There is a long history of short articles on preparing and reviewing manuscripts (e.g., Bentley et al., 1929; Lovejoy, Revenson, & France, 2011). Producing quality manuscript reviews is recognized as an activity requiring time, effort, and skill (Bearinger, 2006; Wu, Nassau, & Drotar, 2010). Articles on reviewing often provide information on the form of the review and the process that generates a thoughtful and constructive review (Neighbors & Lee, 2006). The emphasis of this piece is on the dual functions of a review: to evaluate the manuscript and to help improve the scholarly product (Kaplan, 2005; Roberts, Coverdale, Edenharder, & Louie, 2004).

Manuscript Evaluation
Peer review is a cornerstone of the scientific enterprise (Kaplan, 2005; Neighbors & Lee, 2006). It is the mechanism through which a field selects literature to document knowledge in disciplinary journals (Hames, 2007). *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research (PCJ)* has made important strides as a journal. For example, PCJ has begun to accept manuscripts from a wide range of authors and is an indexed journal so that it is available to a broad range of readers (Domenech Rodríguez, 2011). While maintaining standards is essential, ultimately the editor is the gate keeper for the journal (Hames, 2007). Given that one person cannot hold expertise across all areas of psychology and all scientific methods, reviewers become critical partners in the publishing enterprise. To support PCJ and to ensure its growth, there is a need for faculty to commit to the review process.

Manuscript Improvement
As reviewers take on this challenge, it is critical to consider the goals of reviewing. The evaluation of the manuscript is a necessary part of the review that aids editors in their selection of articles. Perhaps the most valuable part of the review is the effort to improve the manuscript. This goal requires particular effort and is recognized as drawing on a certain artistry (Bearinger, 2006). It is difficult to document shortcomings in a paper while at the same time recognizing the value of the manuscript and means for improving it as a scholarly product (Robinson & Agne, 2010). Reviews need to be well organized so as to aid an author in revision of a manuscript. The review can be thought of as a working document that should guide an author through the problems of the manuscript (Neighbors & Lee, 2006). While a review is critical in nature, a collegial approach may be beneficial. Reviewing for PCJ highlights this challenge as the critiques contribute to a developmental process that should help some of our very best students reach new levels of professional ability.

Collegial approach. A key feature noted by most literature on writing manuscript reviews is the need to be collegial when crafting a review (Bearinger, 2006). This can be accomplished in many ways and will certainly reflect the style of the reviewing faculty member. A useful review can take on an authoritative tone with direct statements about problems followed by clear directions for remedies. However, an equally useful review may have a very different tone. Robinson and Agne (2010) noted that some reviewers will commiserate with authors. This can take the form of comments which appreciate the difficulty of presenting certain concepts or selecting a particular analysis strategy. A collaborative tone allows the author to recognize the challenges that are experienced by all professionals as they strive to refine their craft and produce exemplary work. Thus, when critiquing a manuscript it is useful to think of one’s place as “sitting next to the author” and collaborating on a process to improve a document as opposed to “sitting across from the author.”
in which evaluation is the priority (Domenech Rodríguez, personal communication August 14, 2012). However it can be very challenging for reviewers to be collaborative within a critical review. Often, manuscripts have many difficulties, especially those by novice authors. Sorting through the problems and keeping frustration out of one’s feedback requires diligence, willingness to reexamine one’s comments, and consciousness of message clarity and word choice for a given audience, in this case, a student author.

Developmental considerations. The notion of being collegial and collaborative in a manuscript review highlights another important feature of being part of the peer review process for a journal such as PCJ. The peer relationship takes on different qualities from typical professional reviews when the author is an undergraduate student. While the main functions of evaluation and improvement of the manuscript remain, new considerations come into play. For example, the review a student author receives is likely to be the very first external and highly critical review of that individual’s work. Thus, a manuscript review of a student authored paper serves as an initial exemplar of this key component of the peer review process. This places a premium on the review as it becomes part of the developmental process of young scientists. In addition to being a prototype of a manuscript review, if carefully crafted, the review can serve another key function in motivating some of the very best undergraduate students to engage in an iterative process of reviewing their work under close scrutiny to heighten the quality of their scholarly efforts. The ability to embrace critique from one’s peers is a fundamental feature in a community of scholars and should be fostered. The peer review process of student authored material is an excellent situation and should be fostered. The peer review process of a fundamental feature in a community of scholars and can be expanded so that more faculty can contribute to the education of our students. As a reviewer, think of your efforts as doing what is needed to extend one component of the scientific basis of our field.

As you receive invitations to review manuscripts, please consider the value of the review to our young scholars, to the journal, and to the field. Your support of PCJ and other journals by engaging in peer review is a cornerstone of the advancement of our science. Unfortunately, foundations can easily be overlooked. Ideally, there can be enhanced discussion of the value of peer review, especially for reviews of work by those just entering into the scientific enterprise. To encourage this, PCJ will be providing support materials for reviewers. The editorial staff appreciates the efforts of the reviewers and hopes that the pool of reviewers can be expanded so that more faculty can contribute to the education of our students. As a reviewer, think of your efforts as doing what is needed to extend one component of the scientific basis of our field.

References


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