Almadi Sejla

From Opinion to Professional and Academic Reviews: A Focus on Editorial and Peer Review Processes

DOI 10.35402/kek.2025.3.16

Abstract

Reviews represent an integral part of academic work, an always up-to-date and significant contribution to scientific activities and their outputs. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to position and define academic reviews among other (professional versus opinion) reviews, and to focus on the review processes of academic publishers (and organsiations), by presenting theoretical knowledge, examples and practical advices. To this end, personal editorial (and related) experiences and literature sources were collected and processed. Academic reviews as specific types of professional reviews (opposite to opinion reviews) were found to ensure the validity of science and the dissemination of knowledge from research. Although to some extent these showed similarities to other (e.g. art) reviews, they had developed distinct processes in which editorial and peer reviews (usually) together resulted in the decision-making about the acceptance or rejection of manuscripts. While detailing the alike evaluation aspects/criteria of paper and thesis reviews, check lists and evaluation forms/sheets were introduced. Finally, the current challenges of editorial and peer review processes (i.e. preprints, open vs blind reviews, assigning reviewers, AI-assisted review process) were outlined.

Keywords: artificial intelligence-assisted review, desk rejection, dissertation/ thesis review, editorial review, formal/ professional review, informal/ opinion review, paper review, peer review

Absztrakt

A bírálatok a tudományos munka szerves részét képezik, mindig naprakész és jelentős hozzájárulást jelentenek a tudományos tevékenységekhez és azok eredményeihez. Ezért a jelen tanulmány célja az volt, hogy a tudományos bírálatokat más (szakmai kontra vélemény) bírálati folyamatok között elhelyezze és meghatározza, valamint hogy az akadémiai kiadók (és szervezetek) bírálati folyamataira összpontosítson elméleti ismeretek, példák és gyakorlati tanácsok bemutatásával. Ennek érdekében személyes szerkesztői (és kapcsolódó) tapasztalatokat és szakirodalmi forrásokat gyűjtött és dolgozott fel. Az áttekintő rávilágított, hogy a tudományos bírálatok, mint a szakmai bírálatok egy különleges típusa, biztosítják a tudomány érvényességét és a kutatásból származó ismeretek terjesztését. Bár bizonyos mértékig hasonlóságot mutatnak más (pl. művészeti) bírálatokkal, különálló folyamatokat fejlesztettek ki, amelyekben a szerkesztői és a szakmai bírálatok (általában) együttesen eredményezik a kéziratok elfogadásáról vagy elutasításáról szóló döntéseket. A cikk- és szakdolgozatbírálatok hasonló értékelési szempontjainak/ kritériumainak taglalásakor ellenőrzőlisták és értékelőlapok kerültek bemutatásra. Végül a szerkesztői és a szakmai bírálati folyamatok jelenlegi kihívásai (azaz előnyomatok, nyílt kontra vakbírálatok, bírálók kijelölése, mesterséges intelligencia által támogatott bírálati folyamat) lettek felvázolva.

Kulcsszavak: cikkbírálat, mesterséges intelligencia által támogatott bírálat, szakdolgozatbírálat, szakmai bírálat, szerkesztői bírálat, szerkesztői elutasítás, vélemény

Introduction

Academic journals have remained "the preeminent mechanism" in validating and disseminating knowledge from research today, regardless the many other "avenues" (Danziger 2018). In their validation–dissemination process, usually both editorial and peer reviews[1] are employed. Although the former has the power to immediately reject a paper (based on the assessment of primary criteria, Fahy 2016), and make the final decision about it too (partially based on the further invited peer reviews, partially based on editorial preferences, Danziger 2018); the latter is

[1] Although the term peer review can have varying applications (e.g. it can define the evaluation of one's teaching methods in class), herein it refers to a written quality appraisal on scientific oeuvres. About the peer review of teaching (in general, and in practice with guidelines), see University of Tasmania (n.d.); for a literature review on the peer review of teaching in higher education, see Thomas et al. (2014).

the "gold-standard process" (Kusumoto et al. 2023, p. 2054), "the bedrock" (Sovacool et al. 2022), the assurance and guarantee of the validity of science and academic research and publications, because it evaluates the manuscripts in-depth based on several core criteria.

Therefore, reviews represent an integral part of academic work,[2] an always up-to-date and significant contribution to scientific activities and their outputs. For that reason, their preparation requires an accuracy-, discipline- and rigour-driven approach tailored to the specific field of research. However, the review process in general, although it is usually supported by the (in)formal policy (including check lists and/or evaluation forms/sheets) of the publisher (or organisation), face multiple challenges nowadays (i.e. preprints, open vs blind reviews, assigning reviewers, AI-assisted review process) that have to be addressed to ensure the adequate validation and timely dissemination of science.

This article aims to position and define academic reviews among other professional reviews (compared to e.g. art reviews) and opposite to opinion reviews, and to focus on the review processes of academic publishers, by presenting theoretical knowledge, examples and practical advices. Thus, it delves into the attributes, processes and current challenges of editorial and peer reviews on papers (and – by showing similarities – theses) in general and specifically on certain journals/publishers, while equipping readers with a reviewer check list and an evaluation form/sheet. For these, it is greatly relying on personal editorial experiences gained through academic (universities, research institutes, journals) and professional (mainly publishing) activities[3]; while – where it is indicated with in-text reference – drawing on scientific sources from databases such as EBSCO, Science Direct and Web of Science as well.

