

MIS Quarterly

The Reviewer Role¹ at MISQ

MISQ Roles

There are four critical roles in the reviewing of manuscripts at MISQ in addition to the role of the Minnesota staff. These are (1) the authorial role, (2) the reviewer role, (3) the AE role, and (4) the SE role. For each of these, a descriptive document has been prepared and is available for perusal by the entire IS community at <http://www.misq.org>. Each document has been written from the perspective of those enacting a given role.

Overview of Reviewer Role

The reviewer works in close cooperation with the AE, who incorporates your assessment of manuscripts and forwards her/his recommendation to the SE, who is the final decision-maker in reviewing submissions for *MISQ*. Your role is to carefully read the paper you have been asked to review, to determine its strengths and weaknesses and indicate your overall conclusion about the publishability of the paper.

For a fuller description of how you should think about reviewing papers, please see Allen Lee's article on this topic (<http://www.misq.org/LeeReviewing.pdf>).

Personal Rewards of Serving as Reviewer

The greatest reward a reviewer is likely to experience is the deep satisfaction of knowing you are reviewing novel and exciting research and bringing this work to the eyes of the community. In nearly all cases, these papers would not be nearly as effective were it not for your assistance as a reviewer in developing and sculpting the intellectual content.

When a paper you have reviewed appears in pre-print or print, you will experience contentment, even pleasure that your hard work has helped a colleague or group of colleagues and your assistance has elevated this work to the point where it can receive the attention it is due. In many cases, you will also be able to enjoy the progression of these ideas as they are utilized and cited by other researchers and the ideas grow and become refined over time.

Another tangible benefit of serving as reviewer is that you are at the intellectual heart of the discipline. Not only will you see early versions of exhilarating work that will, no doubt, influence your own thinking, but you will also be part of an organization that recognizes such work through "Best Paper" awards and other acknowledgments.

¹Terms-of-art in this document include: SE (Senior Editor); EIC (Editor-in-Chief); AE (Associate Editor); review team (the entire group of evaluators, including SE, AE, and reviewers); Minnesota staff (The Regents of the University of Minnesota own *MIS Quarterly* and, thus, the staff who assist the EIC in running the journal are employees of the University of Minnesota); editorial board (generically, the sum total of EIC, SEs, and AEs; more specific terms would be the SE Editorial Board, etc.).

Procedure for Handling Papers

How should you go about handling papers that you have agreed to review? The following steps outline what should be happening at each stage of the process.

1. **For each round of reviewing, make a recommendation about the manuscript to the AE. Each round, you, as reviewer, will be asked to make a recommendation on the disposition of the manuscript. The range of these decisions is: (1) reject, (2) reject but invite new submission, (3) major revisions, (4) minor revisions, (5) accept conditionally (very minor revisions), and (6) accept.**

How do you make this key recommendation? This task entails carefully reading the manuscript rather than making a recommendation based only on a cursory reading. We rely very much on reviewers exercising their knowledge, experience, and wisdom in reaching their own, independent decisions.

Why would you make a recommendation of major revisions, minor revisions, accept conditionally, or accept? When papers are first received at *MISQ*, it may be that they are attacking fascinating problems and have innovative approaches to these problems. In such a situation, the review team may see promise in the work, but the paper needs either a considerable amount of revising (major revisions) or a limited amount (minor revisions) in order for the paper to be developed into a publishable paper. Rarely, very rarely, will papers have achieved the plateau of conditional acceptance or acceptance when they are first received. For even the best papers, the review team almost always has suggestions that can improve the paper.

Recommendations of accept conditionally and accept typically occur after one or more rounds of review. When the authors have dealt with all the substantive issues and the review team is in clean-up and polishing mode, these are the appropriate recommendations.

Why would you either reject a paper outright or reject/invite new submission? The answer is simple enough. In your judgment, you view the paper as not making a significant enough contribution and unlikely to do so even with revision, you will recommend rejection. Of course, your determination is contingent on the *category* of the paper. Regular research articles invoke high standards for making new theoretical advances with rigorous support, but research notes have a somewhat lesser requirement because they are shorter. Research essays enlist a different set of standards in that these are most often methodological. (See the *Manuscript Categories and Category Lengths* section of the **Information for Prospective Authors** at <http://www.misq.org/roadmap/standards.html> for further descriptions of the categories of papers that we publish.)

Reject, but invite new submission is a relatively new decision option at *MISQ*. What it means, in effect, is that you see some promise in the paper; however, the paper either lacks sufficient information for you to make an informed judgment or is so badly written that the review process would be extremely risky. If the authors choose to resubmit, it will be assigned a new log number and they can express their opinion as to whether to return to the same review team or recommend a different review team. So if you feel that the paper shows some promise, you can recommend reject, but invite new submission, which means that, if the SE agrees with this viewpoint, the authors will engage in a large scale, risky revisions, and you may see the paper again later.

