

Tips on Peer Reviewing for ATOC5051

1 Contacts

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2 Getting Help!

I am usually available by email. You can also come to me from 2-5 Tuesday or Thursday or by appointment other times.

If you are having trouble with the peer reviewing, there are lots of places to find help! You might ask last year's students for tips. You can see what we're shooting for by looking at the examples of their best work in the proceedings.¹ You might also find a book like *Montgomery* (2003) to be useful.

3 The Basics

In addition to writing the papers, you will each be performing anonymous reviews of each others work. This will give you an opportunity to read closely about topics other than the one you chose, and hopefully you will be able to learn about science writing more quickly. Also, there are a lot of quandaries that arise in peer-reviewing (e.g., one reviewer loves it and one hates it, or a reviewer makes incorrect statements), so you'll get some experience with those issues by practice in a friendly environment.

We will be using a rubric based on the AGU guidelines for review. They are a useful guideline to go by, and when you do reviews of your fellow students, I'll expect to get a A1 or B2 or B1 score, etc. The AGU instructions to reviewers follow.

4 How do the Grades Work?

An email from a past student:

I have a quick question about the peer evaluations and I thought I should ask before our next evaluations are due. I am a little confused about how the alphanumeric system works with the respective score (and grade ultimately) we are giving the writer. I feel like in reality, no paper from this class should really be worthy of publishing (right?). Especially these first drafts. Therefore, I dont think I will ever give someone a 1, since that is the criteria.

I guess my question is: do the scores out of 100 given to the writer directly correlate with some grade? I felt bad after seeing how things were scored, because I gave both the people I reviewed A3s. However, I felt the score was very dependent on the nature on the assignment, but that both people did exactly what the assignment asked for. I think it would just be helpful when I review (and receive reviews) to understand how this alphanumeric rating is affecting the grade.

My reply (edited for this context a bit):

¹<http://cires.colorado.edu/science/groups/foxkemper/classes/ATOC5051.07/proceedings>

You are right, they probably won't reach the standard for publishing, at least not often! But, I think the better way to interpret this is whether they are publishable within the class setting—that is, would it fit in well in a proceedings volume/website of course work. This proceedings would be public, and peer-reviewed (by you), but understandably less complete than you'd see in GRL (well, at least less so than some of the articles in GRL).

But, don't *assume* that these papers aren't publishable, a good idea will go a long way, even without much time to defend it, and many of them may be publishable with only a little more work beyond what is done for class. So read each one with a fresh eye, and realize that you might just see a 2 paper: publishable with revisions. One problem that students have is that they read 'classic' papers or 'important new' papers in classes and journal club. Many, many papers are neither classic nor important, but they are still published! (I'm not saying you should write crummy papers, just don't prejudge).

I do pass on you guys' scores to the final grade, (each reader gets 10 pts to assign, an A1 would be a 10 and a C4 would be a 5). My grades are similar, except I give from 40 to 80 pts. Thus, if you turn in the assignment you get a 50, and you can work your way up to a 100, with 10 of those gained points from your readers and 40 points from me.

So, you do have an impact, and if you read the scores as being 90+ for an A (although I may curve a tiny bit at the end of semester), then you can't get an A without some support from the readers. However, the readers can't prevent you from failing (60) without me.

All that being said (and I did put a lot of thought into it, as you see), the schedule of assigned readers that means that each of you will read a paper for more than half of the class. Thus, no individual student will be repeatedly punished by having the hardest grader.

Overall, rather than being concerned with how you do the grading, I'd prefer if you focused on your comments. If you gave every single review an A3, but gave good, useful, positive criticism on your reviews it would be immensely helpful. Overall, grades in graduate school are not so critical (even fellowship applications typically don't ask for GPA, nor is a given GPA required to pass COMPs or get a PhD), but learning how to write papers, be a good peer reviewer, and think scientifically are critical to your future careers.

