



How to Encourage Best Peer Reviewers: An Empiric Approach

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As editors of international journals, we are always challenged with picking the most relevant, available and highly skilled peer reviewers and receiving their comments on time. When relevant reviewers are selected, no-one can guarantee that the reviews will be submitted on time. One way to encourage the reviewers submit their comments and evaluations on time, or with minimal delays, is to implement 'spiritual' privileges. That option can be particularly helpful for traditional subscription journals, where authors do not pay any submission, processing, or publishing fees. In response to timely submission of reviews by responsible referees, journal editors can do a favor and process the referees' own manuscripts as high priority items. Of course, such a favorable attitude does not mean that mistakes in the study design, statistical analyses and interpretation of the results, ethical misconduct, or poor language can be tolerated and overlooked. Editors can use their reserves, add more rigor and invest more time for speeding up proper reviewing and editing of the most responsible reviewers' submissions.

In such a favorable scenario, timeline of manuscript processing can be shortened by limiting periods before and after the acceptance of external reviewers' comments. In other words, the duration of 'with editor' status of the manuscripts can be decreased to a few hours-days (instead of few weeks-month for

lower priority items). Furthermore, timeframe for external review itself can be diminished to 7-14 days for priority items (instead of 3-4 weeks for regular submissions).

As an official recognition of the best reviewers' quality and timely contributions, editors should publicize their names in the annual acknowledgments on the journal websites and in print issues. Fortunately, more and more journal editors pay attention to these gestures of courtesy and specify the number of times their best referees contribute annually. Of course, frequent contributors (more than four reviews a year) deserve special attention and a range of rewards.

To encourage the best reviewers further, publishers of online journals can waive or discount their publication fees. The same waivers and discounts are applicable to registration fees of conferences and seminars which are organized by the publishers. Last but not least importantly, financial rewards of varying degree can be arranged for the best reviewers annually.

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