

Strategies for Reviewing Manuscripts

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As part of an initiative on speeding up review times in sociology journals, the ASA established a task force to investigate review times. The task force made several recommendations that were adopted by ASA. One of those recommendations was to ask sociology journal editors to identify reviewers who are unusually skilled at producing thorough and rapid reviews, and to interview these reviewers to identify their strategies for reviewing articles.

After asking editors of ASA and non-ASA journals to identify their best reviewers, the three of us conducted these “interviews” over email with a total of 26 reviewers. We asked, specifically:

- 1) How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?
- 2) Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?
- 3) What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?
- 4) What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?

We note that, because we did not attempt to identify average or poor reviewers and compare them to these good reviewers, we have no way of knowing whether these good reviewers’ stated strategies actually contributed to their reputation for providing good and fast reviews. Our aim in this project was not to assess causation, so much as to start a conversation on this central but invisible task of our profession. As one respondent noted, “Manuscript reviewing must be one of the most important, least formally trained professional functions that we serve.” Our reviewers’ thoughts and strategies may suggest ideas for others on how to accomplish this central task.

The full, anonymized responses can be found at the end of this document.

In general, the responses suggest that “good reviewers” see the task of reviewing as part of the life of the mind rather than a burden; that at least some of them schedule the hours it will take to conduct the review as soon as they accept the invitation to review; that they focus on big picture issues rather than long lists of problems; and that many of them have a set list of things they look for in manuscripts, even going so far as to have text that they cut and paste. We were also interested to note that a few of these reviewers nominated by editors as good reviewers spend very little time on individual reviews, in some cases around one hour. Finally, several reviewers suggested that the review process could be sped up if editors gave reviewers less time to conduct the review, and sent prompt reminders.

1) Average time to review an article

There was wide variation in the time reviewers spent on articles, with reviewers citing numbers as low as 30 or 45 minutes, and one reviewer who claimed to spend three solid work days on each review. The average time to review an article was 4.3 hours; excluding the reviewer who claimed to spend 24 hours on each review, the average was 3.4 hours. Several reviewers noted that the time they devote to manuscripts varies depending on the qualities of the manuscript:

Respondent 13: “I aim to spend no more than 1 hour on a manuscript, and I am successful about 50% of the time at this...My rule is that a manuscript that crosses my inbox gets 30 minutes to

make an impression on me. If at the end of those 30 minutes I haven't found anything of great worth in it, I spend another 30 minutes writing up the review and send it in. If at the end of 30 minutes I discover something in it that suggests I should spend more time with it, I will come back and spend however long it takes."

2) Standard issues in manuscripts

When asked if there are particular things they look for, several reviewers do give checklists, but the checklists vary in content. We would highly recommend that graduate students and others who are new to the process of sending in articles for publication consult the full reviewer responses below to see how their submissions will be judged.

Respondent 2: "First three pages tell the story. If the writing there is crappy the whole thing is likely a no-go. Then I turn to the tables & figures."

Respondent 4: "I look first whether there is an argument there and how consistent and novel it is. Sometimes, it takes time to figure out what the story actually is, this becomes an obvious point of the review itself and often, telling authors what their narrative actually is or could be is helpful to them. If there is no story there or it has been told before, then I go through the empirics quickly to see if there is a rough diamond to be found (great new data; a smart identification strategy). If I can't find anything like that, I have already made up my mind that I'll have to recommend reject and I write up a short review of maybe 2 pages maximum. That's the vast majority of papers"

Respondent 13: "The first thing I look for is whether the evidence shows what the author claims. Very often this first elementary test is not met. If it does meet this test, then I move on to whether there are alternative ways of explaining the findings and whether they have been adequately accounted for. If this has also been done then there is a high probability that I will suggest at least R&R, but most articles fall at these first two bars. A third test is whether the author is saying something that has not already been said in the literature. Usually authors that fail at this test have already failed at tests 1 and 2. And a fourth test is whether the point is interesting or innovative, but I feel that this can be left for the editor to decide so I don't make a big deal of it."

Respondent 21: "There are many, many issues related to the application and interpretation of quantitative methods that I see crop up over and over again. In fact, I have a document with the standard things I say in many reviews to just cut and paste. A short list includes: 1) a failure to discuss any diagnostic checks to make sure the model conforms to the assumptions of the method 2) not discussing what was done with missing data 3) not discussing if survey weights were applied 4) Not discussing why the method was selected and why it is appropriate for the data and research questions 5) Failing to check for mediation, moderation, or interaction effects when the research questions/hypotheses suggest them 6) using causal interpretations for associational methods."

Respondent 23: "First, I look at the architecture of the paper. Before reading a word in sequence, I look at beginning and end. I try to see if I can pick out the motivation and central question of the paper. Surprisingly, many papers are either not motivated or under-

motivated...by which I mean the author does not convince me or even sometimes bother to try why we should care about a particular question or the author's particular take on the question. I look to see if I can identify the evidence and methods. I read the reference list. ... You can tell a lot about what the author knows and is thinking from the references, and again, I look for red flags, obvious missing references."

3) Strategies for reviewing quickly and thoroughly

Many reviewers note that the key is to block out a period of time on your calendar to do the review when you agree to do it:

Respondent 18: "When I do accept a request, I actually schedule that window of time, and include it in my "to do" list for that week."

On the other hand, several reviewers note that they only start reviewing when they get the reminder email! A clear suggestion to editors would be to give the reviewer a short time to review (perhaps four weeks) and then send reminders before that time is up.

Respondent 20: "To be honest, oftentimes it's the reminder from the editor that gets me moving on my review"

Respondent 2: "But honestly, the issue is not time-of--the-work; but finding time in the mix of everything else to *get to* the review. I often sit on papers for months as they work their way up an increasingly full priority queue."

Respondent 25: "I believe that most reviewers do a review in a matter of hours. The trick is to get them to invest the hours sooner rather than later. If you ask for a review in 6 weeks you are likely to get it in 6 weeks. If you ask for 4 weeks, you will get it in 4 weeks. If you ask for 2 weeks, you will get a lot of people declining to do the review. The trick is to find the right "window" to allow. I thought 4 weeks was about right."

