

## JVP REVIEWER'S GUIDE

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Peer reviewers play a critical role in the success of the Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology and their thoughtful efforts are greatly appreciated by editors and by authors. JVP editors rely on reviewers to judge the quality and scientific value of a manuscript, and authors rely on reviewer insights to improve their publications (and catch some mistakes).

Just as manuscripts vary widely in their quality, however, so do reviews; some are extremely helpful, and others are much less so. This guide is intended to provide reviewers with a succinct overview of the JVP review process, and to help clarify the most important aspects of a review.

### 1. Manuscript Central

- Reviewing takes place via Manuscript Central (<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jvp>).
- For technical details about MC, download the Reviewer Quick Start Guide (from the front page, follow the “User Tutorials” link on the right side).
- You can create a user account on MC even if you haven't been invited to review anything yet; from the front page, follow the “Create Account” link at the top. It is important to include keywords, because this helps editors search for prospective reviewers.

### 2. Manuscript Submission and Review Process

- Manuscripts are submitted via Manuscript Central.
- The manuscript is checked by a Technical Editor to make sure that it is generally compatible with JVP guidelines for length, formatting, etc.
- The manuscript is assigned to a Senior Editor, who assesses the potential suitability of the paper for the journal. The manuscript is then passed to an Editor who solicits reviews (usually two) via e-mails sent by MC. These e-mails include the title, author(s), and abstract of the manuscript.
- It is very helpful to the editors if potential reviewers have updated their key words.
- Reviewers accept invitations either by e-mailing the editor or by following the hotlink in their invitation. Once they have accepted, they can view the manuscript files and enter a review.
- Reviews are to be returned *within four weeks*. Reminder e-mails are sent if the review has not been received within this time frame.
- A review consists of the completed review form (online) and either a list of comments and corrections pasted into the comments area, or an attached manuscript pdf, Word, or RTF file annotated with the reviewer's comments.
- Based in part on reviewer comments and judgments of significance, the Editor makes a recommendation to the Senior Editor, who then makes a final decision on the manuscript.
  - Accepted manuscripts generally require no further modification except minor copy editing and generally do not require further author input.
  - Minor revision indicates that reviewers' (and editor's) suggestions must be incorporated prior to acceptance (which is not guaranteed); such changes normally must be submitted within 90 days.
  - Major revision indicates that the manuscript may eventually be publishable in JVP and is of sufficient importance that it should be, but that substantial changes including additional research or analysis (and another round of reviews) are necessary.
  - Rejection means that the editors have decided that JVP should not publish the manuscript even if extensively revised. Authors are not encouraged to resubmit rejected manuscripts but should look for an alternative publication venue.

### 3. Guidelines for reviewing manuscript

- a) **Review a manuscript only if you can do so objectively.** Editors seek to prevent conflicts of interest by avoiding the solicitation of reviewers who share significant professional or personal relationships with any of the authors. The goal is to use reviewers who will evaluate the paper based solely on its merits and not let their evaluation be influenced by a personal relationship with the authors of the potential for personal or professional gain.

Unless you choose to reveal yourself to the authors during review and are publicly acknowledged as a reviewer, you should not reveal your identify. You are under ethical obligations to not make public the contents of the manuscript or to use any information in the manuscript until it is published, unless the author provides explicit permission for you to do so.

