Open Research Forum on open peer-review – A personal account

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Outline

• Experience of open-peer review as an author, referee and (guest) editor, and type of journals involved

• Conclusions based on experience with open-peer review so far

• Tend to work on relatively controversial aspects of the fields lacking many experts
➢ Guest editor for special issue in Ocean Science

➢ Author of a few papers in Ocean Science

➢ Referee for numerous papers in Ocean Science, a couple of papers in ACP and one paper in GMD

➢ Currently Associate Editor for Elsevier ‘Ocean Modelling’

Copernicus journals

- Paper is published in ‘Discussions’ section after quality control by assigned or volunteer editor
- Paper is then open for public discussion by referees or anybody interested for 2 months
- Author(s) may engage with comments during the ‘open phase’ or wait until the public discussion to respond to comments (to avoid being contradicted for instance)
- Subsequent revisions and further review is then non-public. However, ‘behind the scene’ comments and replies are expected to be published alongside the final paper if accepted
Option for authors:
- Double-blind review process (both authors and reviewers remain anonymous)
- Traditional review
- Have the possibility to have the peer-review process published if the article is accepted

Option for reviewers:
- Need to agree that their reports be published if the author(s) chose to have the peer-review file published along their accepted manuscript
- Can chose to sign their review, in which case your name becomes known to authors and other referees

Signed my review because I knew most of the authors, who also knew me. First author was ECR. My review was positive and supportive but asked significant revisions and clarifications. Subsequent revision was not satisfactory, so had to become less supportive until I had to recommend against publication due to continuing lack of improvements. The other reviewer, who stayed anonymous, declined to review after 2nd revision. Nature Communications asked me to comment on whether authors had addressed other author’s comments satisfactorily.
Conclusions

**Anonymity**: signing a review rarely helps in my experience. As far as I am aware, reviewers overwhelmingly prefer to remain anonymous. Works only for positive reviews asking only for minor revisions.

Problems encountered from signing my reviews:
- Authors do not really take suggestions/comments seriously enough, potentially resulting in awkward confrontations
- Authors contact you by email or approach you in person to discuss their papers, often a little bit awkward
- Authors can occasionally refuse to address criticism by counter-criticizing your own published work
Conclusions (ct’d)

Journals with open discussions, open peer review – As an Author

Positives

- Paper is immediately available, the paper has a DOI, and can be cited even if not eventually accepted for publication
- Open discussion/open peer review tends to discourage abusive and unprofessional reviews
- You can get a wider range of comments than just those from journal-nominated reviewers, as anybody can in principle comment on your paper (even if this tends to be rare). This can help get much more feedback and ultimately result in a much better final paper.

Negatives

- As everything is public, some reviewer do not necessarily engage with the process as much as they would do were they to remain anonymous. May result in some superficial reviews
- Reviewers and authors may regret some of the things they say that will remain public forever.
- Editor(s) only intervene at the end of the open discussion and play less of a moderating/filtering role than in the standard model
Conclusions (ct’d)

Journals with open discussions, open peer review – As an Editor

Positives – Not many - Negatives – Not many

I tend to prefer the usual model, as it is easier for the Editor to moderate the exchanges between authors and reviewers, which in the open peer review model can sometimes get out of hand. It is often useful for the editor to reformulate or provide a digested version of the ‘reviewers’ comments, to help authors identify what the editor considers essential from less essential.

The editor plays an essential role for the quality of the experience as an author or referee, regardless of the review process is ‘open’ or ‘hidden’
- A good editor will find good referees able to provide constructive reviews
- A good editor will be able to make referees appreciated and will be able to help authors improve their manuscripts
- A good editor will remain neutral and plays the role of an impartial arbiter. A competent editor will be able to see things that referees are not able to see.