Reviewer 26, in a "note to journal editors": "I bet that if you check your data you'll see that most reviewers wait until after deadlines have passed. I suspect that's because missing a deadline triggers a negative stimulus—guilt—and we want it to stop so we write the dangled review. So you might as well move up the deadlines a bit. I doubt that most reviewers have such complicated schedules that we need a month of lead time to squeeze in a review. If you start sending us gentle reminders after two or three weeks I bet you'll shorten the median time to completed review without sacrificing much quality. In other words, my argument is that time to completed review is less a function of work load and more a function of the lack of extrinsic motivation for completing the task by the deadline."

In terms of content of reviews, there is also a strong theme of avoiding the trees and focusing on the forest.

Respondent 15: "Avoid overly detailed, 'thousand cuts of death' to the manuscript, where the reviewer raises minor comments throughout. Here the reviewer may take too much time because he/she fails to see the big picture of the manuscript and may not know about (or care

about) the literatures the author seeks to engage. The reviewer wastes time by raising objections to every point the author seeks to make—partly because he/she doesn't know what else to do."

Respondent 17: "I used to write long lists of problems and then include all of them in the review. But I don't do that anymore. One reason I've stopped doing it is because I feel like it's a waste of time. Another is because I think that the authors probably get more out of my review if the feedback addresses fewer important themes."

Respondent 18: "So I address the 3 or 4 or 5 most critical issues (often with several smaller issues also noted), and leave it at that. For me, the most important aspect is not providing exhaustive feedback, but providing suggestions that are specific enough (and justifying those suggestions) to be helpful to the author."

Respondent 19: "I tend to focus on big picture issues -- how the argument holds together; connections between argument and analysis; methodological clarity and appropriateness."

4) Additional themes

Several reviewers note that doing reviews can be beneficial to the reviewer's intellectual and professional development, in that it exposes you to literature you may not know and probably should. Adopting this attitude towards reviews may make them seem less of a chore, and more like participation in the life of the mind.

Respondent 5: "I learn a lot from being a reviewer so I almost always say yes. It actually seems to me to be a privilege not a burden to be able to contribute in this way, so I work hard to be effective"

Respondent 23: "I think people don't appreciate how much their own work can improve by reviewing the work of others. As you read more of other people's work, including work at different stages, you can get a more general perspective on what makes quality articles that you can bring to your own work. Since I think people tend to think about reviewing as something that is pure service, as opposed to something that contributes to their own intellectual life, it is hard to get people to do the work. But, if young faculty and graduate students got the message that they would become better writers the more they reviewed, we might have more reviewers stepping up to the plate."

And there is a strong theme about trying to be collegial and humble.

Respondent 9: "Don't be mean. Oddly enough, this is my number one rule."

Respondent 15: "I try to provide the kind of review that I would like to receive for my own papers—helpful. That means avoiding laziness—such as sweeping statements without providing examples/evidence from the paper"

Respondent 24: “My reviews are usually a page to a page and a half max...and they usually only go that long if I have something substantive to say about the case itself. I tell the author precisely what I find to be lacking and I am not unkind but I do not mince words ...I never ask the author to write a paper other than the one that they have written but I do ask them to write the best version of what they are trying to write. I always start the review with a positive sentence, but not so positive that the author will be shocked if they are rejected.”

In addition, reviewers offered several other interesting insights on the general problem of excessively long review times:

Respondent 2: “My solution on this front would be to more closely follow the science model: cap words to 1500 or so with a single figure and table, perhaps a small number of papers closer to 4000 words. It seems impossible (a 90% cut), but this forces people to build on others' work (rather than re-write it in a 20 page lit review) and limits one to one of the main science tasks instead of all 4. It also makes it much simpler to review, because everyone is focusing on the parts that matter.”

Respondent 5: “One of my greatest strength is not as a sociologist, but as a reader of crime thrillers (really!). I love a good story, and a convincing plot. I believe that reviewing is essentially looking for a good plot and story line development with plausible setting, characters and denouement. If the story is not cohesive I have to try to identify what it would take to tell this tale to a reader’s satisfaction.”

Finally a respondent who had been an editor had this insightful comment:

Respondent 25: “I worked like a dog to keep things moving quickly. My "staff" of one person did the same. We never took days off. I spent 20 hour per weekend writing response letters. We set a 4 week deadline, sent out a 3 week reminder, and hounded delinquent reviewers relentlessly. We cut the turnaround time almost in half--mean & median of about 7 weeks from receipt of a ms. to mailing of a review/acceptance/rejection, with a mean of 3.75 reviews per ms. But that was all accomplished inside the editorial office by just sheer persistence and blind stupidity. I don't think it's possible to do that with the less personal automated submission, communication, review system. I communicated directly with reviewers. Now, reviewers never contact the editor directly. They can decline to do a review almost anonymously. It's all automated, less personal, and I suspect slower in getting responses. The technology is faster, but the mechanisms for speeding people up are now missing.”

Although the responses do not reveal a silver bullet that can magically reduce manuscript review times, one element of good practice is clear: when you agree to do a review, actually put into your schedule the time that it will take to do it (three to four hours on average). It may be helpful to both author and reviewer if reviewers keep comments to big picture, substantive issues, particularly “how the argument holds together; connections between argument and analysis; methodological clarity and appropriateness” (respondent 19). Finally, those reviewers who have been editors clearly seem to believe that manuscript review times are in the hands of editors, not the hands of reviewers, and they fear that the transition to automated review systems may be reducing direct communication between editors and reviewers.

RESPONDENT 1

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* This varies depending on the journal. I review frequently for [ASA Journal]; and typically for that journal it might take me 45 minutes to read and review, given that methods are usually quite rudimentary. When I review for other publications, such as [Non ASA Journal], the caliber of articles is much higher and the labor involved in providing precise feedback is much more intense. I would estimate for a high quality article with advanced methods, it would take me between 1-1.25 hours to perform those reviews.

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* Most commonly the critical concern is whether the data offer the opportunity for a robust analysis of the research question and if the data are managed effectively. For example, I might look at a regression model and examine its strengths and limits. I also look for the article being very clear in what is being tested and why, considering the extent that it moves the field forward.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* Once I feel the literature review is secure, I often times provide a rather quick read of that, often times more for my own interest rather than to critique the article on that basis. I do look for holes, however, and will commonly offer suggestions for additional citations. I then look at the data and judge if it is of good quality (i.e. longitudinal data suggest to me that an article has more potential than cross sectional data). If the data are limited, I skip forward to analysis and get a sense of the findings in advance of a line by line read of the MS. Then I have a good sense of whether review is going to be supportive, and I can write the review (to some extent) while I read the MS. Sometimes my initial impression changes as I do the line by line read, but more commonly it sticks. My point here is that a reviewer can skip forward and gain a cursory sense of an article's strengths and limits, and that helps inform how to read and likely respond to the MS.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* I am very frequently asked to review MS for Teaching Sociology (I've been on the editorial board for many years) and am very secure in knowing what MS the journal seeks and what the editors look for. So those are easy. I tend to restrict other reviews to my area of expertise in work and family. These are tougher, but each component of the article I consider to be discreet concerns. In writing the review I try to restate the authors intent and consider the merits of the question posed, I then restate the theoretical orientation and consider the merits of the literature review, I then restate the methods and consider the merits of data and analytic strategy, and then I restate the findings and if these are interesting/trustworthy, So there is a bit of cookbook to my approach, which is to work within the conventional article structure and evaluate the merits of each component.