Opinion and Professional Reviews

Review means appraisal, assessment, critique, evaluation, judgement, reflection, by synonyms. And by definition, it is a formal or informal – depending on the type of review – reflection to someone or something exposed to be tasted, seen, heard, smelled, touched… experienced (e.g. physician, restaurant, exhibition, song, perfume, textile etc.), by appraising, assessing or evaluating it through a critical, but favourably constructive, approach, where the final judgement is published somewhere – likely in a relevant place, information source (e.g. kitchen guide, art magazine, newspaper).

Informal or – with other word – *opinion reviews*, asked by product or service providers to be done by their (potential) buyers, appeared first as a quality insurance: the feedback they received was part of their market research, and helped them in their pricing strategy and product/service development (e.g. electronic tools like vacuum cleaners, units of hospitality like hotels).[4] These reviews were anonymous or not, but were kept usually enclosed (confidential) by the person or company who requested them.[5] But the wider usage of internet first created specific platforms (websites) for buyers and users to provide feedback and compare more products and services at one place, then it led bigger internet service providers (e.g. Alphabet, or as we knew it, Google[6]) to give a general chance to

[2] This concerns not only editorial and peer reviews on scientific oeuvres (papers and books), but thesis and literature reviews too. Thesis reviews are prepared regularly for potential graduates at most of higher educational institutions; literature reviews are prepared as singular research materials or as part of empirical works.

[3] As a result, terms such as opinion (informal) and professional (formal) reviews; principles, insider and outsider point of views of (art and) academic reviews; a priori and post review processes; independent (autonomous) and dependent (subservient) reviews, were coined and described for this academic writing guide in the preparation process organically, without the use of other sources or artificial intelligence. However, this does not exclude the possibility for them to not exist somewhere else.

[4] In the 1920s, creative testing; in the 1930s, public polling; in the 1940s, focus groups; in the 1950s, motivational research; in the 1960s, predictive statistical techniques; in the 1970s, a new model for market segmentation; in the 1980s, theories linking attitudes and behaviours; in the 1990s, web analytics as part of marketing mix; in the 2000s, the Net Promoter Score; in the 2010s, the on-demand consumer insight appeared on the horizon of market research (Booker, 2024). In the 2020s, nowadays, market research is no longer belonging solely to academics: the former inventions boosted by technology has made market research easier and cheaper than before, hence, it has become more accessible/ affordable for companies too.

[5] For the past, present and future of market research, see Yallop, Baker & Wardle (2022). For The Market Research Encyclopaedia, see Barabba (1990).

[6] Google decided to award opinion reviews with Google Play or PayPal credits for all survey completion (Google, n.d.).

basically anyone to rate almost anything (e.g. post offices, hospitals, cemeteries etc.) and make his/her opinion immediately public.[7]

While the production of such informal or opinion reviews have become quite uncontrollable (especially for the person or company about whom/which they are written online), the creation of *formal* or *professional reviews* remained very disciplined and checked. As their name suggests, a professional, an expert in a specific field, who possesses the necessary knowledge and skills to assesses the merits and pitfalls of the person or the thing being reviewed, and is deeply familiar with him/her or its context, is only requested or entitled to conduct the review. Therefore, preparing the review (i.e. formatting, referencing, content requirements, processes etc.) follows the written or unwritten rules and regulations or habits and traditions of the field (See Example 1). At the finalisation, it is always checked by a competent person (e.g. a supervisor, editor, peer etc.) before sharing. Sharing can be making it public or kept confidential (depending on the request), and the publishing can be anonymous or not (depending on the type of review). Spheres such as art (including culinary art) and academics have a long history and specific rules and traditions for professionally reviewing works, outcomes of art and research.

EXAMPLE 1
ArtReview (n.d.): *About, Opinion, Reviews*
ArtReview, that was founded in 1949, has become one of the most known international contemporary art magazines, distributed in Europe, the Americas and Asia-Pacific. It publishes nine issues a year for both a specialist and a general audience, among which the December and the January issues are dedicated to particular areas/themes.
It publishes Opinion articles and (professional) Reviews too. Although both types should be written in a clear manner, the former rather focuses on expressing dilemmas, thoughts, feelings about certain art-related issues, phenomena, events (see e.g. Cortés, 2025); the latter rather discovers, describes and evaluates art creations (pieces, collections, exhibitions etc.) of any kind (e.g. films, poems, paintings etc.), explores professional career and art poetica (see e.g. Wu 2025).

Academic Reviews

Academic reviews are regularly done on written works such as papers (e.g. classical research materials submitted to scientific conferences or journals, etc.), dissertations/theses and different types of literature sources, especially books (e.g. monographs, text books etc.). The reason for that – similarly to the initial product and service reviews – is the quality insurance, in terms of science. The ultimate question is always: *to what extent the reviewed material is scientifically sound and perspicuous (comprehensible)?* Therefore, academic reviews *aim* to evaluate the scientific validity, the academic writing and the research methodology of the materials. And in all cases (regardless the type of material), because the stakes are high, the answer(s) to the above question form(s) a decision about the acceptance of the submitted work in the academic community. This acceptance may lead to further advancements for the original author like the publication of the paper, reception of a certificate (e.g. diploma) or a prize, increase in the (book) sales, readings and citations etc.