- b) **Review a manuscript only if you can do so in a timely manner.**  
If you are too busy and cannot review a manuscript in a timely manner, don't do it. JVP has set a guideline of four weeks as an acceptable time for reviewing a manuscript. If you can't review a manuscript it is very helpful to recommend to the editor an alternative expert as an appropriate reviewer. If you agree to a review a manuscript and circumstances prevent you from submitting your review in a timely manner you should consult the relevant editor as soon as possible.
- c) **Understand your role.** As a reviewer, you are a consultant to the Editor and have been selected for your expertise in a particular field. Your job is to evaluate the rigor and originality of the science and the clarity of writing. On the basis of the advice of two reviewers (three if there is a difference of opinion) the Editor decides whether a manuscript should be accepted, returned to the authors for revisions, or rejected. An Editor's decision is, in turn, evaluated by a Senior Editor who renders the final decision. You may be asked to review another version of the manuscript to assess whether the manuscript has been modified sufficiently in response to criticisms, comments, or suggestions.
- d) **Recognize the author's efforts and the merits of the work while being clear in identifying weaknesses.** Manuscript reviews should include a positive assessment of aspects in which the paper succeeds so that the authors have a sense of what they have done well. Reviews should always be written in a respectful and civil manner. It is also crucial that reviewers be explicit when identifying problems with the manuscript.
- e) **Be critical but constructive.** Whenever possible, reviewers should provide constructive advice to authors on how to improve their research and how to communicate their results more clearly. Support criticisms by reference to other published work or a succinct discussion of the problems encountered: unsubstantiated dismissal of another's work does not constitute a rigorous evaluation.
- f) **Be judicious in suggesting additional work.** As a reviewer you may wish to pass some suggestions to the authors that you do not consider essential for the manuscript. But be sure and differentiate your suggestions that you consider essential from those that could be part of a future study. All studies can potentially be improved by 'further work', but only suggest additional work that is absolutely necessary for the authors to support their hypotheses or achieve their stated aims.

## An Author's Options for Responding to Critical Reviews

As an author it is important that you accept that the review process helps to ensure that the best science is published. Although receiving criticism can be difficult, authors can turn reviewers' criticisms into something constructive. Ask yourself whether the reviewers have made valid points that you can address to improve your work. If it seems that the reviewers missed important points, ask yourself whether you communicated your findings clearly. Once you have made an honest analysis of your reviews and your manuscript, if you feel that a mistake was made in evaluating your manuscript, and then defend your position with a thoughtful rebuttal in your response to the editors based on evidence.

### 4. Getting Started

Go to the JVP area at ManuscriptCentral (<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jvp>), enter your Reviewer Area, and you should see the manuscript listed near the top of the page under "Review and Score." To see the combined PDF file of the manuscript, click on "View Submission." To complete your review, including viewing all the manuscript files, click on the button under "Perform Review."

The row of buttons across the upper third of the next window will let you examine the HTML version of the manuscript, the combined PDF file, or Supplementary Files (if any) for web publication. You can access the original manuscript files (Word or RTF files and figures) under "Original Files", so that you can annotate the original file using highlights or 'track changes', though keep in mind that each method you use has a different level of confidentiality.

The tab "Score Sheet" near the upper right corner of the screen will take you to the review form. You may save a partially completed review for later completion by clicking the Save as Draft button at the bottom of the form.

### 5. The Score Sheet

The reviewing form should be completed on line. It includes several parts: **Manuscript Evaluation—Your** rating of different aspects of the manuscript:

- Organization
  - Is the manuscript divided into helpful sections? Could there be more or fewer?
  - Does the manuscript have a logical flow? Does the reader go from A to B to C or from A to D to B to E?
  - Are the topics covered in each section necessary? Are they sufficient?
  - Are the tables and figures (and references to them) well integrated?
- Presentation:
  - Is the manuscript written well? How is the grammar, spelling, punctuation?
  - Does the manuscript appear to have been carefully crafted or are there many careless mistakes?
  - Are the figure and table captions informative?
  - Are the tables succinct and necessary?
- Scientific Content
  - Are the data presented sufficient to support the conclusions?
  - Are the references necessary and sufficient?
  - Are the arguments well reasoned? Are alternative interpretations possible?
  - Should data be analyzed differently?
  - Should additional data be incorporated?
  - Are all the "facts" valid and accurately presented?
- Illustrations
  - Are they of high quality and well designed?
  - Can the relevant anatomy be seen easily?
  - Are they consistent in format (lettering, scale bars, etc.)?
  - Could any be eliminated? Could some be added?
  - Are charts and graphs of the appropriate type for the type of data presented?

