

GUEST EDITORIAL

An Insider's View Into the Review Process

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SO YOU'VE MAILED IN YOUR MANUSCRIPT TO THE *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research*. What happens next? Because I am a reviewer for the *Psi Chi Journal*, I can give you insights into the review process.

When Managing Editor Dr. Stephen Davis receives your manuscript, he will try to make the best possible match between the topic of the manuscript and the expertise and interests of three reviewers. For example, my area of expertise is information processing and learning strategies, and I have interests in the psychology of gender. If you submit a paper on any of these topics, Dr. Davis might ask me to review the manuscript.

When three reviewers have been identified, Dr. Davis mails them copies of your manuscript with instructions for the review and a deadline, usually four weeks. When the reviewers have finished reading and commenting on the manuscript, it is mailed back to Dr. Davis. Dr. Davis reads all of the reviewer's comments and adds his own comments to a copy of the manuscript. He then makes the final decision about your manuscript. That final decision will fall into one of four categories—reject, reject with encouragement to resubmit, accept pending revision, or accept. Dr. Davis then mails the reviewers' comments and a letter to you informing you of his decision. The entire review process takes approximately five to six weeks, although it might take longer.

What can you expect when you open the envelope and read Dr. Davis's letter? First, you should ex-

pect that the reviewers and Dr. Davis will be thorough. They will carefully read your manuscript for content (e.g., is the literature review appropriate in length and breadth?), for a thorough description of the methods used, for the appropriateness of the statistics used, and for an appropriate discussion of the experiment (e.g., practical applications, relation to hypotheses). In addition, the reviewers will check the manuscript carefully for writing style and adherence to APA's *Publication Manual* (4th ed.) format.

Second, you should expect a wide range of comments from the reviewers. Each reviewer has a different perspective on the manuscript and therefore will have different suggestions. In fact, reviewers' comments may be contradictory. One reviewer might have a very positive reaction to a paragraph, whereas another reviewer might have a very negative reaction to the same paragraph. If the reviewers appear to contradict each other, Dr. Davis can help to resolve the contradiction.

You should also anticipate revising the document at least once before publication. Reviewers do not require revisions simply because the author is a student. It is a little known fact that the vast majority of psychologists with publishing experience are asked

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to revise manuscripts before they are published. In addition, revising manuscripts is not a 'punishment' of any sort. Instead, the purpose of revision is to give the author(s) feedback about the document so they can create the best possible manuscript.

Keep in mind that you are not *required* to revise the manuscript. You might decide to submit the manuscript to another journal. However, if you decide to revise the manuscript you will send copies to Dr. Davis. He will then forward the revised manuscript to the same reviewers who assessed the original version. Now you might be thinking, "Oh, great! Another opportunity for rejection," but that is not so. When Dr. Davis mails the reviewer's comments to you he also mails copies to each reviewer. The reviewers can evaluate the revised manuscript to determine if you addressed the comments made on the original manuscript. Submitting a manuscript for publication is like submitting multiple drafts of the same paper to a professor for a grade: You can work on the manuscript until the reviewers feel it is ready for publication.

The process of submitting and revising a manuscript may sound like a hassle, but it can be a positive experience for several reasons. First, when you publish research in the *Psi Chi Journal* you are actively participating in the scientific community and contributing to the growing body of psychological knowledge. After all, psychologists do not conduct research just because they have a lot of free time. They do so to contribute to the growing understanding of the human experience.

Second, graduate schools are looking for applicants with experiences that make the applicant stand out. Publishing in the *Psi Chi Journal* is an experience that can make you stand out from a crowd of highly qualified applicants.

Last, publishing in the *Psi Chi Journal* can help with your own professional development. It is impossible to become a good scientist by taking one or two classes as an undergraduate—you need practice. Publishing in the *Psi Chi Journal* gives you the kind of practice you need to become a good scientist.

In addition, the *Psi Chi Journal* is a relatively safe forum for professional development. Whereas presentations and poster sessions are highly public, publishing in the *Psi Chi Journal* is relatively private. No one need know you have submitted a manuscript for review. Furthermore, the *Psi Chi Journal* emphasizes an atmosphere of growth. With each manuscript, reviewers receive instructions which remind them that the "philosophy of the review process is one of guidance, not of castigation." The objective of the reviewers is not to stomp on your ego until it is shattered into tiny bits; instead, the objective is to help and guide you to create a paper that is ready for publication.

In conclusion, submitting a manuscript to the *Psi Chi Journal* can be a very rewarding experience. You gain firsthand experience in the entire scientific process, from planning an experiment to data collection and analysis to communicating your findings to others. In addition, you can develop professional skills which cannot be learned in the classroom.