Academic reviews can be categorised in more ways, e.g. based on who carries out the review, i.e. the editor or a peer, and what type of material is reviewed, i.e. a paper, a thesis or a book etc. However, there are principles that any academic review should consider to follow.

[7] There is a slight difference between the herein described opinion (informal) reviews and the Opinion articles of newspapers and gazettes. These can either hire editors and columnists (or experts) to write their opinion about a certain (e.g. economics-, foreign affair-, politics-related) issue in an article format, or publish readers' voluntarily prepared (sometimes for a call) and submitted opinions. The content of these articles, besides the required writing style and language, is usually not disciplined (referencing, if there is, happens in hyperlinks). For example, the Wall Street Journal (n.d.), under the section title Opinion, publishes Editorials, Commentaries, Columnist articles, in which it expresses the various (but more-or-less harmonious on certain principles) opinion (i.e. subjective standpoint) of the newspaper's colleagues about the actual issues, phenomena, events. (The journal has a separate section for Reviews in Architecture, Art, Book, Film etc.)

Principles of Academic (Compared to Art) Reviews

Reviews in academic sphere should be shorter in their length than the original material about which they are created (e.g. papers, books etc.). It is in common in them and in other professional reviews that academic reviews too have to be accurate, thorough, rigorous at the evaluation, and constructive at the suggestion process (depending on the overall quality of the material, the latter can be either detailed or rough).

Also, that in the best case, their writer can take both an *insider* (connection) and an *outsider* (knowledge) point of view during the assessment. The difference is that in some other professions like art, while the reviewer evaluates the material to the best of his/her factual knowledge in the field, at the same time, (s)he usually creates an emotional attachment, connection to it as well through his/her senses. In contrast to that, in academics, the reviewer should rely on his/her mind overwhelmingly, hence the general knowledge on how to proceed with such a review provides the outsider, and the personal connection to, the deep knowledge and understanding of the specific topic gives the insider angle in the review process.

It is also in difference that since the distinct professions have developed distinct technical vocabularies, they use different *languages* in their reviews to evaluate different *aspects/criteria*. Therefore, while in fine painting (see Example 2), reviewers might look for the ars poetica, the former collections/ exhibitions, the depiction style and technique, the materials etc.; in academics (see Example 3), they might look for the theory, the methods, the research objective or questions, the hypotheses etc. And the different *content* can be followed by a different *structure*.

However, similarly to art reviews (or architecture, poetry book, film etc. such those in e.g. Wall Street Journal before), the reviews on academic books can also be *published openly*, with the reviewer's name (and affiliation), in scientific annals and journals. These reviews rather serve as sources of a one-time judgement for praising and/or criticising the oeuvre (e.g. monograph) for its merits and drawbacks. In contrast, for scientific validation and dissemination of knowledge, specific *academic review processes* have been developed by the different publishers (or education/ research organisations).

EXAMPLE 2
Wu (2025): *Salman Toor's Night Vision*

"Painting in a style that falls between illustration and academicism, Salman Toor depicts queer men of colour in genre scenes that are at once nostalgic and speculative. The long-limbed and paunchy characters in Toor's world are seen gathered at parties, picnics and parades thick with bodies and sketches of bodies, enacting bygone or imagined encounters with friends and lovers. Wish Maker, Toor's first major New York exhibition since his institutional debut at the Whitney in 2020, weighs 19 of his paintings at Luhring Augustine's Chelsea location against 44 of his works on paper in the gallery's Tribeca space. Here, Toor not only portrays viable alternatives to a heteronormative world, in the form of queer spaces and sociality, but also accentuates his draughtsmanlike pentimenti to represent, within his own fabulations, other images that might have surfaced – and to which it seems he could still return. […]

While Toor's images are, on one hand, palimpsests of art-historical precedents – The Scroller, for instance, harks back to Courbet's Origin of the World (1866), and Beach (2023), a work on paper in which a hairy male figure with wind-tossed locks poses on a foamy shore, recalls Botticelli's Birth of Venus (c. 1485) – on a literal level, too, Toor's works feature layers of half-erasures and revisions. Next to the figure's left hip in Beach is a severed hand, grey and mortified, which seems to have been abandoned when the figure's arm was raised. A bodily trace is also left in the charcoal, pencil and ink version of The Scroller (2024): a sketch of a foot haunts the composition's bottom-left corner. Toor reprises this ghost foot in the painting as a kind of artificial pentimento. Rather than being sketched out and later rejected, the trace here is a deliberate addition that counters the subject's voluminous flesh, a reminder of an unrealised idea preserved for future consideration, the way queerness as an ideal may be, in the words of José Esteban Muñoz, 'distilled from the past and used to imagine a future'."