**Significance**—How important is this manuscript relative to others that JVP might publish?

<b>Significance</b>	
How would you rate the overall significance of this paper?	
( )	<b>5- High</b>
( )	<b>4</b>
( <b>X</b> )	<b>3</b>
( )	<b>2</b>
( )	<b>1 - Low</b>

- This is probably the second most important part of the review form (after the overall recommendation). An article can be technically perfect, yet be of little significance. Similarly, a highly significant article can be presented poorly. It is up to the reviewer to differentiate between these categories and pass that information on to the editor.
  - *VP generally publishes only significant or highly significant papers.*

**Manuscript Specifics**—Your responses to certain questions, details to be provided below.

- Most of these questions are straightforward. It is helpful if a reviewer’s answers to these do not contradict their answers in other parts of the review form (e.g., a paper rated “1” for significance probably shouldn’t be judged as “an important contribution”).

<b>Manuscript Specifics Questionnaire</b>	Yes	No
1. Is this an important contribution to vertebrate paleontology?	( <b>X</b> )	( )
2. Could the paper be condensed by a significant amount?	( <b>X</b> )	( )
3. Are the illustrations adequate?	( <b>X</b> )	( )
4. Is the taxonomy up-to-date?	( <b>X</b> )	( )
5. Are the descriptions, diagnoses, and identifications satisfactory?	( )	( <b>X</b> )
6. Is the material adequately curated in a recognized institution?	( <b>X</b> )	( )
7. Are the title and abstract informative?	( <b>X</b> )	( )
8. Are the references adequate, current, and pertinent?	( <b>X</b> )	( )
<b>Please expand on your answers to the above questions with 'Comments for the Editor' box below.</b>		

- Please heed the note at the bottom; *detailed explanations of answers to these questions are very helpful for both the editor and the author(s)*. Those details should be presented in the Comments to Authors and Editors sections (see below).
- Given publication costs and limited journal space, suggestions for condensing a paper are especially helpful (#2). Such suggestions could include combining/eliminating figures and or tables, moving parts of the manuscript to supplementary online information, eliminating sections of the text that aren’t particularly relevant, etc.
- Please pay special attention to whether the taxonomy is accurate and up-to-date (#4). This is one aspect of a manuscript that can be unfamiliar to a non-specialist. Also, are all scientific names spelled correctly and italicized?
- In terms of references (#8), are there additional references that should be included? Have some been included that could be eliminated? Are all cited references (including those cited in figure and table captions, etc.) listed at the end of the paper? Are any listed references not cited in the text?

**Manuscript Evaluation**—your overall recommendation to the editor:

Overall Recommendation	
( )	Accept
( )	Minor Revision
(X)	Major Revision
( )	Reject

- This decision should probably be made last, after careful consideration has been given to the remainder of the form (and the included comments).
  - Accept: no changes at all are necessary except minor copy editing.
  - Minor revision: changes are necessary (perhaps many), including significant improvements to figures, but such changes do not dramatically affect the conclusions of the paper, they can be incorporated relatively easily, and they do not require significant additional analysis or research.
  - Major revision: changes are necessary that affect the fundamental conclusions of the paper, substantial reworking of the manuscript is necessary, or additional analysis and research is required. Sometimes judging between minor and major revision is difficult, and you can explain your reasoning in the comments to the editor, whose final decision will be based on the other review(s) and her/his own judgment.
  - Reject: this should not be published by JVP (can be for a variety of reasons). Being explicit in one’s review will help the editor make an accurate recommendation. Sometimes a “minor revision” from one reviewer is equivalent to “major revision” from another. It is up to the editor to sort this out, based on the rest of the review form and the specific comments of the reviewers.

**Comments for Editors and Authors**—Your explanations for the above ratings and any other details can be included in the “comments for editor” box and/or the “comments for authors” box on the review form.