RESPONDENT 2

Before getting to your exact questions, I think there are two bigger issues, one general and one specific to sociology. On the general issues; I think the whole notion of peer review likely needs to be radically re-thought; and my thinking on the issue is that it likely needs to be abandoned in favor of an open-source ranking system. (See for example the write up here: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/17/science/open-science-challenges-journal-tradition-with-web-collaboration.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0). Particularly in an interdisciplinary age where people are publishing findings on-line before they get reviewed (think of the Arxiv for networks or the NBER "working paper" series for econ), a slow review process is deadly to rapid progress. But to be effective (and this is the second issue), I think we also need to stop publishing papers that are really mini-books. The ASR/AJS model is to simultaneously open a new theoretical front/problem, describe new empirical results, often introduce a new method, and close/solve the problem simultaneously. This has generated papers that are ever longer and more complex and encourages reviews that tend toward "you need more theoretical expansion of <any noun>" that are often too vague to mean much but result in longer lit reviews that never change a table/figure....My solution on this front would be to more closely follow the science model: cap words to 1500 or so with a single figure and table, perhaps a small number of papers closer to 4000 words. It seems impossible (a 90% cut), but this forces people to build on others' work (rather than re-write it in a 20 page lit review) and limits one to one of the main science tasks instead of all 4. It also makes it much simpler to review, because everyone is focusing on the parts that matter. OK, off my soapbox; on to your questions: In particular, we are interested in the following questions:

1) How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)? - Actual reviewer time varies radically. If the paper is bad, I can tell and review in less than a couple of hours. If the paper is brilliant, similarly a couple of hours. Of course most papers are neither (the first should be desk-rejected much more often). The rest of the pack usually takes me at least 1 full work day but sometimes (often) two or three. But honestly, the issue is not time-of--the-work; but finding time in the mix of everything else to *get to* the review. I often sit on papers for months as they work their way up an increasingly full priority queue.

2) Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts? - The big issue is whether the question is good and if the main table/figure answers that question. This is largely a clarity issue (that would be made better by cutting most of the theory rather than expanding it). Once I decide a paper is interesting; I think the job of the review is to provide substantively useful comments to make the paper better. Which is different than trying to make the paper (a) into a paper I would write or (b) a "perfect" paper. The goal is decidedly not to demonstrate how smart I am by finding some esoteric hole in the author's logic/methods/data or make suggestions that involve essentially writing a new paper. I think the basic rule of thumb is that if implementing your suggestion would require fundamentally changing the analysis, then it should be a reject and not an R&R. If your suggestion is for writing a different paper, you might not actually be properly judging this question. The difference between "interesting" and "perfect" seems lost on most reviewers. We should require authors to fix silly methods mistakes or gaping holes in the literature; but too often we send them chasing down the "perfect" which

will not really make the paper better instead of focusing on what will make the paper impactful. For example, I was just reviewer at a management/networks journal where the author/reviewer response was over 100 pages. That's a phenomenally inefficient waste of time. The poor author could have written a small book in that effort! We all know that real research is a compromise between perfect scientific design and available methods/data/etc., but seem to forget that when writing reviews. We fetishize fancy methods (strong findings should be robust to imperfect methods; we're fools not to ask why most empirical work in economics is really still dominated by OLS!)-novelty. Is whatever is "new" in the paper of interest or surprising? Too often I think authors and reviews focus on a "competing theory" model that is inappropriate and we somehow (particularly for top journals) denigrate the simple empirical newness of a paper. We have to open the door to empirical discovery & replication.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* - First three pages tell the story. If the writing there is crappy the whole thing is likely a no-go. Then I turn to the tables & figures.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* - If it's a good paper that is just not quite hitting the mark, I will translate tables to figures, suggest alternative strategies, etc. Please feel free to elaborate on these questions or to address any other issues that you think it would be helpful for us to know, or for the sociological community at large -style review process is just not adequate for the sheer volume of work being produced (and required by P&T). So we need to lower the volume. We can't lower the number of pieces and most of the text-volume in most papers is superfluous to discuss on this issue. - Again, my sense is that the oldus window-dressing rather than substance. If we radically cut the length of papers, then people have to build on others work and the review time can be fast and direct. Second, we need to recognize that science is a self-correcting process and work with that. Our job as reviewers is to keep out what is truly wrong, not re-write papers for authors so that each and every one is some perfect jewel. If the paper is no good, it will not get cited. That's fine. The current strategy of heavy culling is a necessary result of trying to select to save costs. On-line, open publication with minimal review would solve that. If we're not willing to go that far, then at least pushing 50% of all ASA journal papers toward a "note" length would have much the same effect. On the editorial side, stringing authors along multiple R&Rs is wrong. First, a 2nd R&R should be very very very rare. IF the paper needs 3 R&Rs then it should have been rejected in the first round. Second, new reviewers should not be brought into the process for R&Rs -- perhaps rarely for an obvious hole in the first round; but never for a 2nd R&R.

RESPONDENT 3

Flattered to be identified; but I have to admit sometimes I fail to turn reviews around quickly. Indeed, with increasing reviewing load (I don't keep a precise count but I am confident I do between 20 and 30 articles a year ie at least 2 a month), especially since I am personally not brilliantly organised and have no PA, I omit things. My point is; that I would not necessarily take myself as an ideal - and certainly not as a model others might follow. I can only tell you what I do.