EXAMPLE 3

Boonstra (2020): *Book Review: Limits: Why Malthus Was Wrong and Why Environmentalists Should Care*

"For much of sociology's history, few of its scholars have cared about Robert Malthus (1766–1834) […]. But when the extent of environmental problems became more apparent towards the end of that century, the appreciation of Malthus changed. Perhaps the reverend was right about nature's limits?

As the book title reveals, Giorgos Kallis has no such doubt. Malthus' error, according to Kallis, is not a failure to anticipate tractors and fertilisers, but assuming that nature is limited. […]

Kallis explores ideas and practices that – different from Malthus, economics, neoliberal politics and icons from sustainability science – emphasise nature's plenty. […] While Kallis thinks very differently about nature's limits and the necessity of economic growth, he is closer to Malthus than he admits when it comes to individual moral duties of self-limitation. Kallis ends with a plea to reinvent a culture of self-restraint for modern societies, starting by investigating the genesis and evolution of self-moderation: 'Seeing civilization as the art of limiting the unlimited can help us to revisit other civilizations [...] to ask why and how they limited themselves' (p. 128). […] Yet, Kallis neither theorises nor investigates how these limits interact to shape social action and history. […]

Sociologists have used these ideas to explore to what extent contemporary societies are undergoing a (de)civilising process in relation to nature (e.g. Quilley, 2009). A leading hypothesis is that increased knowledge about the effects of human development on earth's ecology and geophysics, can induce moral restraints. […]

To sustain human societies, Kallis suggests redirecting our focus from nature's limits to processes of civilisation and decivilisation. […] Kallis' contribution lies not so much in proving Malthus wrong, but in raising questions about power and inequality in relation to global sustainability."

Academic Review Process: Editorial and Peer Reviews

Academic review processes usually have at least two stages: editorial and peer reviews before the final decision is made about a manuscript (see Example 4). Hence, it is also possible that either editorial or peer reviews have more (sub)stages or rounds to ensure the expected quality of the manuscripts.[8] However, too many review rounds may not be necessary as manuscripts passing two rounds are (were) initially "highly-polished" and "safe" to publish (possess expected quality for a good publication), so more rounds just delay the publication significantly, which prevents the timely dissemination of knowledge (Rust, 2018).

EXAMPLE 4

Fahy (2016): *Editorial – What happens after you submit a paper to Women and Birth: An insider's view of editorial and review processes*

Women and Birth, a leading international academic journal with an impact factor of 1.56, has a two-stage review process: (1) an editorial review that can result in immediate rejection; (2) if the manuscript passes that, min. 2 peer reviews are further implemented. "In this way authors whose paper is rejected get a quick decision with clear reasons and reviewers' valuable time and expertise is not wasted." (p. 1)

(1) Editorial reviews have to evaluate "Editors' Triage Criteria" by reading the abstract and the introduction of submitted works. This includes appraising whether the paper is "outside the aims and scope of the journal" (p. 2) – which is "the most common reason for immediate rejection" (p. 1) –, and is following the Guide for Authors; if the paper has an "Ethical approval" (p. 2), language respectful of women, good English/ "clarity of thinking in the abstract", a "focused literature to situate the paper in the international literature", applied "relevant research reporting guidelines", and included "the Summary of Relevance in the Introduction".

(2) Peer reviews are done by "midwives with PhDs or clinical specialists in the focused field of

[8] E.g. Journal of Vascular Surgery, Cases, Innovations and Techniques (Li & Smeds 2025) implements "editorial office check" and "initial review" prior to peer reviews.

midwifery or maternity services" (p. 1), based on the "Review Criteria" of the journal. There are different review criteria for theoretical studies, qualitative and quantitative research. However, criteria called "Presentation and Logic" is common at each type of papers. It includes the following aspects: "English is of a high scholarly standard; Writing is respectful of women; Work of others is appropriately attributed; Abstract is a structured summary; Title reflects the content; There is an appropriate introduction; A logical argument is developed; Writing is clear and succinct; There is an appropriate conclusion" (p 2).

Editorial Review

Editorial reviews are carried out (by the Editor-in-Chief or one of the Deputy/Guest Editors) on all types of materials that are submitted to a journal or book publisher. Therefore, the aim of review is not only to evaluate the scientific validity, the academic writing and the research methodology of the material, but also to assess its fit to the publisher and its publish- or rather saleability. Editorial reviews require a great professional routine to evaluate the materials in a relatively short time and to make immediate decision about their "consideration for publishing". These reviews are a brief, rough, firm and sometimes tough evaluations; their preparation process and formatting are unruled, unique to the editor. The timing of the editorial review (decision) depends greatly on the amount of manuscripts on the editor's desk versus the editor's time available for conducting the review. [9]

Editorial reviews can be in-depth, but "superficial" too (i.e. checking certain parts of the research e.g. abstract and/or introduction) focusing on the primary criteria set towards manuscripts. These usually involve topic and/or paper type fitting to the scopes of the journal; topic being actual, novel, significant; length, formatting and referencing requirements; academic writing style and language.[10] If a material does not pass these criteria, it receives an *editorial* or *desk rejection*[11]. If it passes these criteria, it is sent out to peer reviews – about which process the authors are informed. However, getting informed about the person of reviewers depends on the type of peer review system (open or blind) implemented at the journal. Based on these reviews, the editor makes the final decision on publishing (or not) the material.[12] In case the review(er)s suggest revisions on the manuscript, the modifications are followed up and checked by the editors (or their assistants) and the reviewers too.

