

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Considering the review process as a constructive conversation

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The review process is central to scholarly activity in health professional education. As authors, the process can be emotionally charged, particularly if we receive unhelpful rhetorical comments from the infamous “reviewer number two”. As reviewers, we are sometimes dismayed by the gap we perceive between the standard of writing in the received manuscript and the quality expected by the journal. From our experiences as authors and reviewers, we aim to reconceptualise this gap as an opportunity for constructive conversation, building on the guidance provided by this journal (<https://fohpe.org/FoHPE/about#peerReviewProcess>). The review process includes submission, first review, response to feedback, a possible second round of review and response, followed by rejection or acceptance for publication. We describe our insights about how this process can be conducted as a constructive conversation between authors and reviewers.

First, view the review process as an opportunity to engage in feedback to nurture the development of scholarship in health professional education. When feedback is conducted as a two-way conversation (Ajjawi & Regehr, 2018), it allows authors and reviewers to co-construct their understanding of the scientific rigour, meaning and merit of the manuscript. Since we may hold different assumptions about academic writing conventions, we can familiarise ourselves with journal guidance and format instructions so that our writing and review preferences do not override journal expectations. Whichever our role in the review process, remember that we are always learning.

To align expectations, we suggest authors and reviewers be willing to engage fully with the review process. Although there is a perceived power differential between authors and reviewers, this dimension of co-construction requires being open to negotiation. Reviewers are responsible for making recommendations about the suitability of the manuscript for publication, however authors do not have to agree with all review

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comments. Where there are disagreements, explanations should be provided to show that all comments and responses have been read and considered. Even brief explanations show constructive and respectful engagement in a scholarly conversation. We encourage a reflective approach to writing and responding to feedback rather than an apologetic or defensive stance (Lingard & Watling, 2021).

To engage in a constructive conversation with a reflective orientation, time is needed. As authors, we must remind ourselves that the manuscript is not finished upon submission. The writing process continues, and time is required to make revisions. As reviewers, we should commit to review only when we can prioritise the time for a conversation with authors. We may be required to write more than one review of the manuscript. We may need to take more time to construct a shared understanding of the contextual factors, which can vary among manuscripts and impact how a study is reported. For example, the type of data reported as evidence can impact the amount of detail and terminology used to describe and justify how data were generated and analysed. Time and energy expended may differ depending on previous experience with the review process and scholarship. Remember, constructive conversations may still trigger strong emotions. Consider the review process as an opportunity to engage in constructive conversations about writing and scholarship in health professional education.

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