

REVIEWER FATIGUE: YOU CANNOT TURN A BLIND EYE

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We have all been there. We are sitting at our computers, blithely working away on our next big publication, when all of the sudden...the inbox dings. Immediately thoughts turn to who it could be: a paper acceptance? a colleague wanting to meet for lunch? a student desperately needing help? With the unbounded excitement you switch tabs only to see:

The following paper has been submitted to XYZ Journal and you have been identified as a possible reviewer.

Today more than ever, the field of business has become publish or perish. In the college of business, while historically only those blessed with a tenure track position were considered appropriate for and expected to provide peer reviewers, those who teach for a living now too are being called upon to publish in some form to maintain scholarly academic or practitioner status.

According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, in 2022 there were approximately 100,000 college level business teachers in the US, a number expected to grow by roughly 8% by 2025. If we look at this in an oversimplified manner, presuming that everyone publishes two papers every five years, that is 40,000 papers going out for review every year. So for ever one of those papers, two reviewers are needed, calling for a grand total of 80,000 reviewers. Of course this is only accounting for researchers in The United States of America...but you get the picture.

While lists such as Cabells, UT-Dallas 24, and the Australian Business Deans Council all use different metrics to make statements about the quality of a journal, one thing remains constant: double blind reviews. These reviews serve as the standard bearers for quality and in many ways, the only manner in which researchers can get feedback on their papers. Rarely does an institution employ two people with identical research agendas and if they do, its likely they are collaborators; thus, by sending out the papers and providing one another with input, we are in a way exhibiting the only citizenship behaviors we can to our colleagues across institutions.

Much like fundraising fatigue, crisis fatigue, and Zoom fatigue, reviewer fatigue is a true problem in academia today. Not only does it call into question the quality of journals themselves, as the quality of the journal is only as good as the quality of the review, but also the timelines for the researchers. While many journals offer a six week turn around, I have seen firsthand it taking six weeks just to engage a reviewer...let alone get the review back!

But, I get it. As I write this essay, I have thirteen student papers to grade, five papers of my own to finish, a data set that needs cleaned, and an entirely separate journal with over twenty articles needing processed, let along the ones needing reviewers....and I almost forgot: I have a life outside of academia (in theory at least). I have no desire to review a paper today but I am going to fight through my reviewer fatigue and help.

Reviewer Fatigue is a real thing and the lack of credit we receive for doing it should be a topic for discussion at every annual review this year and in every accreditation meeting.

We should be commended for helping one another as well as sharing our own insights with those trying to add to the knowledge base. We should practice the golden rule and help others as we expect to help them and be rewarded for it.

So the next time your inbox dings and its that journal asking for a review, take a deep breath, get a coffee, and set aside an hour to help out your colleague. Or better still, reach out to your favorite journal now and offer your services to serve on the review board so that the editor knows ahead of time that they can count on your service.

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