Peer Review

The term *peer review* expresses the collegiality of the process of evaluating the scientific validity, the academic writing and the research methodology of the materials submitted to the publishers. Instead of the publish- or saleability, the field of research matters greatly at this stage of the review process. Hence, the reviewers should be assigned from/in the research field of the submitted material, to be familiar with its topic and examination. Editors usually assign two reviewers independently from each other, to be able to carry out a review completely based on their own scientific knowledge, academic writing and research methodology skills and attitude. The peer reviewers should prepare an in-depth and justified *review report* about the manuscripts, of which criteria and length varies[13]

[9] During COVID-19 editorial decisions about sending a paper for peer review (or not) were made "significantly faster after pandemic lockdowns began". See more about journal submission, review and decision trends during COVID-19 in Boindi et al. (2021).

[10] For the "primary" and "full review" editorial criteria at Animal Feed Science and Technology, see Robinson et al. (2010).

[11] Harikumar et al. (2022) found that appr. one-quarter of the medical journals with high impact factors that they examined equipped their editors with a formal policy that gave recommendations about rejection. Upon such rejections, editors received complaints from authors in a few cases (6.4 percent), to which 16 percent of journals responded with a standardised feedback.

[12] Editors' preferences are significant factors in the final decision-making. Danziger et al. (2018) found that at the Journal of Molecular and Cellular Cardiology, where the review process mainly focused on "the assessment of the novelty, methods, and results of the work" (p. 127), flaws in writing style and discussion hardly impacted the final editorial decision, even though it had been highlighted by reviewers. Rather, novelty is emphasised to keep up with the actual state of science. Herein the editor has a fair amount of discretion to counterbalance the potential distance between the two peer reviews.

[13] However, the length can also significantly depend on the reviewers' gender, country-level cultural and economic backgrounds; and somewhat less on disciplines, language proficiency, publications (Zhang et al. 2022).

depending on the (in)formal review policy of the journal. As a result, the editor and the peer reviewers (and the journal) can take a full responsibility for the reviews and the decision made about the manuscripts.[14]

The assignment of peer reviewers is an immense responsibility as this guarantees "the accuracy and fairness of peer review results" (Zhao & Zhang 2022). According to Wiley's (publisher) survey (2013), 84 percent of researchers believe that peer reviews ensure "control in scientific communication"; 90 percent feel that peer reviews improve the quality of manuscripts; respondents consider "reviewer quality and speed" as the most important contributors to "a pleasant publishing experience" and to attract better authors to submit a paper in the journal. Therefore, peer reviews are crucial in terms of science and/or publication (Riley & Jones, 2016), especially today, when hundreds of thousands of manuscripts can be published by leading publishers on a yearly basis.[15]

Peer reviews can be *open* or (single- or double-) *blind*[16]. The main advantage of blind reviews is the promise of evaluating a work in a less biased, more objective way, without any emotional pressure, cooperation or rivalry[17]. Although two reviews should be enough for a well-grounded decision about the future of an academic material, if these are two distant in their final judgement, a third independent reviewer may be involved in the review process.

- *Open (non-blind) review*: when the name (and affiliation) of both the reviewer and the reviewee (author) are openly known or publicly available in the review process.
- *Single-blind review*: when the reviewer's name (and affiliation) is concealed, treated confidentially (e.g. by the editor), while the reviewee's (author's) name (and affiliation) is openly known or publicly available in the review process.
- *Double-blind review*: when the name (and affiliation) of both the reviewer and the reviewee (author) is concealed, treated confidentially (e.g. by the editor) in the review process (i.e. this means anonymous reviewing and authoring).

Peer Reviews on Papers (and Theses)

Classical research papers including theoretical and empirical (qualitative or quantitative) studies, submitted to scientific conferences or journals are reviewed by editors and peers, while bachelor, master or doctoral theses are reviewed by opponents. Regardless this difference, both these papers and theses are reviewed along roughly the same *evaluation aspects/criteria* due to their alike nature of being original and new, complete research outputs with similar structure, mostly with in-text (+ bibliography) reference systems. Therefore, although different expectations are set towards the different levels of research, similar knowledge, skills and attitude are needed to prepare review reports for them. Other types of papers (such as caucuses, extended abstracts, policy briefs, presenter symposia, reports, scientific reflections/opinions, writings for paper development workshops etc.) have also similar principles at the reviewing process as classical research papers, but these frequently have specific length, formatting, referencing, content and structure criteria (which can be usually found in the formal review policy of the publisher/ organisation).

All paper (and thesis) reviews have to be done in an accurate, thorough, rigorous and constructive manner. Being a strictly dry, factual (not creative) and objective (especially if double-blind) text, these reviews should be rather sharp, concise and descriptive in their writing style than redundant, but they can be precisely detailed (within the given scope limits). Their language should be professional, scientific, drawing heavily from the vocabulary, up-to-date nomenclature of the given discipline. Their formatting, content and structure requirements can be independent (autonomous), so up to the reviewer, or dependent (subservient), so up to the formal policy of the publisher (or organisation).

