

# Reviewing for the journal of vascular surgery, cases, innovations and techniques (JVS-CIT): A “how to” guide for reviewers

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The quality of the *Journal of Vascular Surgery Cases, Innovations and Techniques* (JVS-CIT) depends on the quality of peer review. As surgeon scientists, reviewers, and editors, we share a common interest in moving vascular surgery forward, and there is no journal more uniquely suited to push these boundaries than JVS-CIT, which highlights cutting-edge innovations and techniques. Reviewers share the important responsibility of highlighting the duality of history and novelty in our field. The following guidelines provide a framework of reference for reviewers for JVS-CIT and other journals.

## PASSION ELEVATES CONTENT

Reviewing requires committed time and devotion. Whether your interests are collecting grunge rock posters from 1989 or growing hybrid tea roses, passions aren't found, they're developed.<sup>1</sup>

We share an unbridled enthusiasm for vascular surgery, and reviewers at JVS-CIT are encouraged to put forward the passion of the music collector or seasoned gardener when reviewing. Reviewers may designate areas of interest and expertise, affording them a unique opportunity to expand their own knowledge in emerging technology. Through the process of investment and development, passion will elevate content.

## THE REVIEWER AS A CONTRIBUTOR

Wondering where to start with a review? Write down your general thoughts. What stood out? How did it make you feel? Is the manuscript relevant and interesting? Is it novel? Does it have merit? First impressions make a difference. Like walking into a movie theater or buying a book, anticipation is part of the review process.

You will know right away whether you are walking into “The Empire Strikes Back” or “Caravan of Courage: An Ewok Adventure.” Abstracts deliver the first impression and should convey in a clear and effective manner why the case or technique is important. An eye for potential is paramount. The primary aim of a review is not only to judge content but to improve the quality of presentation.<sup>2</sup> In other words, don't just ask if a manuscript “moves the needle” but rather “what could be done to help it move the needle”? Furthermore, assessing suitability for publication specifically in JVS-CIT is important. While a paper might be wonderfully written, if its topic area would not be of interest to readers of our journal, this should be noted. General thoughts on the quality of the paper and its suitability for publication should be placed in the “Comments for Editor” section of the review and are an important way to provide your thoughts on the paper to the editorial team.

## CLARITY IN COMMENTS

Peer review ultimately is the comprehensive assessment of content, methodology, originality, strengths, weaknesses, ethics, and the presentation of information.<sup>3</sup> Honest assessment and constructive criticism can be difficult to deliver. Be clear, specific, concise, and respectful. Clear questions and comments will receive clear answers.<sup>4</sup> If something is not clear, let the authors know you could not understand and offer suggestions. While formatting details and spelling are important to the review process, focus should be given to the content and overall presentation. Manuscripts may have spelling or grammatical errors. If these are significant, this can be mentioned to the editors; however, be aware that the publishers have copyediting teams available that can help authors clean up manuscripts if the content underlying these errors is appropriate for JVS-CIT. An introduction or discussion may need a complete overhaul; help the authors refocus and provide clear, specific, and concise direction for how they can improve. A good review will briefly summarize the study and the author's conclusions while identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript.

## THE HUMBLE REFEREE

In their 2002 commentary on reviewing manuscripts for the *Journal of the American Medical Association*

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(JAMA), Peter Cummings, MD, MPH, and Frederick Rivara, MD, MPH, remind reviewers to keep in mind the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”<sup>5</sup> Approach a manuscript as if it were written by a colleague with the aim of improving their contribution. Be curious and critical in your review, and most importantly, show humility. Reviews should be constructive and courteous. If you think a manuscript is substandard, let the editor know. Do not hesitate to point out the flaws of the work or scientific method but do so in a manner that is consistent with the professional standards of JVS-CIT. “Reviewer comments to the author” is not the place to be condescending, hurtful, or unnecessarily derogatory to the author. Even if you feel the manuscript does not merit publication, showing respect for the time the authors took in writing the paper is warranted. While JVS-CIT may not be the appropriate venue for a publication, your comments may help them improve the manuscript for publication in a more suitable setting.

### EQUITABLE REVIEW

Reviewers should not accept an invitation to review if you are unable to judge a manuscript impartially or have a potential conflict of interest. Reviewing for JVS-CIT is a privilege and responsibility. All manuscripts should be treated as confidential and should not be shared or distributed in any manner. Avoid making statements about acceptance or rejection in your review as the decision for publication is at the discretion of the editorial team, not the reviewer.

### CONTEXT MATTERS

Thomas Bower, MD, the 44th president of the Society for Clinical Vascular Surgery, offers a notable reminder: “you got to know your roots.” As a reviewer of emerging innovations and techniques, it is critically important to have an understanding and appreciation for the historical management of vascular disease. When reviewing the case of a subacute type B aortic dissection, it is important to ask if the authors provide context and consideration for the historical standard of care and alternative therapies.<sup>6</sup> Authors should reflect on the past, present, and future of the approach or technology

described. Reviewers should also be aware that due to the novelty of some procedures, there may be very little in the current literature describing newer techniques or providing significant support for techniques described.

**Find your process.** Reviewing is an art. Much like Major League Baseball scouts who evaluate players to determine if they possess the skills and talent to play professional baseball, reviewers develop critical observation skills by leaning into a strong foundation of knowledge and by honing their craft through frequent reviewing. William Stoops, PhD, editor of *Experimental and Clinical Psychopharmacology*, has a three-step process for reviewing: read the manuscript once without making comments or taking notes; mark up the manuscript with comments; and finally, complete the rating form.<sup>7</sup> Other reviewers do it all electronically with one window open with the manuscript, and the second with the reviewer submission form, using the latter to take notes in real time. Whatever your process, identify a method that is reproducible and works for you.

Reviewers are the “life-blood” and an under-recognized critical component of peer-reviewed publications. This voluntary work is important in not only appraising the suitability of publication but also improving the manuscripts that are ultimately accepted. “THANK YOU” to our pool of reviewers for JVS-CIT!

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