1) How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)? I try to turn ms around as close to straight away as possible with the assumption that I am going to be equally busy in a month's time as I am now; so I might as well get them done. That worked when I was more junior; and I used to get ms turned around in a few days or a week. I am much more committed now but I try to get ms reviewed as quickly as a can - normally within 2 weeks of their arrival, certainly in a month. The problem is that if I miss the month, I forget about them - and then as has happened occasionally (and I am glad to say it is occasional) I have had to be chased. In terms of ms: I am a quick reader- maybe a very quick reader. I will take about 30 minutes to read an ms of about 6-8000 unless it is very dense. But weaker pieces which I just know are not publishable take a lot less; I know this will upset authors but pieces which are way off the pace will be read to the end by me - in the hope of redemption. But I am scanning for signs of interest at that point; normally sadly it doesn't come and the process is very quick. With all papers, on completion, I will immediately note down on the back of the ms what are the key issues with the paper and what my central decision is: accept (very rare), minor revision (sometimes), major revision (a lot; and I see this as correct - journals, authors, and reviewers are a team trying to produce the best work for the discipline - it is the reviewers job to help in that process), reject (a lot - I am afraid; I don't like to do it but there are just too many papers now and some have to be eliminated from the process). I will often then let the paper sit for a while, as I think through my initial reaction. And sometimes if it is a complex paper I do back to my highlighting. But I don't think I ever change my mind about my fundamental response to the paper; only to details within it. I then in one burst (as quickly as possible) write out my response in an email, telling the editor a) the central point of the paper and then in a series of number points the key amendments which need to be made to improve the argument; typically these are empirical additions and conceptual refinements and, if I know a literature which will help/has been obviously missed, I cite it. My reports for revisions are probably around 1000 words long (I don't know precisely) because the moment I have done them I read them through quickly to check for typos and send them: I don't have time to do more. Rejections/Acceptance reports are shorter - much shorter - for obvious reasons.

2) Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts? I simply read them from the perspective of a potential reader. The standard and maybe only thing I look for is this: Is this paper interesting? That is my prime criterion. Does it make a contribution to the discipline/field? Is the argument/evidence convincing/new? Does the level of presentation reach publishable standard.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* This question is more applicable to revisions: rejections and outright acceptances are easier and pretty quick or at least quicker. (And perhaps the fact that I am thinking in terms of placing the paper in those three major categories - rather than just reading the paper as independent text - does accelerate my time of assessment). A further potential accelerant: Knowing that manuscripts will often come around a second time unless they are very good and obviously publishable or publishable with very minor revision (in which case reviewing is easy anyway), I read ms quickly but (hopefully accurately) all the way through in one go marking the key passages with a view of making a general assessment of its argument. I am then looking to identify its precise strengths and weaknesses. I have to say: I make a snap judgment based on my own perspectives (biases) and my knowledge of the fields. Maybe other referees contemplate the whole process much more than me and are more (too?) pedantic about details; I just don't know.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* I can't really say I am thorough. I don't try to address every footnote and every literature and sub-literature which the author may or may not have ignored/used. I give an overall assessment of the paper as a whole and try and point up the critical areas of weakness or absences. In short, I try to read the paper as the author wrote it (or how I interpret that the author wrote it: the central idea that he/she had in mind). I hope my reviews are fair and perhaps even generous; certainly I have no time (and in fact despise) reviewers who use the anonymous process to look clever, to grind axes and worst of all to settle scores - eliminating rivals' work under the guise of professional criticism. (I wonder if reviewers so motivated take a lot longer). What I also try to do to help the editor is to be aware of how my own readings is bound to reflect my own position and to highlight literatures and areas which I don't know (a lot). Consequently, I hope editors will be able to see why I have read the paper the way I have - and perhaps misread it. I admit; I sometimes make mistakes, I was too generous on a paper at a theory journal recently. One final point which may help. Everything I do is out of respect for a professional colleague. That is my motivation in reviewing. I don't like being kept waiting months for a review; and I don't like receiving comments in which the reviewer is obviously delighted with their own cleverness and point scoring rather than helping a fellow academic. A useful technique I ask throughout the process is this: could I make my comments to a colleague's face about his/her paper. Imagining I am actually talking to someone I know helps me a lot to focus on what I am trying to say and how I should communicate my response - and what they are trying to do. And it makes me want to do it quickly. As I say, I really don't know if I am a good reviewer. The best way of seeing what I do is to get hold of a paper I have received and the comments I made on it (and the time it took for me to get it back - the editors will know the timeline). I would be very happy for you to get that information. It is important for the profession. Ps Probably takes me nearer 45 mins to read a paper, in fact. PPS: one of the problems of slow turn around may be simply motivation: there are few rewards for reviewing - hardly any of them concrete (ie direct recognition/reputational advantage or increased chance of future publication or monetary) and no real sanction for slowness either (especially since universities are pressing down on academics to deliver other things - and they do have sanctions). Sanctions can't work. But what a system of rewards would like like that would actually motivate I am not clear about.

RESPONDENT 4

The reason for long review times is academic overproduction which in turn is related to escalating competition. Thus, overall number of submission goes through the roof, number of qualified, experienced reviewers stays the same, reviewers get too much to review, take longer and longer to do it. Ok, but you're interested how I do it. Well, first, my background makes me feel uncomfortable if I'm late. Second, I don't review topics on which I have nothing to say or papers whose abstracts are so poorly written that the chances of them getting through are close to 0. And I stopped doing reviews for mid level journals unless I am really interested in the paper. This way, I am avoiding being overwhelmed by review requests (I get maybe one or two per week). To do a review, it takes at least 2 hours, sometimes up to 5. I look first whether there is an argument there and how consistent and novel it is. Sometimes, it takes time to figure out what the story actually is, this becomes an obvious point of the review itself and often, telling authors what their narrative actually is or could be is helpful to them. If there is no story there or it has been told before, then I go through the empirics quickly to see if there is a rough diamond to be found (great new data; a smart identification strategy). If I can't find anything like that, I have already made up my mind that I'll have to recommend reject and I write up a short review of maybe 2 pages maximum. That's the vast majority of papers (I try to keep my R&R rate roughly at that of the journals, trying to calibrate my own level of criticality). If a paper has a story and I have already written comments about it (how to improve or what other literatures to connect to or how great it simply is), then I look at the empirics more carefully. I spend a lot of time on the tables and variable definitions if it is quantitative, or with the historical details or interview passages if its qualitative. This then becomes usually a second set of recommendations or things you ask for. Finally, there is nitty-gritty stuff you come across while reading, which I scribble on a piece of paper in order not to forget. Then, I reread my comments twice to check that it makes sense for journal editors (who will not have read the paper) and for the authors. I make sure there is some positive wording about what's really good about the paper, keeping in mind that we're in the cruel business of making and breaking careers as reviewers. I don't mind if you attach my name to this, if you want to. I suggest that ASA has a committee on overproduction and does something about it. For example: lifetime page number limit; or five year no of submission to top 5 journal limit. I'm joking, of course, knowing this is not the Soviet Union.

