

EDITORIAL

Reviewers Efforts Well Appreciated

“If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants”

Sir Isaac Newton

It is great pleasure that *Defence Science Journal (DSJ)* is in the sixty-second year of publication. We have been delighted with, but also admittedly taken aback at, the sheer weight of submissions that we have received. In servicing such a huge amount of submissions, we have relied on what seems like a small reviewer’s database. To each and every one of those reviewers, we extend our sincere thanks, for without them, we genuinely would not have been able to run the *Journal*. We believe that reviewing is a vital part of the publication process, and also a vital part of being a scholar. It was one of our stated aims to ensure consistently excellent reviews at *DSJ*, and we believe we are well on the way to providing that. We passionately hope that each submitting author has been pleased with the contribution of the reviewers, if not always with the final decision made by the Editor in light of those reviews.

Most importantly, the quality and supports of the reviews themselves was paramount. Those who accept a reasonable number of papers, and return high-quality reviews on time, are the Editors’ best friends – although we of course recognise that not all peers are able to devote the same amount of time to this service. Certainly, we would expect a reviewer to only accept reviews to which they were able to devote sufficient effort and time. Reviewing a manuscript allows critical challenges to the theory development, data collection and analysis methods and the claimed contributions to knowledge of the researchers, as a process to test the rigour and relevance of their research.

It is important to realise a strategy for review for every manuscript. What we mean is that reviewers are not selected at random. Certainly here at *DSJ* we make strenuous efforts to assign manuscripts to reviewers who have some interest and expertise in the area—which we make clear in our invitation letters. This can be challenging, and we do not always get it right, but we believe that this helps ensure better quality reviews. What this means from the reviewer’s perspective is that it helps to have some idea of why you have been approached.

A reviewer has been chosen because of interests and areas of expertise in the field. In most cases, they are not chosen only to point out typos and spelling errors in the manuscript. While these are indeed important to note if necessary, the job of the reviewer is to evaluate the substantive scientific merit of the paper. Seldom is a paper so well constructed at first review that only spelling errors are worth commenting on. On the other hand, the job of the reviewer is not to criticise purely for the sake of it. It is always positive for reviewers to realise that there are alternative ways of looking at every issue, and it is rarely a case of ‘right and wrong’. It is the reviewer’s professional obligation to put forth their opinion on the various components of the article, justify these opinions, and suggest improvements. It then becomes the Editor’s job to take all of this into account and make a decision.

A reviewer should be supportive and constructive in the comments, but also honest with opinions. With the latter in mind, remember that it is the Editor who will make the decision on a manuscript in light of the reviews, but not necessarily in agreement with them. Here at *DSJ* we do not simply ‘average out’ the review

ratings and make a decision. Instead, we look at the reviewers’ comments and the manuscript, and make our decision informed by them. Sometimes, your opinions will differ from those of other reviewers’, and we will make a different decision from that which you recommended. Occasionally we will even make a different decision than that recommended by all three reviewers.

Our view is that reviews are only truly helpful if they are objective, constructive, carried out in a neutral and unbiased way, and are beneficial to both the authors and Editors. A good review is constructively critical, but provides detailed advice on how the content and presentation can be enhanced. However, a good review also provides justification of criticisms, and reasons why the reviewer considers that certain changes should be made. This overall approach to reviewing is, in our view, the approach, which is consistent with the scientific method. At one point a reviewer may consider that the research is excellent and that the issues to be addressed are mostly to do with clarification. At the other point a reviewer may consider that the research is poor and that many substantial issues need to be addressed. However, at both points the principle of reviewing should be the same; that of helping the authors enhance their research, and helping the Editors judge whether the manuscript is ready for/worthy of publication.

A good review should be a constructive critique to test the rigour and relevance of a manuscript, which is helpful to the authors for enhancing their work. It is our view that a reviewer should always review manuscripts consistently, holding them to their own personal standards of rigour and relevance. *Defence Science Journal* operates in Open Journal Systems, which is open source journal management and publishing software. There are four ways in which reviewers can make their thoughts known. First of all, there is a table of specific headings where comments can be entered. These boxes are probably best for brief evaluations of the relevant area, not detailed comments. They do not automatically go to authors, so if substantive comment is in there, the Editors must cut and paste this into a review for the authors if they wish them to see it. There is also a ‘comments to editor’ box, where the reviewer should put their uncensored thoughts about the paper and their recommendation for publication (or not). Nothing in this area will ever be seen by the authors. There is a specific ‘comments to authors’ area, where the substantive content of the review can be entered. However, reviewers often find it easier to type their review in a word processor, and upload it as a separate file rather than type or paste it into the box. We are very happy for reviewers to upload review files if they wish also.

We would also like to stress the value of reviewing, not just to the manuscript author and editor, but to the reviewer as well. Reviewing is a chance to clarify one’s thoughts on a subject, and to have a genuine impact on the development of scholarship in a field. As we say in many of our emails to reviewers; good quality reviews and reviewers really do make the difference for a top-quality journal.

Sudhanshu Bhushan
Defence Science Journal