[14] Bunner and Larson (2012) highlighted that authors' satisfaction is related to the acceptance/ rejection of the paper for publication, and not to the quality of the review.

[15] In 2013–14, Elsevier (leading academic publisher regarding volume) received appr. 1.3 million submissions a year, of which 365,000 were accepted for publication – 72% of them were rejected (Sovacool et al. 2022).

[16] Another, less frequent option is triple-blind reviews, when not only the reviewer and the reviewee are unaware of each others' identities, but the editor responsible for the paper is also unaware of the authors' information (name, affiliation) when assigning the peer reviewers (Kusumoto et al. 2023).

[17] However, Teixeira da Silva and Daly (2025) argue that confidentiality at blind reviews may increase mistrust in research and publishing by preventing "the direct and across-the-board scrutiny of peer reviewers or editorial handling".

However, there are *a priori* and *post review* processes in any cases that provide a sound framework for the final judgement of the material to be reviewed. The former refers to when the novelty and originality of materials are checked by software detecting plagiarism and the use of artificial intelligence (AI). Since plagiarism[18] and/or the use of AI (may) represent a hard line[19], their detection is usually carried out at an organisational level, upon submission, in the form of routine (frequently automated) examinations; and results in the immediate decision about the acceptance or rejection of the material for further review. The post review refers to the preparation of a reviewer report and/or a rating/scoring, which lead(s) to an explicit decision about the material (e.g. rejection, acceptance with modifications, acceptance as it is – in case of papers) and/or in a grade based on total scores (e.g. 1: fail, 2: sufficient, 3: satisfactory, 4: good, 5: very good/ excellent – in case of theses).

Independent Review: Check List

An independent (autonomously prepared) review is written in a flow of text arranged into at least a paragraph, or it is displayed in bullet points. Its content should be structured into three main parts: (1) Basic/ Primary Criteria, (2) Core/Main/Secondary Criteria and (3) Summary/Final Judgement.

The *Basic/Primary Criteria* should approach the material to be reviewed from/along its basic attributes, of which evaluation actually provides an immediate decision about the outcome of the review (i.e. acceptance for further review or rejection). These attributes are in line with the minimum criteria/ requirements of every material: non-plagiarism (plus non-AI usage in certain cases); length, formatting and referencing requirements; academic writing (language and style). Moreover, such a beginning helps the reviewer to get into the reviewing process.

The *Core/Main/Secondary Criteria* should appraise all structural (content-wise) and methodological aspects of the material compared to (e.g. editorial, organizational, research field-related) expectations, such as (in case of a general empirical study in social sciences): (sub)title, keywords (and JEL codes), abstract, structure, topic choice and its justification, literature review/ theoretical background, research objectives/ questions, hypotheses/ propositions, methodological choice and justification, data collection and analysis, results, conclusions, including research limitations and future research directions. Hence, the entire material has to be reviewed carefully and thoroughly step by step in a logical order.

The *Summary/Final Judgement* should provide a brief, overall evaluation and suggestion in one-two sentences on the material as a whole, and a final judgement. For independent reviews, it is suggested to create a general check list (and practice its use) that facilitates a rapid and systematic evaluation, so that peer reviewing can become a routine.[20] (See Example 5.)

EXAMPLE 5

Independent Review Check List for Empirical Studies in Social Sciences

Basic/Primary Criteria

- Do the net and gross length meet requirements?
- Does the formatting meet requirements (e.g. font, page size, margins, alignment, colours, numbering of pages and headings etc.)?
- Does the referencing meet requirements (e.g. used reference style, its thoroughness in-text, including images/tables, accuracy and arrangement of bibliography reference entries)?
- Does the writing meet academic standards (e.g. language and style, number and severity of grammatical and stylistic mistakes)?

Core/Main/Secondary Criteria

- Is the scientific (sub)title appropriately determined (e.g. style and content)?
- Are the keywords (and/or JEL codes) properly provided (e.g. their number, use of up-to-date vocabulary of the field)?
- Is the abstract properly written (e.g. length, used tense, style, structure, content)?
- Is the material appropriately structured/ built up (e.g. logic, flow, trajectory, weights)?
- What is the chosen topic and is it appropriately justified (i.e. fit to the journal/ programme, significance, actuality, novelty)?

[18] "Self-plagiarism" is also "discouraged in scientific publications" (Freeman 2024).

[19] While plagiarism is, the use of AI may not be a hard line for publishers, even though both are closely tied to the originality of scientific works

[20] For separate review check lists for analytical and empirical models, and behavioural area at Journal of Retailing, see Roggeveen (2019).

