

**How to write, or respond to, a manuscript review:
Answers to questions from the ASLO Early Career Community**

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As the ASLO Early Career Committee prepares for the Early Career Workshop at the upcoming 2019 ASLO Aquatic Sciences Meeting in Puerto Rico, I thought that this would be the perfect time to reflect on the most recent Early Career Workshop held at the 2018 ASLO Summer Meeting in Victoria, BC, Canada. The workshop focused on how to write an effective review, and equally important, how to respond to a critical review. We were fortunate to have panelists Rana El-Sabaawi (University of Victoria), Stephanie Hampton (Washington State University), Pat Soranno (Michigan State University), and Emily Stanley (University of Wisconsin) answer questions from participants.

Below is an abbreviated list of questions along with paraphrased answers from the panelists.

What should a reviewer do if they are not familiar with a method or certain aspect of the manuscript?

Reviewers should be able to get a good feeling for the scope of the manuscript by reading the abstract before agreeing to review it. If you are not an expert on a particular aspect of the manuscript, let the Associate Editor (AE) know, and let them know on which areas you are focusing. If you do not feel qualified to review the paper, let the AE know soon and provide them with suggestions for alternate reviewers.

How much time should a reviewer spend on correcting grammar or style?

Detailed grammatical corrections are not the primary function of the reviewer. If there are numerous flaws throughout, it is appropriate to simply state that the manuscript is not as polished as it needs to be for publication, then focus on the high-level critiques. And please never say that the author is clearly not a native English-speaker.

As a reviewer, is it appropriate to recommend your own citations?

Reviewers are identified based on their publications, so it is not surprising that a reviewer may suggest their own citation. If you are concerned about this, you could recommend three citations, including one of your own, and let the authors select which is most appropriate to include in the revised manuscript.

This is the author manuscript accepted for publication and has undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the [Version of Record](#). Please cite this article as doi: [10.1002/lob.10297](https://doi.org/10.1002/lob.10297)

Do AEs perceive short reviews pointing out critical manuscript flaws to be as informative as longer, more detailed reviews?

Short, well-argued reviews can be highly relevant to the decision process, but reviewers really need to justify the reasoning behind their recommendation. Do not be afraid to recommend that a paper be rejected if there is a serious underlying flaw. Ideally, the reviewer would provide suggestions for how the flaw can be fixed or some high-level suggestions for how the paper can be improved.

When is it appropriate to include confidential comments to the AE?

Confidential comments can be helpful to explain your thought process to the AE if you are having trouble determining a recommendation or to explain a critical manuscript flaw that caused you to write a short review. It is important that confidential comments to the AE are consistent with the blind comments to the author to ensure that the review process is transparent.

Still have questions about characteristics shared by high quality reviews? See this informative *L&O Bulletin* article by Laura Falkenberg and Pat Soranno (<https://aslopubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/lob.10217>).