

The Next Generation of Peer Reviewers: Survey of Reviewers-in-Training

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Background

"Reviewing manuscripts for an academic journal is not an easy task. We know that writing a good review is a challenging task, for which there is often no training during medical school, residency, and sometimes not even in graduate school."¹

The editorial board of the quarterly medical journal *Wilderness & Environmental Medicine* (WEM) (<250 submissions/year), official journal of the Wilderness Medical Society (WMS) encourages any WEM reader or WMS member to review for the journal, regardless of prior experience. Thus, the WEM editorial board created a reviewer toolkit¹, publicly available on the WMS website. (Scan QR code, bottom right, to access.) The toolkit was written by the Editor-in-Chief (EIC) and Associate Editors (AEs) and provides a basic introduction to peer review that outlines the expectations specific to WEM reviewers.

In August 2017, WEM launched a Reviewer-in-Training (RiT) program, open to medical/doctoral students, residents, fellows, or any reader of the journal or member of the WMS. The journal does not currently solicit RiTs; interested reviewers contact the editorial office or learn about the program at the annual WMS meeting.

Reviewers in the RiT role:

- Serve as a third reviewer on a variety of submissions. (The journal standard is 2 reviews per submission, so the RiT acts as an extra reviewer.)
- Are identified as an RiT in the system and when review comments are sent to the author. (See Figure 1.)
- Receive feedback about their review from the EIC and/or section editor or AE.

During the period of August 2017 to June 2018, 24 RiTs registered in the program; 20 had completed at least 1 review; and 47 reviews had collectively been completed (new and revised submissions). (For context, the journal had approximately 200 active peer reviewers during roughly the same time period.) Of the 47 reviews performed by RiTs, the recommendation given by an RiT agreed with the EIC's final decision in 25 cases; in 17 cases the recommendation was in conflict by 1 "step" (eg, "minor revisions" and "major revisions") and in 5 cases the recommendation was in conflict by 2 steps.

Reviewer #3 (Reviewer-in-Training): I'm ... There is so much to be learned from and i ... Overall, given how complex the response and describe each physical site including r ... understanding of how difficult this situatic ... contributed to this article, and that is app ... having a final editor re-word some areas f

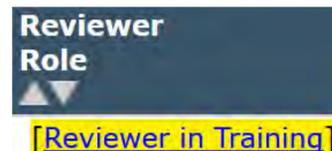


Figure 1. Left: An RiT is identified in the decision letter. Right: An RiT is given the RiT role in EES.

Purpose

- To survey the journal's RiTs approximately 1 year after they began the program to obtain program feedback.
- To educate other editorial office professionals on what 1 small journal is doing to ensure the new generation of peer reviewers is adequately trained in peer review, potentially improving review quality and thus, article quality.
- Editorial offices are in the best position to facilitate such a program, as they have the benefit of working directly with both editors and reviewers.

Results

Twenty RiTs were contacted to take the survey; 13 participated. All participants gave permission for the survey results to be presented in this poster.

Reviewer-in-Training Demographics			
Number	13		n=13
# reviews for WEM		Read WEM reviewer toolkit?	10
1 review	8	Read decision letters?	13
2 reviews	3	Was reading these helpful?	11
4 reviews	2	Would you use as a guide for your next review?	11
Ever reviewed for another journal?		Knowledge of peer review process prior to becoming an RiT	
No	10	a little/none	9
Yes	3*	Knowledge of peer review process after participating as an RiT	
Education		a little	3
MD or PhD	7	a moderate amount	3
med school, doctoral, or residency	6	a lot	6
*Did not receive mentoring/feedback on reviews.		a great deal	1

Conclusions

The results indicate that new/inexperienced reviewers need guidance from more experienced peer reviewers and welcome feedback and tools for improvement.

Some gaps in the WEM RiT program were identified.

- RiTs currently do not have access to direct, one-on-one mentoring from an editorial board member during the process of review. Eleven respondents said it would be "helpful" or "extremely helpful" to have access to one-on-one mentorship from an editorial board member.
- Criticism from RiTs included: "I feel like I have more learned how much I don't know as opposed to things that help me specifically be a better reviewer" and "Direct feedback on [what was] effective/not effective would be beneficial ... clear explanations on how my comments could be improved ... would be appreciated" and "... most of the feedback I got was critical, which is great ... I like critical feedback. The challenge however is that not knowing what I did well means I didn't know which things to carry forward in future reviews."
- These critiques reveal that it would be beneficial to develop learning objectives for the RiTs and a standard evaluation template for editors to use when giving reviewer feedback, to ensure each RiT is receiving balanced and comprehensive feedback.
- Further development of the program could include categorizing and tabulating the most common feedback to identify where RiTs are repeatedly deficient.

Other journals might bring this study to the attention of their editorial boards in an effort to start a conversation about peer reviewer training.

Reference

1. Pollock NW, McIntosh SE, Cushing TA, Keyes LE. Reviewer Toolkit: *Wilderness & Environmental Medicine*. January 2018. Available at: <https://www.wms.org/research/WEM%20Reviewer%20Toolkit%202018.pdf>. Accessed June 11, 2018.



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Which Peer Review Training Resources Would You Be Most Likely to Use?

