

---

# Establishing a Scholarly Identity Through Peer Review

Joelle Nagle, Western University

*Abstract: Graduate students develop their researcher identity through their written academic work, not only voiced through their research but through the dissemination of that research published in peer-reviewed conference presentations and articles. Through one's tenure as a graduate student, academic service may include reviewing submissions for conferences and/or academic journals in a student's field of expertise. However, there is little guidance, if at all, for how to complete a peer review, which is thoughtful, constructive, and useful to aid in the development of a more nuanced research narrative. In this editorial, I outline the benefits and mentorship opportunities afforded through peer review and suggest steps students can use to approach the peer review process.*

*Keywords: Peer Review, Scholarly Identity, Mentoring*

## Editorial

Peer review is an essential activity in the academic publishing process and is integral to a researcher's participation within a scholarly community. Peer review is important, because academic "integrity and consensus rely on the peer review process" (Nicholas & Gordon, 2011, p. 233). Through this process editors are able to make informed decisions on the quality and contribution of a potential article, which is an "essential role in scholarly communication" ("Editorial," 2010, para. 2). During one's tenure as a graduate student, academic service may include peer reviewing submissions in their field of expertise for academic conferences, journals, and sometimes both. Pertinent to a graduate student's role, peer review demonstrates "that you are part of the academy; collegiate and willing to engage in the interplay that makes the profession work" (Lucey, 2014, para. 3). By contributing to an academic community in this way, graduate students begin to develop their identity as a scholar.

Through this voluntary "culture of service" (Lovejoy, Revenson, & France, 2011, p. 1), it is essential to a new scholar's identity to make a contribution to expanding knowledge in the field. Peer review develops an academic's contribution as an expert "to ensure accuracy and improve the quality of published literature through constructive criticism" (Nicholas & Gordon, 2011, p. 233), and by acting as a "consultant" to the editor, one can provide "feedback to authors about ways to improve the science and the communication of that science" (Lovejoy et al., 2011, p. 4).

## Benefits and Mentorship

As a new scholar, there are many benefits for participating in peer review early in one's academic career. Refereeing not only includes you in the development of an article, but studies show that "over 90% of the authors stated their published work had been improved by the peer review process" ("Editorial," 2010, para. 2). Participation also improves the reviewer's skills, since "reviewers reflect on what constitutes high-quality" (Nicholas & Gordon, 2011, p. 233). Additionally, peer review should be considered an opportunity to improve one's own critical thinking skills (Kotsis & Chung, 2014) and improve the quality of the reviewer's own work (Lovejoy, et. al., 2011; Nicholas & Gordon, 2011). The more one engages in this scholarly activity, the more one's own work may become refined; as Carpenter (2009) noted, "the most prolific and impactful authors are also prolific reviewers" (p. 191).

Peer review is also an opportunity to mentor a peer in one's field and "should be approached as a collaborative effort to encourage colleagues" (Kotsis & Chung, 2014, p. 5). Adewoyin and Vassileva (2013) acknowledged the importance of mentorship, noting that "peer review helps in mentoring researchers, as authors, to further develop their work and knowledge by providing competent peer-criticism" (p. 737). According to Carpenter (2009) rejection can also act as a mentor. Reviewers are reminded that their

---

constructive feedback, through acceptance or rejection, should offer the author a clear path for improvement.

The *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education (CJNSE)* offers a unique opportunity to involve graduate students in mentorship through the peer review and review editing sequence. This process begins with non-blind review as an opportunity to connect graduate students and to consider each other as colleagues. Once a manuscript is accepted the mentorship continues through the aid of a Review Mentor, whose role is to assist the author in incorporating their reviews in revisions. Further, a Senior Review Editor, typically a professor or post-doc, oversees this process and finalizes the manuscript for copy editing.

### Steps for Writing a Peer Review

Given the dependency on and need for expert reviewers, graduate students need opportunities to understand how to construct a detailed and effective peer review, since academics learn this “craft partly through our own trial and error but mostly through observing the actions of others (i.e., reading others’ reviews or the reviews of our own work” (Mason, 2009, p. 191). Therefore, there is little guidance, if at all, for how to write a review (Kotsis & Chung, 2014; Lovejoy, Revenson, & France, 2011; Nicholas & Gordon, 2011), which is thoughtful, constructive, and useful to aid in the development of a more nuanced research narrative. As new scholars build their academic identity within their field of expertise, they need encouragement that they are indeed becoming an expert, and peer review can contribute to a novice scholar’s confidence. Some journals, such as the *CJNSE*, provide guidance by providing a template for the reviewer to complete. However, there are still ways to approach a review to ensure it is thorough and detailed enough for the editor to make an informed decision, as well as for the author to be able to work on a “revision path” (Carpenter, 2009) for the purpose of improving their work. Table 1 provides an outline on how to approach peer review.

Table 1

*How to approach peer review.*

---

Step 1	Read through the article lightly first, making notes on the conceptual overview/main idea(s) and possible contributions, and strengths and weaknesses.  Write the first paragraph of the review with a brief summary of the above—this information provides the editor with pertinent information to judge the fitness of the article for publication.
Step 2	The second reading should be the <i>critical reading</i> .  Pay attention to accuracy in theory, methodology, findings, limitations, and implications within the discussion.  Itemize your review points and use specific examples in the text for ease of reference for the editor.
Step 3	The last reading should be to review your own comments and make sure your language and tone of criticism is constructive and professional.  You can briefly comment on organization, grammar, and style (i.e., APA), etc., but these are not the main focus of the review unless they severely obstruct readability.