RESPONDENT 5

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* It normally takes about 3-4 hours. I read the article at least twice, draft a review, then let it sit before I send in a final recommendation. I would say about a quarter of the time I need to read an article a third time.

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* I primarily look for sociological value to the reader beyond the shared criteria of writing, organization, substantive content, methodology etc. Issues that arise sometimes are: “how much there is really there?”; clarity of organization and writing; and, the breadth of literature review.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* One strategy is to put a bogus date due in my calendar (usually 2 weeks out from receiving invitation to review) and to try to meet that. If I get a little jammed up I usually still get it in “early”. I also take my willingness to do the review seriously and think that it is part of my professional contribution to the discipline. If I can’t do it well and on time, I should decline. That said, I learn a lot from being a reviewer so I almost always say yes. It actually seems to me to be a privilege not a burden to be able to contribute in this way, so I work hard to be effective.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* Taking really good margin notes is very helpful to doing what I hope is a quality review that helps the editor to make the decision. Reading carefully twice or more is essential; checking references sometimes; leaving several days or a week between the first and second deep readings. That strategy often leads to seeing things better or differently the second time through.

RESPONDENT 6

I am honored to have been mentioned in this connection and appreciate your effort to address this important problem. But, alas, I am part of the problem in terms of response time. I think I'm a pretty thorough and conscientious reviewer once I get to it, but I take far too long to get manuscripts back and increasingly have had to decline reviewing assignments. (Part of that is specific to this year, while I'm on the tenure-and-promotions committee of my university, but not entirely.) To answer your questions, it takes me a long time to review a manuscript thoroughly -- ordinarily 3-5 hours depending on length and complexity to read and write up comments. My only strategy for reviewing thoroughly is to read the manuscript carefully, including tables, FNs, and appendices, and make extensive marginal comments on the manuscript by pen as I go, writing main points on the cover of the manuscript as those points emerge. Then I use the notes on p. 1 to construct a critical narrative, and use the jottings throughout for more detailed comments that follow the general narrative. For this to work, I need to do it in one sitting (because my notes are elliptical and sometimes illegible) or at most over 2 days, and because it's rare to have 4 uninterrupted hours during the academic year, I tend to put off the reviews until I'm late. So, alas, I have no tips on how to review manuscripts either quickly or promptly.

RESPONDENT 7

I do not take very long to review articles. I like to attack them almost as soon as I receive them, and I would rarely take more than a week to return them to the journal editors. In real terms, however, I would only take a few hours (three or four) to perform a review, unless the article is particularly challenging to read or to assess. However, I should preface any comments about strategy with a comment about personality. I am very production oriented, and as a result, am driven to finish things, and get them off my plate. I have anxieties about forgetting things, and I know that if I finish to start with (how's that for an oxymoron?), then there's no risk I'll forget. So, much of what I do is determined fundamentally by how I am, rather than by a strategy. Also, my children are grown, and I am married to an academic, which means that an early morning or late evening in front of the computer screen is far more acceptable than it might be for others. But I do have some comments about how I review which might assist others: I see reviewing as an important form of scholarly development. . I look at reviewing as an opportunity to learn things that I should either already know, or that I can learn now, and it challenges me to think about what I know in a different light. So, I see it as an opportunity, rather than as a duty, and one that I am in a hurry to do. It is going to help me as much as it helps the editor and writer. I focus on my strengths, and don't fret about the areas upon which I don't feel competent to comment. My philosophy is that the editors must have chosen me to read this because of what I know, not because of what I don't know. So, I do not scramble to read up on a sophisticated theoretical perspective with which I am not familiar when I *can* comment on the cohesiveness of the argument, and the link to a thematic area that I know well. I make sure to signal the areas which I believe someone else should verify. One of my greatest strengths is not as a sociologist, but as a reader of crime thrillers (really!). I love a good story, and a convincing plot. I believe that reviewing is essentially looking for a good plot and story line development with plausible setting, characters and denouement. If the story is not cohesive I have to try to identify what it would take to tell this tale to a reader's satisfaction. I approach the writer with deference and respect. After all, they probably know more than I do about what they are writing. I see them as colleagues from whom a respected opinion has been requested, and for whom I should make haste, as I hope they would for me. I try to craft as clear and as complete a review as possible. I sign my reviews when possible so that the authors can contextualize my comments relative to my own scholarly positions. And finally, I am strongly motivated by the selfish desire to be known as she-who-can-be-depended-upon. Being geographical far removed from most of my intellectual peers, reviewing is one of the small things that I can do to be actively involved with the wider community. I will never forget the first international review I was asked to do. I was extremely humbled, and am still gloriously flattered whenever I get a request to review. I hope this helps. I am very happy to clarify my thoughts, discuss them further, comment on the thoughts of others, or assist in any other way you can think of.

RESPONDENT 8

In the past, I have attempted to complete a review in about three days. Roughly, one of these days (or parts thereof) is spent reading the manuscript and writing notes on it (I usually print the manuscript). A second day--or again, parts thereof--is spent going back to the manuscript, looking over my notes, and often incorporating the notes into a word document that will ultimately contain my review. I also attempt to organize that document into strengths, areas for improvement, and "minor points"; under each of these sections, I include quotes or specific examples from the manuscript to illustrate. The final day is spent effectively "filling in the gaps" and writing the actual review. I will say, though, that over the past four months or so, I've increasingly had to decline to review or have been slower to review. In reviewing manuscripts, I've noticed two issues that crop up: (1) In some cases, I've read very theoretically rich manuscripts that are empirically underdeveloped; (2) In other cases, I've basically encountered the opposite. An example of a case under the first scenario might be when the author is effectively trying to do too much with (limited) data, basically leading to a theory-data/results mismatch. The theory may be a real contribution, but the limited data cannot support the framework at the high level of abstraction/generalization at which the theory is pitched. Examples of cases under the second scenario include a failure to ground variables in theoretical concepts and/or an inability to develop a theoretical synthesis or novel theory when the results are not aligned with established frameworks. I hope this helps for the time being. If I can be of any further assistance, please let me know!

