

EDITORIAL POLICY ON REVIEWING FOR COGNITION

We strive to publish the very best research in the cognitive sciences, with a particular focus on those papers that introduce novel experimental and theoretical advances, and that will be of interest and relevance to our wide readership. However, we cannot do this without the help of the many reviewers that *Cognition* contacts each year. Reviewing is a somewhat thankless task that takes considerable time, and no doubt we would all much rather spend that time writing our own papers rather than reviewing the papers of others. Probably we would all much rather say 'no' to each and every reviewer request we receive. And yet the expertise of the reviewers, and the quality and timeliness of their reviews, helps define a journal.

Reviewers have a responsibility both to the science and to the authors who are trying to advance that science. This responsibility includes helping the author better his/her paper and, if necessary, better his/her science. Too often, papers attract negative reviews that fail to provide constructive advice on how to better the presentation of the research, or how to better the research itself. Too often, reviewers confuse bad presentation with bad science. Sometimes, of course, it is very difficult to know how best to advise an author of a particularly weak paper. But in these cases, the tone of the review is as important as its content.

We would ask you, as a reviewer, to please keep these points in mind, and remember that the role of the editors and the reviewers is as much to reach a consensus on how the author could improve the impact of their research as it is to reach a consensus on whether a paper should be accepted, sent back for revision, or rejected. Too often, we hear our colleagues (or even ourselves) refer to their experiences of the editorial process (across a range of journals) as ranging from unconstructive to confrontational. If the author can respect the editorial process as being cooperative and constructive, rather than confrontational, the journal as a whole, and its reviewers, will be held in greater respect.

Your role in the editorial process is to determine, as an expert in the field, whether the paper advances the field sufficiently to merit publication in *Cognition*, and whether there might be ways in which the paper (and the impact it might have) could be improved. You should consider your role here as more that of a mentor than of an examiner. Even if you recommend rejecting a paper (and over 80% of submissions are rejected), do so respectfully. It IS possible to point out fundamental flaws whilst praising the endeavour. Think back to what it felt like when you were a graduate student giving your first conference presentation – the last thing you'd have wanted is to be 'shot down' by someone senior in the field. It is the last thing any of us want. It is thus worth bearing in mind that the role of the Editor, as he/she reads each review is not simply to determine whether the paper is acceptable, or to determine which revisions would make it acceptable; it is also to evaluate the quality and fairness of the review (and if necessary, to seek clarification from the reviewer).

Finally, a word about anonymity. Some journals give reviewers the option of signing their reviews. For the present, *Cognition* will continue with its policy of blanket anonymity. This is primarily to ensure that more junior researchers (who are often just as expert as their more senior colleagues) feel able to express their criticisms (albeit positively!) without the fear that they may somehow be called to account.

Thank you for your patience in reviewing this policy document. If you have any comments about this policy, please feel free to contact me (cognition@york.ac.uk).

Gerry T.M. Altmann, Editor-in-Chief, Cognition. June 2006