

How to Write a (Seminar) Peer Review?

Malte Helmert

University of Basel

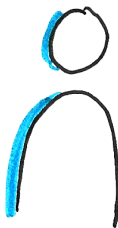
Let's Go!

Peer Reviews

peer review = a **review** conducted by a **peer**

- **review**: a report on a piece of work, for example a text
- **goals**: evaluate quality, help improve the work
- **peer**: authors and reviewers are on the same level
- main quality control mechanism in scientific research

Goals



Review Author (You)

- practice critical reading
- improve your own writing
- practice giving feedback
- learn something new



Report Author

- gets feedback
- improves writing
- improves structure
- improves grade

Get Familiar with the Report

- skim the report first
- then read the report thoroughly
- take notes while reading
 - which parts are unclear?
 - where did you get lost?
 - any gaps or missing pieces?
 - less important: typos

Properties of Good Reviews

write the review you want to receive

- plan enough time for reading/writing
- submit on time
- be constructive
- be detailed and specific
- justify arguments with examples
- be honest but polite
- also highlight things you liked

Aspects of a Review

Aspects of a Review

- focus on **different aspects**
 - summary
 - clarity
 - soundness
 - scholarship
 - (relevance, novelty and significance)
 - minor comments
- consider them **independently**
- not a fixed structure
 - ↪ discuss more or fewer aspects if it makes sense

Summary

Content

- (very) short summary of the report
 - use your own words
-
- demonstrates that you understood the text
 - shows author how text was received
 - main points clear?
 - focus as intended?
 - story/structure clear?

Clarity

Content

- How well written is the report?
 - Is the structure easy to follow?
 - Is it easy to read?
-
- not about spelling mistakes, etc.
 - ↪ “Minor Comments”
 - unless there is tons of them
 - spell-check your report before submission!
 - point out bad style
 - but realize that styles other than yours can be good
 - be **constructive** and not aggressive

Soundness

Content

- Is the **formal background** complete and consistent?
 - Are the **main arguments** supported sufficiently?
 - Are the **proofs** correct?
-
- not only formal proofs but also argumentation
 - consider the details but don't be too picky
 - small errors go under "Minor Comments"

Scholarship

Content

- Is related work sufficiently cited and discussed?
- Are the references complete and in good shape?
- Recommend **additional sources** if you know something the author missed
- Check the bibliography as well
 - bibtex entries copied from Google Scholar are often incomplete

Relevance, Novelty and Significance

Content

- How well does this fit with the conference/journal (relevance)?
 - Is the presented work revolutionary or incremental (novelty)?
 - How much of an impact will the results probably make (significance)?
-
- used to keep a conference/journal theme
 - used to decide if the results are important enough to be published
 - not applicable for our seminar

Minor Comments

Content

- catch-all group for other comments
 - typos, spelling, grammar, style, ...
-
- **unrelated to main message** of the review
 - make suggestions easy to address
 - page numbers and sentence context
 - be **specific and constructive**
 - you can include an annotated version of the text for this

Receiving a Peer Review

How to Receive a Peer Review

When you receive a review

- be **gracious** even if you disagree
 - someone took the time to read your work
 - and give you feedback
- fix the problems
- if the reviewer misunderstood
 - identify where they got lost
 - **improve** the section to avoid this misunderstanding

be prepared and willing to make changes