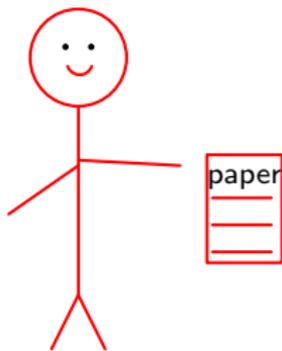# How to Write a (Seminar) Peer Review?

Travis Rivera Petit
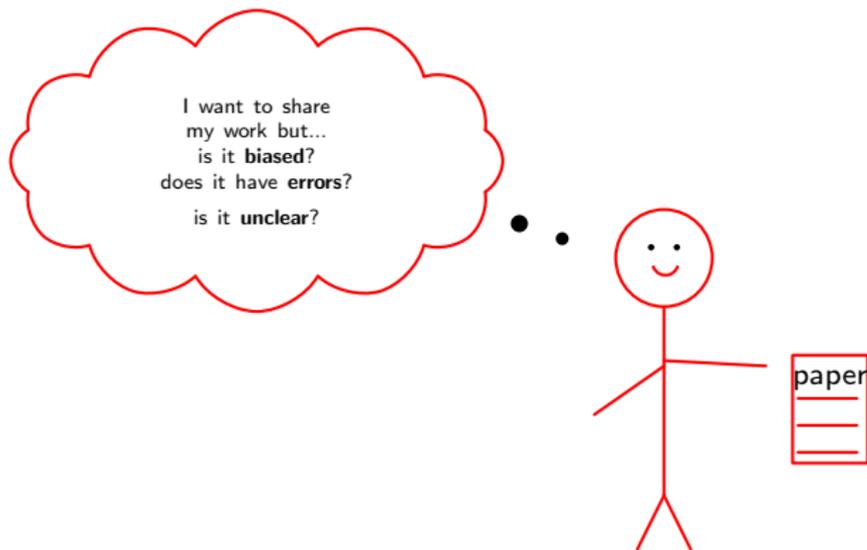
University of Basel

Let's go!

Peer Reviews

Peer Reviews

Peer Reviews

- **You need feedback**

Peer Reviews

- **You need feedback**
- **Who can give you good feedback?**

Peer Reviews

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    - Someone in your audience

Peer Reviews

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- **Who is your audience?**

Peer Reviews

- **You need feedback**
- **Who can give you good feedback?**
    - Someone in your audience
- **Who is your audience?**
    - your peers!

Summary

peer review = a review conducted by a peer

- review: a report on a piece of work, for example a text
- goals: evaluate quality, help improve the work
- peer: authors and reviewers are on the same level
- main quality control mechanism in scientific research

Goals
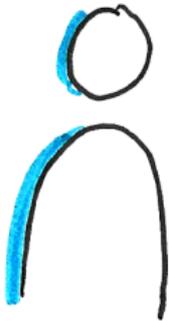
Review Author (You)

- practice critical reading
- improve your own writing
- practice giving feedback
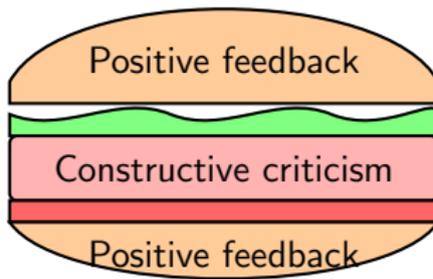- learn something new

Report Author

- gets feedback
- improves writing
- improves structure
- improves grade

Writing a Peer Review

Properties of Good Reviews

- be constructive
- be detailed and specific
- justify arguments with examples
- be honest but polite
- also highlight things you liked

The Sandwich Method

- Not mandatory but makes it easier to receive criticism

Aspects of a Review

- focus on different aspects
  1. summary
  2. clarity
  3. soundness
  4. scholarship
  5. (relevance, novelty and significance)
  6. minor comments
- consider them independently
- not a fixed structure
  ⇝ discuss more or fewer aspects if it makes sense

1. Summary

Content

- (very) short summary of the report
- use your own words

- demonstrates that you understood the text
- shows author how text was received
    - main points clear?
    - focus as intended?
    - story/structure clear?

2. Clarity

Content

- How well written is the report?
- Is the structure easy to follow?
- Is it easy to read?

- not about spelling mistakes, etc.
  - ⤳ "Minor Comments"
    - unless there is tons of them
    - spell-check your report before submission!
- point out bad style
  - but realize that styles other than yours can be good
- be constructive and not aggressive

3. Soundness

Content

- Is the formal background complete and consistent?
- Are the main arguments supported sufficiently?
- Are the proofs correct?

- not only formal proofs but also argumentation
- consider the details but don't be too picky
  - small errors go under "Minor Comments"

4. Scholarship

Content

- Is related work sufficiently cited and discussed?
- Are the references complete and in good shape?

- Recommend additional sources if you know something
  the author missed
- Check the bibliography as well
  - bibtex entries copied from Google Scholar are often incomplete

5. Relevance, Novelty and Significance

Content

- How well does this fit with the conference/journal (relevance)?
- Is the presented work revolutionary or incremental (novelty)?
- How much of an impact will the results probably make (significance)?

- used to keep a conference/journal theme
- used to decide if the results are important enough to be published
- not applicable for our seminar

6. Minor Comments

Content

- catch-all group for other comments
- typos, spelling, grammar, style, . . .

- unrelated to main message of the review
- make suggestions easy to address
  - page numbers and sentence context
- be specific and constructive
- you can include an annotated version of the text for this

NO!!!!

A peer review is not just a big list of all the grammatical mistakes you found

Receiving a Peer Review

How to Receive a Peer Review

When you receive a review
- be gracious even if you disagree
    - someone took the time to read your work
    - and give you feedback

- fix the problems
- if the reviewer misunderstood
    - identify where they got lost
    - improve the section to avoid this misunderstanding

be prepared and willing to make changes