- Is the literature review properly conducted (e.g. number and quality of processed sources, structure, flow, used method, presence of independent ideas and conclusions etc.)?
- Are the research objectives/ questions and/ or hypotheses/ propositions appropriately set (e.g. their number, feasibility, relevance to research gaps/problems)?
- What are the means (chosen methods) to achieve these objectives, and is their use (appropriately) justified (e.g. based on former research traditions)?
- Are the data collection and analysis properly conducted (e.g. with regard to sampling, ethics, validity and reliability, implementation of methods etc.)?
- Are the results properly deduced from the analysis and appropriately provided as research outcomes (e.g. can responses to research questions be given etc.)?
- Are the conclusions appropriately explained (e.g. in general and specifically related to former literature, contributions/ implications, limitations, future research directions)?

Summary/Final Judgement

- All in all, I find the material to be…
- Therefore, I suggest…
- As a consequence, my final judgement is…

Dependent Review: Evaluation Form/Sheet

A dependent (subservient) review refers to when the publisher/editor (or organisation), that assigns the reviewer, provides a standardised list of evaluation aspects/criteria, often in the shape of an official evaluation form/sheet. Requiring the same evaluation aspects/criteria from all reviewers have several advantages: (a) it ensures that the *aspects/ criteria important* for the employer will be truly evaluated; (b) the reviews are prepared in an *alike or very similar manner*; (c) as a result, reviews about the same material become *comparable*; (d) this *facilitates* the publisher's/editor's (or organisation's) decision-making about the appraised material. However, where the evaluation form/sheet provides only a formal framework for the review, i.e. it does not include (enough) concrete evaluation aspects/criteria, the reviewer needs to do an independent review within it. The reasoning behind choosing this less strict (and comparable) evaluation format by the publishers/editors (or organisations) is the more freedom and creativity the reviewers can have in the evaluation–thinking process. (See Example 6.)

Current Challenges of Editorial and Peer Reviews

There are multiple challenges that editorial and peer reviews face currently: the issue of preprints, open versus blind reviews, assigning reviewers, AI-assisted review processes.

Preprints

Preprints allow the immediate visibility and accessibility of research materials before/without finishing the (accuracy-driven, yet time-consuming) science-based review process (Kusumoto et al. 2023). This can lead to the dissemination of misinformation, and – by that – to the application of harmful practices – in case of e.g. medical or psychological researches. Furthermore, preprints do not allow double-blind reviews to be implemented as they indicate authors' information (Sun et al. 2024).

Open vs. Blind Reviews

Despite being the most transparent way of reviewing (that could enhance constructive discussion between reviewer and reviewee), open reviews expose reviewers to considerable vulnerability, e.g. to: unfair comments from authors, conflict of interest, revenge, negative career consequences etc. (Kusumoto et al. 2023). Hence, open reviews can be significantly less critical (more cautious) than blind reviews, or refused to be done. Double- (and triple-)*blind reviews* although show less bias towards authors and institutions – in contrast, single-blind review(er)s are more likely to recommend well-established authors' and/or prestigious institutions' papers for publication –, interestingly the "blindness" does not impact the quality of the review. Furthermore, in case of double-blind reviews, reviewers can many times identify authors e.g. from self-citations.

Assigning Reviewers

Although peer reviewers are "essential to the publication of high-quality papers and the advancement

EXAMPLE 6
Peer Review Form of Culture and Community (KéK)

Volume, number:				
Title of article:				
Genre:				
			y/n/appr.	*Note:*
1. Topic choice				
1.1. Correspondence to the scope of the journal				
1.2. Actuality of the topic				
2. Formatting requirements				
2.1. Appropriateness of length				
2.2. Hierarchical segmentation (structure) of text				
2.3. Correctness of language, style				
3. Content, analysis				
3.1. Processing of literary data				
3.2. Method for presenting the problem				
3.3. Correctness of the method of processing the problem				
3.4. New scientific results				
3.5. Correctness of the conclusions				
4. Notes: *Comments on content:* *Comments on formatting:*				
Acceptable for publication	Without modification	With small modifications	With greater modifications	No
Note:				
Name of reviewer:				
Academic degree:				
Date:		Signature:		

of science" (Kusumoto et al. 2023, p. 2058), it has become very difficult for the editors (or the organisations) to assign peer reviewers: they experience a high volume of submitted manuscripts, parallel to a high rate of refusals from professionals to participate in the review process, thus the responses to such invitations are usually slow (Candal-Pedreira et al. 2023; Hu 2023). DeLisi (2022), as the editor of *Psychiatry Research*, reported to receive "about 50+ new papers a week", of which 50 percent passes the editorial review, so should get peer reviews. Unfortunately, 2 out of 10 reviewer invitations are accepted only, which is still not a guarantee for the preparation of review reports: it is possible that finally a reviewer does not prepare the report on time or ever.

To cope with these challenges, primarily publishers/ editors (and organisations) should restore the appreciation of reviewer work. Because although the reasons behind the high rate of refusal might vary, reviewer work not being recognised (rather being depreciated), while resulting in overwork and fatigue are serious contributing factors (Candal-Pedreira et al. 2023; Kusumoto et al. 2023). Incentives to participate voluntarily in the review process can be financial and non-financial. Financial compensation is more likely in the private sector, of which widespread introduction, in the public sector too, would probably successfully result in a higher ratio of acceptance of reviewer invitation (Kusumoto et al. 2023). However, its

impact on review quality is ambiguous. Non-financial rewards can include networking, advancement, personal satisfaction, free access to the journal, appointment to the journal' editorial board, acknowledgements, publication of outstanding peer reviews (e.g. as best practices or commentaries).