---

### Things to Consider

There are some crucial aspects to contemplate when providing a constructive and professional review. Firstly, timeliness is crucial. We cannot complain about the process if we contribute to its delay. A journal will offer a deadline for review completion, and it is necessary that a reviewer adhere to this deadline. Any

delays at this stage set back the entire publication process for the particular article. If you are unable to complete a review, it is customary to inform the editor immediately as well as to recommend another possible reviewer. Secondly, be respectful to the international community. English language journals can act as gatekeepers. For English Language Learners, focus on the big picture throughout the review. One can privately comment to the editor if there is an obstruction to readability, and the editor can address this issue. Lastly, as Lucey (2014) aptly stated: “As you review, so shall you be reviewed.” Always be respectful and professional in language and tone. If one considers peer review to be a collaborative mentorship within one’s community of practice, then there is no excuse for debasing another colleague and their work; commit to making a positive contribution. As novice scholars, the task of reviewing a colleague’s work can be intimidating. However, the more we engage in the process of peer review, the more we understand the current research in our particular field, how other researchers approach their work, and in what ways our colleagues are contributing to specific discourse communities.

### **Overview of this Issue’s Contributions (English)**

In “Searching for the ‘white crow’: Stories of hockey, fishing and lessons learned chasing ‘Bigfoot’ from the perspectives of an academic greenhorn,” Lyle Hamm (University of New Brunswick) weaves his narrative through his beloved Canadian childhood to thoughtfully explore what it means to persevere through graduate school. His insights will be reassuring for those of us still on our graduate school journey.

In “Finding Myself in Methodology: An Autoethnographic Account,” Maggie McDonnell (McGill University) explores her lived experiences as a college teacher and doctoral candidate through autoethnography. McDonnell positions herself within teaching and learning and the relationship between herself and other. She outlines variations of autoethnography and the methods she engages in, specifically interactive interviewing.

### **Acknowledgements**

For this issue I would like to extend a special thank you to my Associate Editor Danielle Lorenz. Her assistance and expertise are invaluable. She will take over as interim Managing Editor in January 2018, and I have no doubt that she will continue to make a valuable contribution to our scholarly community. I would also like to acknowledge our continued collaboration with the CJNSE (French) team: Andréanne Gagné (Editor) and Charlaïne St. Jean (Associate Editor), and to our webmaster J.P. Lahaise. Next, our journal could not operate without the volunteer efforts of our extensive team, located throughout Canada, of dedicated *Peer Reviewers*: Heather Birch, Valdine Bjornson, Summer Cowley, Alison Crump, Greg Hadley, Michael Karas, Sarah King, Colleen Knechtel, Danielle Lorenz, Maggie McDonnell, Hayley Morrison, Joelle Nagle, Angelica Quesada, and Kaitlyn Watson. *Senior Review Editors*: Elizabeth Groenveld (Old Dominion University) and Giuliano Reis (University of Ottawa). *Review Mentor*: Danielle Lorenz (University of Alberta). *Copy Editors*: Hayley Morrison (University of Alberta) and Greg Hadley (St. Francis Xavier University), and *Senior Copy Editor*: Alexandra Cogswell (University of New Brunswick).

### **REFERENCES**

- Adewoyin, O., & Vassileva, J. (2013). Can online peer-review systems support group mentorship?. In *International Conference on Artificial Intelligence in Education* (pp. 737-741). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.
- Carpenter, M. A. (2009). Mentoring colleagues in the craft and spirit of peer review. *The Academy of Management Review*, 34(2), 191-195.
- Editorial. (2011). *Nature: Cell Biology*, 13(2), 109.
- Editorial. (2010). *Nature: Immunology*, 11(12), 1063.
- Kotsis, S. V., & Chung, K. C. (2014). How to submit a revision and tips on being a good peer-reviewer. *Plastic Reconstructive Surgery*, 133(4), 958-964.

- Lovejoy, T. I., Revenson, T. A., & France, C. R. (2011). Reviewing manuscripts for peer-reviewed journals: A primer for novice and seasoned reviewers. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine, 42*(1), 1-13.
- Lucey, B. (2014). 10 tips from an editor on undertaking academic peer review for journals. *Elsevier*. Retrieved from <https://www.elsevier.com/reviewers-update/story/career-tips-and-advice/ten-tips-from-an-editor-on-undertaking-academic-peer-review-for-journals>
- Nicholas, K. A., & Gordon, W. (2011). A quick guide to writing a solid peer review. *Eos, 92*(28), 233-240.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Joelle Nagle:** Joelle Nagle is the 2017 Managing Editor for the CJNSE. She is a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Studies (Curriculum) at Western University, in London, Ontario. Her doctoral work explores multiliteracies pedagogy within the professional learning of preservice and in-service teachers. Within the last 17 years, Joelle has worked in many roles as an educator in K-12 education and post-secondary education in both the university and college settings. She has worked with the CJNSE for several years in the roles of peer reviewer, copy editor, review mentor, and Associate Editor. Joelle would like to continue to encourage Canadian graduate students to become involved in the peer review process to help establish and cultivate their researcher identities within their specific fields and communities of practice.