The image shows a screenshot of the 'Comments' section of a review form. It consists of two text input boxes. The top box is labeled 'Confidential comments for the Editor' and the bottom box is labeled 'Comments and suggestions for the Authors'. Both boxes are empty and have a small diagonal icon in the bottom right corner.

- The editor sees both sets of comments; the author(s) only see(s) the latter. If you have confidential comments, put those in the editor box. If you have only comments that the authors can see, paste all your comments in the author(s) box; the editor will still see them.

**Signing Your Review**—The reviewer can choose to remain anonymous or to sign the review. The decision is entirely up to the reviewer.

- To sign the review, simply include your name in the “Comments and suggestions for the Authors” box. If you omit to sign, your review will be anonymous by default unless you attach a file that contains your identity.

## 5. Annotating and Commenting on the Manuscript Files

As a reviewer, you may either

1. download the original text file (Word or RTF) from the Details page at the reviewer web site, mark up the file using highlights or 'Track Changes', and attach this file to your review, or
2. compile a Word or RTF document listing specific comments about the text by referring to numbered lines on particular pages of the pdf, and then either paste this information into the Comments box(es) on the review form or else attach this file to your review, or
3. annotate the PDF itself using the Adobe Acrobat commenting tools (see instructions below) and attach the annotated file.

Use the option that is most convenient for you. Keep in mind that anonymity is more difficult to guarantee if you annotate the pdf or Word file.

Some reviewers provide detailed suggestions for improving a manuscript's format, spelling, grammar, and style, and some carefully check the literature citations against the Literature Cited section. These contributions are very helpful to the editors, but investment of large amounts of time is not a requirement of all reviewers. In lieu of making detailed corrections, reviewers might provide general comments on the number of such errors if they have been encountered while preparing the review. A paper that has many such problems should be revised by the author(s), often with the help of a colleague with editorial experience.

**How to Directly Annotate the PDF File**—To use the Acrobat tools, simply open the .pdf file using Acrobat (full version, not Acrobat Reader). If the Commenting Tools (Commenting & Markup Tools in newer versions) are not visible, go to the Tools Menu, scroll to Commenting (& Markup), and select Show Commenting (& Markup) Toolbar. The tools should appear. Alternatively, you can pull each tool individually from the "Tools" menu under "Commenting".

The most useful of the tools are the Text Edits tool and the (Sticky) Note Tool. To use the text edit tool, click on the tool and then make the text correction on the document just as you would in a word processing program. Once you hit return, the edit marks needed to indicate your changes will be added automatically. To place a note at any point in the manuscript, click the Note Tool, and then click on the location where you want to put a note. A yellow box will come up in which you can type an editorial note.

**IMPORTANT:** if you wish to remain anonymous, you must delete your name from the header of the note. To do this, right-click and select preferences on the note, or click options if you are using a Mac, and delete your name. To set this as a default, right click (option click on the Mac) on the small note symbol in the document (NOT on the note itself) and select "Set as default". This way you will not have to delete your name from each note you add. However, you must do this for each different type of editing tool and again for each different manuscript that you edit this way.

Marking up the original file or using Acrobat tools on the .pdf file generated by Manuscript Central will save a reviewer from the tedious task of transcribing marginalia compiling a list of remarks into the comments window of the review page. However, be sure to attach the edited file to your review. There is a button for this at the bottom of the review form. Editing of original or .pdf files is not required but is encouraged, as it is a quick and easy way of submitting corrections and comments.

## 6. Completing the Review

Have you:

- Examined the complete manuscript including its figures, tables, and supplementary files?
- Completed the review form by clicking on the presented choices?
- Pasted or typed your comments to author and editor into the review form?
- Signed the review (in the Comments to Authors box) or intentionally omitted signing?
- Attached any annotated files or list of comments?

You may complete your review by clicking the Submit button at the bottom of the review form. A record of your review will be saved for your future reference in the Scores Submitted listed of your Reviewer Center on ManuscriptCentral. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of your colleagues and your discipline!