

Tips for JGIM Reviewers of Concise Research Reports

Thank you for agreeing to be a reviewer for JGIM. For both new and experienced reviewers, we have a few tips for writing helpful reviews from our perspective as both editors and authors. The overriding theme is to be clear so that there is no chance for misunderstanding, or the need for guessing or interpretation on the author and editor's parts. Of course, either author or editor may disagree with you, but they should disagree with your points, not with their misunderstanding of your suggestions.

Domains that are commonly commented on include:

1) The importance/novelty of the article. Many concise research reports may serve to confirm (or refute) previous findings rather than being completely new observations. If not novel, the article needs to explain how it relates to previous research and how it contributes to current knowledge; 2) the appropriateness of the methods used; 3) the accuracy of the interpretation of the data and whether the conclusions appropriately flow from the data; 4) the generalizability and implications of the article and 5) clarity of the writing.

Concise Research Reports limit the author to no more than 700 words and no more than 2 tables or figures. Consequently, the author will make difficult choices about what to include. While we do not want to publish flawed concise research, usually there will be enough information provided to allow the reader to be confident the authors followed sufficiently rigorous methods. Sometimes this information can be moved to tables or figures. For example, if this is an analysis of a weighted database, instead of providing information about the weighting in the methods, there could be an annotation to the results table stating that the results were weighted. The background will generally be very brief, with as few as one or two sentences. The methods will be brief, but should have enough information to imply adequate rigor. Results should focus on the specific point being made by the article, though some supporting information can be in the results, this latter information may be in tables rather than in the text (for example demographic information). Typically, the bulk of the paper will be in the discussion. The authors should provide information about why these results are important, how it contributes to the current literature and suggest directions for future research. The conclusion should be brief, perhaps no more than one or two sentences.

Other generic tips for reviewing are provided below:

1) Be specific and give examples. General statements such as not a significant contribution, clinically unimportant, and poorly analyzed are not very useful without more details. Authors get frustrated trying to guess what parts of their manuscript need to be improved, and editors essentially need to do a review from scratch to fill in the void.

2) Suggest corrective actions if possible.

3) Cover the major areas. Is the paper a useful original contribution? Is the paper appropriate for the JGIM audience? Are the methods and analysis valid and clear? Are the tables and figures clear and a good use of space? Are the writing and presentation clear and concise? Is the

literature review current and does it place the study in appropriate context? Are the conclusions valid? Is the discussion insightful? Most reviews are 1-3 pages in length.

4) Prioritize your concerns. It helps both author and editor to know what are the major issues that must be addressed, and which ones are minor and not as critical to the survival of a paper.

5) Be respectful of the authors. Scholarship is difficult and criticism is not pleasant to receive. Be fair and critical but make your comments in the tone that you would want to receive.

6) Be frank when making confidential comments to the editor. This section allows you to make comments that the author does not see. These comments may include your opinions about whether the manuscript is ultimately worth publishing. Please only use this section for comments you do NOT want the author to see. A common mistake is to put suggestions that would have been useful to the author in this section. Another common mistake is to put the same information in both the confidential comment and the author section. It is fine to leave this section blank if you have no confidential comments to make.

7) Do not convey different messages to the author and editor. It is really confusing and sometimes even hurtful to an author to have a reviewer "be kind" or even positive in his or her comments to the author and harsh (rejecting the manuscript) to the editor. It is not being kind. Good, accurate criticism should always be provided back to the author. Moreover, if you give generally positive feedback to the authors without raising significant concerns and then recommend to the editor that the paper be rejected, you will have created a communication problem that the editor will need to fix.

8) Especially for new reviewers, do not be shy. Act as the expert. You were chosen because you have some expertise, either as a reader of the literature or a contributor to this or related literature. Do not hold back.