RESPONDENT 9

I've been trying to think what may be unique about my reviewing strategies. Here's what I think is unique, but I'm not sure how "profound" these strategies are:

1. Don't be mean. Oddly enough, this is my number one rule. All of us have received reviews of articles we've submitted where the reviewer took advantage of his or her anonymity to say things they wouldn't say if we were to learn who they are. It will evidently come as a surprise to some that it's possible to make constructive comments without resorting to sarcastic, ungenerous, or ill-tempered remarks.
2. I think such an attitude can have at least two consequences: (1) One is that it helps keeps reviewer comments to a minimum, to only those things that are of substantive importance. So many of the comments I've received have been utterly useless and were only thrown in so that the reviewer can show off how smart you are. (2) Second, the author is less likely to be discouraged about resubmitting the article. I know that one of the most cited articles within sociological circles (I believe it is either first or second all-time) and outside as well (it has shown up in books, such as Malcolm Gladwell's "Tipping Point") was almost never published because one of the reviewers said it wasn't worthy of being published in a 3rd-tier journal. In fact, the author let the article sit for almost three years before resubmitting it.
3. Limit one's remarks to substantive issues. For instance, don't ask authors to discuss topics tangential to the article's primary point.
4. Be theoretically agnostic. That is, just because someone tests and finds support for a theory you don't like, doesn't mean it shouldn't be published. Again, a friend of mine went round and round with a reviewer who didn't like his theory (even though he had empirical support for it). Finally, he wrote the editor and told him that he wasn't going to respond to any more comments from the reviewer because they didn't see eye-to-eye, and that the editor would have to make a choice whether to publish the article or not. Ironically, it has become one of the most highly-cited articles in sociology (and economics and religious studies).
5. When reviewing articles that appear to be written by folks where English isn't their native language, I try to keep my editorial suggestions to a minimum and judge the article by its content not by its prose. However, I typically send a separate note to the editor, noting that if the article is deemed good enough for publication, it will need some editing.
6. Resist the cult of statistical significance. I run into this a lot. People seem to think that just because a coefficient is statistically significant, it is substantively significant. As the economist Deirdre McCloskey has made this point repeatedly (see below), that's not necessarily true. Variables that have very little effect can still be statistically significant, especially if the sample size is quite large. Also, a lot of the time, people are analyzing either complete data or non-random data -- in those cases, statistical significance does not apply (at least if it's calculated the standard way). McCloskey, Deirdre. 1995. "The Insignificance of Statistical Significance." *Scientific American* April: 32-33. Ziliak, Stephen T., and Deirdre N. McCloskey. 2008. *The Cult of Statistical Significance*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

REVIEWER 10

In regards to your questions, it takes me about 2-3 hours on average to complete a review, depending upon the stage of the paper. The standard things that I look for are a clear theoretical and empirical contribution; good data (i.e. carefully and thoughtfully utilized for the questions at hand, high-quality data), and a strong analysis. Admittedly, I don't have any strategies for reviewing manuscripts quickly. I probably end up spending more time than is needed to review a paper, but I want to make sure that my comments are fair and thorough. If I agree to review a paper, I read it once through and take notes in the margins about issues and questions that come up for me. I then read through the paper again, see if I can write out the argument (if I can, then it usually is stated clearly) and elaborate on the issues and questions that I took notes on. Inevitably, this process leads to more comments and questions, and I then identify 3-5 key issues that the author needs to address. Most of these issues relate to where the empirical and theoretical contributions (i.e. what is new here? how does this work extend our knowledge and contribute to theory?) may be lacking and how to possibly improve them.

RESPONDENT 11

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* Approximately 4-6 hours

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* Is it well organized? Can I readily identify the research question, and does it line up with the lit review provided and the empirical evidence that is analyzed? Have they missed any key points in the literature(s)? Are they over/under-stating the reach of their data? Common issues: grammatical/formatting errors; fuzzy research question; does not drive home contribution to literature; wrong audience (e.g., better suited for a different journal)

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* Review intro, subheadings, conclusion, flagging key issues. Scan bibliography to get a sense of the literature they are engaging/missing. Outline review letter, and then elaborate on each point as I return to the meat of the article.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* I usually read a hard copy beforehand (sometimes in several short sessions), marking up my queries in the margins. Then I outline those issues in a word doc (creating in essence a skeleton of the review response), then revisit each issue by returning to the clean pdf copy with fresh eyes (and in the process I usually revise or dump some critiques, or pickup new ones). Lastly I reread the review I wrote to make sure I'm being clear, and try to always end with at least some words of encouragement. P.S. I never work on a review early, and am almost never late. In other words, I usually allot time for the review right around the due date. So giving me 3 versus 6 months doesn't make any huge difference. It goes on my calendar as a major To Do either way. HOPE THAT HELPS!

RESPONDENT 12

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* 3 hours on average, but of course it varies according to the length of the manuscript. Manuscripts in my area--health--tend to be a bit shorter and crisper.

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* I tend to focus on questions of research design (and I review mostly quantitative studies, which is relevant here): how good are the data, how well have the authors analyzed them, are their claims in keeping with their results, and do I have enough information to really evaluate the strength of their findings? In answering these questions, the data, methods, and tables are a good place to start. Of course the background, discussion, and conclusion are important too, but these are largely set-ups to the main event, and I can see how much I'm going to enjoy the paper looking at the results first. Authors tend not to realize how much the abstract matters. It really sets the stage for the entire review process.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* I usually set aside a single day to do nothing but reviews. I have to be in the right mindset. Once I'm there, I like to keep the inertia up. Often the best papers are ones that can be reviewed the fastest: they make their contributions plain and everything is clear as glass. With papers like that I can identify the strengths and weaknesses very quickly and do my best to provide constructive feedback. Papers that are hard to read are both more likely to be rejected and take a bit longer to review. Sometimes I don't spend too much time on papers that clearly aren't right for journal X.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* Some reviewers like to provide copyediting suggestions, so write reviews that can appear quite thorough. I don't do that (if the writing needs some editing, I just make a blanket statement, like "this paper needs a bit more quick-to-quality editing"), which allows me to spend more time on other things and, I like to think, spend more time on things that reviewers are supposed to focus on. I think I'm especially thorough with papers I've given an r-and-r, under the assumption that those are the papers in which the authors will probably have to take my comments seriously. This is sort of a minor point, but I also like to provide bullet-point comments. This allows me to be more thorough in the sense that I can provide specific comments regarding a method, paragraph, sentence, or coefficient, without having to write a long narrative review. I like to write reviews thinking of the author on the other end: what comments are they going to be looking for, how can I deliver them in a fashion where they're likely to take my advice seriously, and how can I prepare them for the next round of review at another journal if I reject the paper this time around. Authors will naturally polish things over time over consecutive drafts, but it's the core design issues they might need outside perspective on, and that's what the review process is really good for.

