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Top Ten Tips: Be a Better Reviewer

Read on for reviewing insight courtesy of the 2017 SSA Annual Meeting workshop presented by Roland Bürgmann of University of California, Berkeley, BSSA associate editor emeritus; John Ebel of Boston College, founding editor-in-chief of SRL; and Brent Grocholski of Science.

- 1 Agree to be a reviewer only if you can do the job.** Don't say yes to reviewing a paper if you know you won't have the time to do it or aren't interested in the job. The editors at the SSA workshop said they would rather work with an inexperienced but interested reviewer, rather than a reluctant one.
- 2 Saying "no" is not always a bad thing.** If you have to say no to a reviewing opportunity, you can remain on an editor's radar by thanking them and letting them know when you will be available. Mention an alternate reviewer if possible.
- 3 Be honest about your schedule.** If you don't have time to review a paper, let an editor know right away so another reviewer can be found. A long delay while you mull over the offer can disrupt editors' schedules.
- 4 Be honest about your schedule, part 2.** If you can't meet an editor's deadline, ask for an extension. In most cases, the editor will tolerate a delay rather than face the uncertainty of whether you will be submitting the review at all.
- 5 Don't assume that someone else is better qualified to be a reviewer.** Some early-career scientists fear they are not "senior" enough to review a paper, but editors sometimes seek younger reviewers who have worked in prominent labs or under well-known researchers.
- 6 Develop a system for reviewing.** You might read the paper through first without making any notes or comments, then take detailed notes, then draft and redraft your comments. Following a plan like this creates consistency between reviews, makes your review notes clear and ensures that you haven't overlooked anything.
- 7 Don't use a review as an opportunity to promote your own research.** Think your work or that of your colleagues is critical for an editor to consider? That's one thing to mention. But don't use the review as a megaphone to tout your own theories or research, or to settle an old score with a rival researcher.
- 8 Focus on the science.** Technical journals have a well-trained staff to edit papers for grammar, spelling, readability and other copyediting concerns. Don't spend time in your review pointing out these types of fixes. Your job is to ensure the scientific accuracy of the research presented.
- 9 Be realistic in your comments.** A good reviewer may point out new analyses or suggest other simple experiments that could refine a paper's conclusions, but don't ask for the kind of data that would require five more field seasons to collect.
- 10 Understand the benefits of being a reviewer.** Early-career scientists who begin as reviewers often move up to an associate editor position at a journal, or receive requests to chair a session at a technical meeting. A good track record as a reviewer can boost your professional reputation and expand your network.

Ask an Expert: Michael West on Resilience



One student asked us for help dealing with the tough parts of being a scientist. Michael West, state seismologist and research associate professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Geophysical Institute, responded with his expert advice.

Q Do you have any tips for dealing with stress, career setbacks and grant/paper rejections?

A The old adages to do "something you love" and "something that matters" are painfully cliched, but each is quite applicable to careers in science. Because research relies heavily on self-direction, doing something you love is nearly prerequisite to success. You'll know you have found your passion when you find yourself lying awake at 3 a.m. wrestling with an experiment result that doesn't make sense.

You don't need to be obsessed, but engrossed is a fair goal. This matters because new ideas don't come easily—if they did, then your current research would likely have been figured out already! Being engrossed in a problem is the only way you are likely to stick with it, unable to settle for a less than optimal solution. Do not mistake long work hours with being engrossed, however. Being engrossed might lead you to choose long hours, but there is a risk in spending too much of your free time in the office. All of the other parts of our lives—friends, relationships, sports, arts, even that next episode of "Game of Thrones"—help develop our creativity. We all know that good life-work balance is healthy, but rich life experiences make you more creative in your research as well.

The second adage, do something that matters, is what buttresses us against inevitable setbacks. Having the certainty that what you do matters to society will allow you to keep negative reviews, failed proposals and tight job markets in perspective. I am surprised how infrequently our community talks about this, but it is a simple fact that some research really does matter more. As a leader in your field, it is up to you to determine whether or not your science matters. If you can honestly defend to yourself why your science is worthy of the support of public money, then you will be well-positioned to weather the inevitable bumps.

While these adages are embarrassingly easy to say, they are not easy to follow. Especially as an early-career scientist, one often has to follow a handful of opportunities. You may be working on a project under a more senior PI. You may be tied to the limitations of a particular workshop or funding solicitation. And you may feel compelled to build on your early-research successes even when they no longer hold your interest. Figuring out how to leverage your specific opportunities in ways that achieve these goals is beyond any advice column. But adhering to the two very simple metrics of "something you love" and "something that matters" will help keep you on track for the long haul.

Have a burning career-related question for an SSA expert in a future issue? Email seismogram@seismosoc.org with "Ask an Expert" in the subject line.

Wanted: Session Proposals for Seismology of the Americas



The Session Proposal Process is now open through 1 October 2017 for Seismology of the Americas, a joint conference of the Latin American Caribbean Seismological Commission (LACSC) and SSA (23-26 April 2018 in San Juan, Puerto Rico).

LACSC and SSA welcome proposals from across the fields of geotechnical and earthquake engineering, earthquake science and seismology, via this online form: <https://goo.gl/forms/WVD8vx6hPQoJ6D9e2>.

Be prepared to provide a session name, a one to two paragraph description of the session topic, and the name and contact information for at least one convener, preferably two, for each session. Each convener must have agreed to participate at the meeting before you submit your proposal.

All approved sessions will be published on the meeting website, seismology2018.org, by 1 November 2017.

Where Are You Reading Our Journals?

Send us a selfie or a shot of you and your colleagues reading BSSA and/or SRL wherever you're living and working around the globe. We'll share our favorites in the next issue, and one lucky winner will receive an SSA bag filled with seismological goodies, including a copy of "The Art of Being a Scientist" by Roel Snieder and Ken Lerner, recommended reading for students and early-career scientists by this issue's SSA Expert, Michael West. Send images to seismogram@seismosoc.org.



Parting Thoughts

We hope you enjoyed the inaugural issue of *Seismo-gram*. SSA welcomes your feedback on the content as well as your ideas for future issues at seismogram@seismosoc.org. Send us your thoughts, and be on the lookout for the next issue in October!