2. **Prepare your report.** Upon reading the manuscript, if you determine that the paper should not continue any further in the review process (i.e., your recommendation is either outright rejection or reject, but invite new submission), then you as reviewer write a report that explains your reasons for recommending rejection and offering constructive suggestions about how the authors can pursue their research. Before sending your recommendation to the AE, please share your thoughts about the paper informally, via email. Informal communications are helpful in, if at all possible, reaching a consensus of editorial opinion. While it is not necessary that you and the AE hold exactly the same views with respect to the manuscript, a consensus on the vital statistics of the paper is the best scenario from the standpoint of the authors and ultimately best for finding papers worthy of publication.

Upon reading the manuscript, if you determine that the paper needs changes before it is ready for publication, you will recommend either major or minor revisions. Rarely, very rarely, would you recommend acceptance of a paper the first time you see it. The fact is that not even the best scholars in the field will be able to produce a paper where significant improvements cannot be made.

Major revisions implies that the changes you propose are fixable, but extensive. Minor revisions means that the authors have mostly crafted a publishable paper and the requisite changes are fairly limited to the highly do-able list you are providing.

Please share with the authors key references they may have missed. Make these as thorough as possible. Avoid directing the authors' attention to a whole body of literature that you think would help the paper; this is perhaps accurate, but puts the authors in a difficult position. Either provide them with specific citations or do not mention this bibliographic lapse in your report.

MISQ is moving toward an editorially directed process. You would not have been asked to review a paper unless the two editors, the AE and the SE, see a lot of promise in the paper. By the time you have received the paper, the paper's chances for eventual acceptance have gone up quite a bit. The probability is certainly not 1.0, but the odds are fairly high.

Our widespread practice of this framing will preempt endless cycles of revisions of papers that are finally rejected on the n^{th} cycle. *MISQ* has a reasonably good record in *not* rejecting papers after multiple revisions, and we would like to continue to shine in this category.

You will want to clearly communicate your impressions and assessment of the paper to the AE. In the request from the AE to serve as reviewer, you might have been asked for your own independent judgment about the chances of the paper succeeding in the review process. The AE may have briefly outlined above why s/he saw promise in the paper and how it could offer a solid research contribution. The AE needs to know about problems that are fixable. The AE also needs to know if you feel that the paper has aspects to it that are not fixable.

This set of statements summarizes your role neatly. After examining the strengths and weaknesses of the paper, express your judgment as to whether the reservations you have can or cannot be corrected for ultimate publication.

Privacy

Please understand that *MISQ* is giving you access to submissions and all other review documents solely for the purpose of evaluation. You may not share them with any other parties. The manuscript under review is not citable, and its contents remain the intellectual property of the authors until such time that it would be accepted for publication and the authors sign a copyright transfer to *MISQ*.

Clearly, the paper may have influenced your general thinking about a particular phenomenon and that is all to the good. But unique intellectual innovations in submissions are sacrosanct and may not be referenced, adapted, or reused without express permission from the authors. Unfortunately, since the review process is a double-blind process, we cannot share with you the names of the authors. Until a paper is accepted for publication, it may not be cited.

Reviewer Assignments and Time Lines

We very much appreciate your agreeing to review for *MISQ*. Please appreciate the fact that there will not always be a one-to-one match between the topic of the paper and your expertise, narrowly defined. If the only way we could review papers would be if there were such a match, we would need nearly as many reviewers as there are authors. In short, you will likely have to stretch at times to be able to provide reasonable feedback to the AE and the authors, but that is business-as-usual. This is not to say that you might at some point be asked to review a paper that is entirely out of your ken. Hopefully such cases are rare, and that most of the time you will be able to draw upon your specific and general knowledge of the research in IS and provide constructive feedback.

If you are already handling a reasonable set of papers under consideration by journals and conference and feel that you cannot take on more, indicate this to the AE.

A major goal is to improve even further our reputation for providing timely reviews. In this regard, upon receiving a

manuscript, please strive to fulfill the following time lines:

Initial screening by SE	3 to 4 days
Screening by AE and obtaining reviewers	7 to 10 days
Reviewers	21 to 28 days
Preparation of AE report	4 to 7 days
Preparation of SE report	4 to 7 days

Your Selection as Reviewer

You have been asked to assist because we believe that you have the ability to accurately assess the quality of our manuscript and can provide a constructive, timely review. Although a volunteer activity, it is still an honor to have been selected to review. The entire IS community owes a debt of gratitude to those such as yourself who readily volunteer to take on this critical set of tasks.

Thank you for your service to *MISQ* and the IS community!