RESPONDENT 13

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* I aim to spend no more than 1 hour on a manuscript, and I am successful about 50% of the time at this. Another 30% of manuscripts take 90 minutes to review, and another 15% take two hours. That last 5% can take anything from half a day to a solid week of work. My rule is that a manuscript that crosses my inbox gets 30 minutes to make an impression on me. If at the end of those 30 minutes I haven't found anything of great worth in it, I spend another 30 minutes writing up the review and send it in. If at the end of 30 minutes I discover something in it that suggests I should spend more time with it, I will come back and spend however long it takes.

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* The first thing I look for is whether the evidence shows what the author claims. Very often this first elementary test is not met. If it does meet this test, then I move on to whether there are alternative ways of explaining the findings and whether they have been adequately accounted for. If this has also been done then there is a high probability that I will suggest at least R&R, but most articles fall at these first two bars. A third test is whether the author is saying something that has not already been said in the literature. Usually authors that fail at this test have already failed at tests 1 and 2. And a fourth test is whether the point is interesting or innovative, but I feel that this can be left for the editor to decide so I don't make a big deal of it.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* I don't have any particular strategies. I do watch the clock when I'm first reading it to avoid going over 30 minutes. I skim it first, then go back to grasp the main claim and consider the evidence, and then read it as carefully as possible in the time left.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* If the claim doesn't match the contents, the review points this out. If alternatives have not been addressed, the review focuses on what those alternative explanations might be. If literature has been missed I suggest citations. And if the point can be reframed to be more interesting I will make that suggestion.

RESPONDENT 14

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* 2 or 3 hours.

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?*
I don't have a check list. My procedure is usually to read the paper all the way through, while making notes on my laptop and putting some numbered comment boxes in the margin of the ms. I will probably check to see how well the abstract, introduction and conclusion match, and how far the data presented bear on the research question. I will then go through what I see as the problematic areas in more detail, writing brief comments on each. If necessary I will check any points I am unsure about using either my own small library or the web. I will try to make suggestions for additions if anything comes to mind and may provide some additional references. If I am doubtful I am perhaps less forgiving than a few years ago and will tend to select reject rather than R&R.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* Only the things mentioned above. Probably I don't visit the main library as much as I used to years ago and use the web instead to check points. I do tend to put a time limit on a review these days and operate on the principle of a 'good enough' rather than a perfect job.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* I follow up my original reading of the complete articles by re-reading what I take to be the problematic sections. Hope this helps. I suspect different people have different approaches. People here in the UK are thinking of the grieving families in Newtown and hoping our friends in the US can somehow break this terrible cycle.

RESPONDENT 15

1. *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* Probably if I know the area reasonably well, about 2 -1/2 hours. To me, reviewing takes more time than it should. Overall, I try to provide comments to help authors improve their papers—even those where the quality will never be up to par for the particular journal. This is in contrast to what I sometimes observe, where reviewers provide sleight-of-hand comments to dismiss papers that hold no interest for them. I generally view the reviewing process as something worthwhile that allows me to learn something new--so for most papers, the investment is worth it. I attribute journal reviewing time partly to the journal editor. If the editor has a sense of the reviewer's expertise, she/he can more effectively direct the manuscript. Providing the abstract to the reviewer during the letter of invitation really helps too—the reviewer can decide if she/he feels sufficiently familiar with the topic. Another issue is the stage of the review of the manuscript—if the first draft, broader general reviews are helpful; for papers that have been revised and resubmitted, a more detailed review is often needed.

2. *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* Yes—I would imagine most of these issues are self-evident-but they might be stressed better to potential reviewers, since off-the-wall reviews are still endemic to publishing in sociology. The things I look for are the following below – these are also the standard issues I see in papers which authors develop insufficiently.

1) The importance of the research question. Is the paper significant for moving theory and research forward? Does it span sociological literatures, preferably core literatures, and preferably issues of broad importance across the social sciences? Related to this, does the paper speak to new debates that sociologists have overlooked, including nationally public policy debates? Is there something novel here?

2) Consistency/logic of argument—is this strong—are all ends of the argument well-explained and tightly connected? Are nuances in the literatures/argument recognized by the author? Is the argument too simplistic—or too boring?

3) Does the theory section clearly connect with the empirical section—do these two sections flow together well?

4) Is the data set unique in providing new empirical evidence about the research question? 5) Is the methodology appropriate and well-defended? 6) Balance of presentation of material—is too much attention given to methodology/data analysis at the expense of theory? Conclusions may be shortchanged at the expense of other text.

3. *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* I try to provide the kind of review that I would like to receive for my own papers—helpful. That means avoiding laziness—such as sweeping statements without providing examples/evidence from the paper. For example, “I feel the paper is unconvincing” with no explanation or minor, easily correctable problem noted by reviewer. (Meaning what--you are too lazy to provide a competent review and just

want to provide a sweeping statement to get this paper off your plate? Or perhaps something in this manuscript contributes to some irritation you have with the literature?) To review a manuscript quickly, effectively, and helpfully, I would ask the six questions above I have noted. Also, probably add, for some journals (where editors do not do enough screening of papers)—is the paper highly appropriate (quality and topic) for that journal audience? Citations to the particular journal can be a quick tip-off whether or not the author has considered the journal audience.

4. *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* I think the above also allow for a thorough review. Avoid overly detailed, “thousand cuts of death” to the manuscript, where the reviewer raises minor comments throughout. Here the reviewer may take too much time because he/she fails to see the big picture of the manuscript and may not know about (or care about) the literatures the author seeks to engage. The reviewer wastes time by raising objections to every point the author seeks to make—partly because he/she doesn’t know what else to do. Or there may be a lack of maturity with the reviewer, where they are only able to provide comments about agreement/disagreement of certain points—they cannot see the big picture. (Of course, failure to make the big-picture clear can be the author’s fault.) When a manuscript is at the final stage for acceptance, it may be more useful to note editorial issues in more detail. Note that the reviewers should avoid “my-way-or-the-highway” reviews. Respect the author and the literatures being presented (even if the author is unfamiliar with/dislikes these literatures). The more I think about it—the more I probably take a tiered-system in reviewing. In the first, round, ask the basic questions noted above; if the manuscript makes it past that round, more detail is in order (but avoid presenting a moving-target for the author in terms of suggested revision).