Secondarily, publishers/ editors (and organisations) can implement more strategies to increase the number of potential reviewers, e.g.: peer review can be professionalised (Candal-Pedreira et al. 2023); PhD faculty and students (Xu et al. 2016), thus researchers and professionals in general invited to evaluate scientific materials, can be mentored/ trained to peer review (e.g. traditionally it is uncommon in higher education studies to receive peer review training, see for that in medical education in Kusumoto et al. 2023); all editorial board members can be required to review a certain amount of manuscripts every year, editors can invite manuscripts that have already been submitted and therefore reviewed at another journal in the former year, and can waive "charges for publishing reviewers' works or making them open-access" (Hu 2023). Or publishers can require potential authors or anyone submitting a manuscript to undertake two peer reviews (because each submission needs two peer reviews), by accepting the terms and conditions at paper submission. I experienced this well-established practice at Academy of Management, for which Annual Meeting in 2024 6,400 papers were submitted, from which the top 5% were accepted for presentation (for more about is submission rules, see Academy of Management, n.d.).

AI-Assisted Review Process

Since the application of AI "automates routine tasks and accelerates decision-making processes, optimizing operations and data analysis" (Fiorillo & Mehta 2024), some regard it rather an opportunity than a challenge or weakness in research and publication. For example, Fiorillo and Mehta (2024) found that ChatGPT can be a useful tool at improving manuscript quality, efficiency of review process, accessibility, and at providing „insightful feedback and suggestions" for researchers/ writers. Chauhan and Currie (2024) highlighted that Generative AI can help editors in "identifying relevant additional citations" to increase the impact and appeal of manuscripts, "synthesizing a comprehensive and actionable" review report, providing a "third" review (especially if the two assigned reviewers are too distant in their evaluations), "automating and simplifying" workflow. Similarly, when Sperber et al. (2025) examined the contribution of AI in reviewing student materials, concluded that the use of AI, by offering them beneficial feedback, was appreciated by students, who – in the process – could develop AI literacy and its ethical implementation. In line with that, most authors warned about the ethical considerations one has to take prior to (or at) using AI in the review process, to assure authorship, maintain confidentiality and privacy, control bias.

However, in contrast to these authors' enthusiasm about „the significant role of AI in revolutionizing […] academic practices" (Fiorillo & Mehta 2024), it has to be emphasised that AI cannot replace human knowledge and skills at the moment. For example, we tested this year with a few colleagues the review quality of ChatGPT at some (random) bachelor and master theses (without research purposes), and we encountered the following results: it evaluated theses, that before we had assigned with lower grades, as excellent. Furthermore, Majovsky (2025) – through an example – warned for the "misuse" of generative AI in academic writing, that "is becoming a growing concern". Based on his peer reviewer experiences, "it threatens the integrity of the peer-review process, as AI-generated content may appear polished but lacks the critical engagement that genuine scholarly work requires."

Therefore, not only the "ethical implications" of the use of AI should be carefully approached, but its overwhelming and unchecked application in research and publication, which – by committing errors – can undermine the trust between authors and publishers and the validity of science (which can further harm people in case of e.g. a medical study, Kusumoto et al. 2023). For coping with these challenges, Majovsky (2025) proposes the implementation of a reviewer rating system; and Sperber et al. (2025) suggests AI to be used only complementarily to human-centred review processes.

Summary

Academic reviews as a specific sphere of professional or formal reviews (opposite to opinion or informal reviews), show similarities to other professional (e.g. art) reviews (especially in case of openly published book reviews), but greatly differ in their insider-outsider point of views, language, evaluation aspects/criteria and – as a consequence – content

and structure. They ultimately aim to evaluate the scientific validity, the academic writing and the research methodology of the materials. However, their accuracy-, discipline- and rigour-driven, yet constructive approach has to be tailored to the specific field of research.

Academic review processes can have more stages/rounds – of which number should be maximised –at the different publishers (or organisations), in which editorial and peer reviews alternate to result in a fair and grounded decision made about the acceptance or rejection of the manuscript for publication. Although these reviews have different aims, weights, length, timing and evaluation aspects/criteria, their challenges are closely related and can impact the validity of science and the dissemination of knowledge. These challenges, especially the ones about the assigning of reviewers and the AI-assisted reviews, require a thorough discretion on behalf of the publisher (or organisation), for which more solutions or opportunities were provided.

Paper and thesis reviews show similarities in their many attributes and evaluation aspects/criteria, hence similar knowledge, skills and attitude are needed to review them. These reviews have a priori and post review processes and can be independent (autonomous) or dependent (subservient) in terms of formatting, content and structure requirements. Therefore, researchers should equip themselves with check lists (so that peer reviewing can become a routine) in case the publisher (or organisation) does not provide an evaluation form/sheet. The examples provided (specifically for the check list and the evaluation form/sheet, but in general for the academic review processes too) in this article should be carefully adopted (e.g. with regard to the exact journal, research field, publisher/organisation etc.).

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