completing the CME questions and meeting the journal standards to obtain CME results in 3 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits. The *AJR* requirements state that to receive CME credit a reviewer must meet two of the following three criteria:

1. The reviewer comments address both format and scientific method.
2. The reviewer comments must include an overall summary plus a succinct evaluation of strengths and weaknesses.
3. The reviewer rating scored at the beginning (Manuscript Grading Questions) of the review meet the decision rendered.

Additionally, in the past year, the ARRS Executive Council made the decision to require ARRS membership for reviewers to receive CME credit.

When evaluating the Comments to the Editor and Comments to the Author sections, we noted considerable variation in reviewer approaches to these two key sections. For this discussion, we will focus on the Comments to the Editor. This section requires the reviewer to answer several questions that should assist with the final decision (accept, reject, reconsider with minor revision, or reconsider with major revision). The questions and appropriate responses are as follows:

1. Is there a financial or other conflict of interest between your work and that of the authors? Yes or No: **When the answer is yes, a reviewer should recuse him- or herself and decline reviewing the manuscript.**
2. Does the decision you have rendered agree with the comments you have provided? The Manuscript Grading Questions and your comments to the author and editor should match your decision. The decision criteria are listed on the reviewer assistance material included on the website. If you have concerns about the final decision, the criteria for each of the categories listed are available at www.arrs.org/Publications/AJR/Reviewers.aspx. **Failure to meet this requirement can be problematic when the decision selected is “resubmit with major revision” or “reject.” In the case of the latter, an author appeal commonly occurs because there is not sufficient reviewer evidence to match a reject decision.**
3. Was the article submitted to an appropriate manuscript category (i.e., original research, clinical perspective, etc.)? **If not, reviewers should suggest a more appropriate category. Content descriptions for pages, number of authors, figures, references, etc. should be checked prior to beginning reviews to be certain the authors have followed the guidelines (www.arrs.org/Publications/AJR/Authors.aspx). When the selected manuscript category does not match the content or format, the manuscript will most**

likely be returned to the authors for appropriate modifications. In these circumstances, the authors may also choose to submit the manuscript to a different journal.

4. Are the images of sufficient quality for publication? If yes, no further comment is necessary. **If the images are not of sufficient quality, the figure numbers should be noted in the Comments to the Authors section.**
5. Are words and numbers readable in graphs and line art? If the answer is yes, no further comment is necessary. **If there are issues, these should also be specifically included in the Comments to the Authors section with specific table and/or line art numbers included.**
6. Please give a frank account of the strengths and weaknesses of the article. Optimally, this key section of Comments to the Editor should read similar to an executive summary. **The strengths and weaknesses can be summarized in a sentence or two followed by a conclusion that matches the Manuscript Grading Questions and Comments to the Editor and Authors. This response is also required as one of the CME requirements listed previously.**

Our evaluations of the Comments to the Editor section showed that 90% of reviewers addressed the first five questions effectively. Most frequently, reviewers responded with a simple yes or no answer. **In most cases, this is adequate unless there are deficiencies that should be specifically addressed in the Comments to the Authors section.** Reviewer approaches to question 6 and approaches to editor and author comments were diverse and variable. Ten percent did not complete the Comments to the Editor. In this setting, the Comments to the Author section was also frequently deficient. An additional 10% placed comments appropriate for the author in the Comments to the Editor section and provided no author comments or simply stated that we should use the Comments to the Editor section for the authors. This approach requires further staff effort and carefully deleting any comments to the editor that would be inappropriate for authors.

We also noted that more reviewers are using the manuscript category templates to complete their reviews. The templates are included with the invitation-to-review letters and are also available on the website (www.arrs.org/Publications/AJR/Reviewers.aspx). Just over 30% of reviewers are using the templates at this time. The templates provide specific questions and comment suggestions for each section of a manuscript. The use of templates may be especially helpful for new reviewers.

Going forward, we hope reviewers will consider the Comments to the Editor section as an opportunity for candid comments intended for the editorial staff that note

strengths and weaknesses and provide a brief summary supporting the final decision. When indicated, reviewers should consider noting other journals that may be more appropriate for the submitted article.

We look forward to continued communication with our reviewers, including more consistent written notification when we find excellent reviews or reviews that can be improved. We appreciate the support of our more than 1900 reviewers and will continue to provide assistance that ensures optimal quality and scientific integrity for our journal. If you have questions or suggestions for what we might do for additional reviewer assistance,

feel free to contact me directly at berquist.thomas@mayo.edu or at the *AJR* address.

Thomas H. Berquist
Editor in Chief
ajrsubmit@arrs.org

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