5 The AGU Guidelines

The following pages are taken from the instructions to reviewers for GRL. We will use them as a rubric for our class, with the following adaptations:

- Interpret descriptions of **scientific merit** in the classroom context: e.g., 'important new science at the forefront of an AGU discipline' corresponds to 'important new science at the forefront of what we are learning in class' or 'would convey or exemplify an important topic to a student in this or a similar class'
- Interpret descriptions of **publication quality** in the proceedings volume context: e.g., 'if a submitted manuscript meets GRL standards' equates to 'if a submitted manuscript meets the standards of our proceedings'.²
- Presentation categories can be used directly

²<http://cires.colorado.edu/science/groups/foxkemper/classes/ATOC5051.07/proceedings>

6 AGU Peer Review Instructions

Editorial Instructions to Reviewers (A reminder of current GRL Policy)

Geophysical Research Letters aims to provide rapid publication of forefront research that has an immediate impact on the science community. The journal features articles from a broad range of geophysical disciplines. We ask your help as a reviewer in evaluating both scientific content (Categories 1-4) and presentation quality (A-C) to determine if a submitted manuscript meets GRL standards.

We welcome and will pass on to authors any specific suggestions which would materially improve the quality of a manuscript. Your comments will be conveyed anonymously unless you specifically note in your review that you wish your identity to be passed on to the authors.

Scientific Quality: Scientific quality of the manuscript is fundamental to publication, and the following Categories 1-4 are meant to aid the reviewer and Editor.

Science Category 1: The manuscript meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Important new science at the forefront of an AGU discipline
- Innovative research with interdisciplinary/broad geophysical application
- Instrument or methods manuscript that introduces new techniques with important geophysical applications

If the manuscript falls in Category 1, please give sufficient detail as to which of these criteria and why.

Science Category 2: The manuscript is potentially Category 1 but significant clarification/revision is needed. For example, the manuscript presents:

- Some unclear or incomplete scientific reasoning
- Inadequate presentation of data
- An instrument/method where the geophysical application is not obvious

If possible, please specify the revisions that might allow this manuscript to meet Category 1 criteria.

Science Category 3: The paper is publishable in the refereed literature but is unlikely to become a Category 1 paper. For example:

- It is a scientifically correct paper but not obviously a significant advance in a geophysical field
- A solid paper with little immediate impact on the research of others (e.g., a routine application of a standard research technique, or a new measurement/laboratory method with limited geophysical application)
- A good but basically incremental improvement to existing data sets, models, or instruments

Science Category 4: This paper is basically unpublishable in an AGU journal:

- There are major scientific errors in the manuscript
- Essentially the same material has been published or is being considered for publication elsewhere
- The technique is not useful
- The research area is not representative of an AGU discipline

Presentation Categories: These categories measure the maturity of the submitted manuscript in terms of language, communication, and GRL criteria.

Presentation A : Manuscripts should meet ALL of the following:

- Abstract is succinct (< 150 words), accurate, and comprehensible to a non-specialist
- Manuscript is generally well-written, logically organized, and adequately illustrated
- Figures and tables are understandable and readable (when sized for GRL)
- English usage and grammar is adequate, with few spelling/typographical errors (please specify any minor fixes)

- Manuscript appears to fit GRL's 4-page limit

Presentation B: Manuscripts are potentially "A" manuscripts with suitable revision. Please give explicit direction as to which sections/features need revision, extension or reduction. For example:

- Abstract needs to be rewritten/shortened
- Manuscript is not well written, is not logically organized, or is inadequately illustrated
- Manuscript needs to be (and can be) shortened
- English usage, grammar, or spelling errors detract from the paper

Presentation C: Manuscripts cannot readily be revised by the authors into Presentation "A" without a major re-write. For example:

- Specific ideas cannot be adequately presented within the 4-page GRL limit
- Organization and illustration of the manuscript make it too difficult to review fairly
- English usage, grammar, and/or spelling errors are endemic and require substantial copy-editing before this manuscript can be reviewed adequately

Highlights: GRL is now highlighting several manuscripts in each issue. Science Category 1 manuscripts are potentially highlightable. If you feel that the manuscript you are reviewing is particularly exciting and deserves to be highlighted, please include in your review a short note as to its importance.

The Editors of GRL rely on the counsel and recommendations of reviewers in order to maintain the quality of the journal and meet GRL's specific criteria. Please recognize that the final decision on a manuscript is made solely by the Editor using the expertise of several reviewers and based on the above GRL criteria.

Michael J. Prather
Editor-in-Chief
15 March 1999

References

Montgomery, S. L., *The Chicago guide to communicating science*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2003.