RESPONDENT 16

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* It usually takes me about a half day. This means that I have to wait until I have that clear amount of time available to work without interruption. I find that it is not feasible to do it in 'bits and pieces' - it has to be done in one sitting to get an overview of the paper and how that parts relate and work. Absences from work on research and administrative visits consume the uninterrupted time and this can lead to delays (because of the difficulty of reviewing away from home while using a laptop). I used to find reviewing easier when I was sent hard copy as I could then schedule it as a task to do on long train journeys: I would scribble on the manuscript and then write up notes when back at the desk. When working electronically this is not possible - it is difficult to simultaneously open a manuscript file and write a document file (especially on a laptop) without a lot of 'juggling' that distracts from the reviewing task. Electronic work is more easily done from a desktop (especially one with two screens), and this is why uninterrupted desk time is needed.

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* I think that the main common issues that I raise are: a) Coverage of relevant literature - does the paper identify and engage with the literature in the area or have obvious sources been missed? This is particularly pertinent for conceptual and discussion papers - e.g., papers on 'power' that ignore whole areas of the debate and so do not locate themselves in relation to standard and established contributions. I particularly comment where a debate had figured in the journal in question, but the manuscript does not seem to be aware of this. I see this as an important part of the continuity and progression of 'normal science'. b) typos and grammatical issues - many manuscripts are poorly proof-read. c) Lack of clarity because of a heavy and ponderous writing style. This reflects not the concepts and terminology used, but the actual writing style that can be very dense and obscure, with long sentences and multiple clauses. I invariably suggest that papers can be rewritten for clarity, as it appears that few have been read by the author once they have been written. d) relevance to the particular journal: is the paper better suited to a specialist rather than a generalist journal. If submitted to a general journal, a specialist paper needs to have more of its framework explained and clarified and so needs to be written differently from how it would be written for a specialist audience.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* I don't really have any. I don't find Office 'tasks' and 'to do' lists usefully. Using hard copy made this easier: the hard copy would sit on the corner of my desk looking accusingly at me until I wrote the review. Electronic copies drop off the bottom of the computer screen very quickly and it is difficult to remember that they need doing. I do sometimes put them in the diary, but this depends on me knowing in advance when I will have the opportunity to look at the manuscript. Gentle reminders are useful, except in the case where they arrive too quickly. In some journals, the reminder comes a week or so after agreeing to write and tends to imply that the editor expects a very quick response. This just alienates the reviewer, so the reminder needs to be timed carefully. About a week or so before a realistic deadline is good.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* Allocating a block of time is essential as this means that the whole of the manuscript can be kept in mind while assessing it.

I do compile the comments as I read through it, going back and forth to edit when I find that issues questioned are in fact dealt with later in the article. When completed, I go back over the whole report and rearrange paragraphs or reword sections so as to produce a holistic assessment. I am, inevitably, more thorough on papers that relate directly to my own current research interests, and I sometimes spend much more time on these. In the case of papers on the margins of my interests I find it difficult to be thorough because I need to be selective (partly because of lack of expertise in some areas. I will sometimes note that my comments relate only to certain aspects of a paper (where I feel that I have the expertise) and rather than judge other parts I add a note that the editor may wish to rely more on other reviewers with competence in that area. I hope that those comments help. I am happy to amplify on anything or respond to any further questions that you may have.

RESPONDENT 17

I think this is an important issue for our field. As someone who publishes in sociology journals and other specialty journals and reviews for most of those journals, I recognize that there is a shortage of high quality reviewers. I think that may be one of the bigger causes of the slow-down problem. The best reviewers are just overburdened with reviewing. They get asked to review all the time. I used to say yes to every review request, until I found myself reviewing at least 2 manuscripts a week. Lately, with additional editing opportunities that have come my way, I've begun saying no to most review requests outside of a core set of journals. I figure that saying no quickly helps speed up the process of looking for new reviewers, but I sympathize with the editors as they continually have to search for a new pool of reviewing talent among junior faculty and advanced grad students to replace those people like me who have become overburdened. So this is just a long way of saying that I think much of the slowness in reviewing is the result of competition and the scarcity of high quality reviewers. Now to your questions:

1) How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)? On average, I'd say that I spend 3 hours per manuscript. This varies greatly by paper. I spend less time reviewing very bad papers with obvious weaknesses, and I'll sometimes spend a half day reviewing a high quality paper that I think deserves more detailed feedback.

2) Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts? I start by asking three questions: 1) what is the paper trying to do (e.g., what is the theoretical problem it is trying to solve)? 2) How well do they accomplish this objective? And 3) Is the question or problem worthy of our attention (i.e., how novel is the insight?). Some papers never get past the first question, which can be quite frustrating for a reviewer. I spend most of my time dealing with questions 2 and 3.

3) What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly? Ideally, I'll do a review in one evening. I usually read papers around 8 pm and try to finish the review before 10. Giving myself deadlines like this helps speed up the process. However, this schedule usually only works with the worst papers. If a paper is fairly complex and the problems are nuanced, I'll spread the review over 2 or 3 days and return to it several times. As far as scheduling goes, I use my Outlook calendar to find times to do reviews. If the review is due in 6 weeks, I'll schedule the review for week 3 or 4. Sometimes other stuff comes up and I'll have to push the review out a week. But by scheduling the review initially for week 4, I give myself plenty of time to finish it before the deadline. I think it's helpful when journals send out a reminder that a review is due. I especially like it when I get a reminder that the review is due the following week. This is usually the kick-in-the-rear I need to get it done.

4) What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly? I try to read the paper front to back in one sitting. Often I can figure out what the main problems with the paper are during that first read. If there is an obvious issue, I'll sit down at my computer immediately and write a quick summary of the problem. If the paper has several interconnected problems, I'll usually jot down some notes on the cover of the manuscript and return to the paper the next day and see if those problems still make sense to me. The more complex the paper is (and the more

complex the problems with the paper are), the more likely I am to reread certain sections of the paper, which I usually highlight during my first reading, and then I'll try to prioritize those problems and address them in that order in my review. I rarely send a review back to the editors immediately after finishing it. I'll only rush a review out if I've gone over the deadline. Usually I prefer to let the review simmer for a while and then I can return to it and make sure that I still agree with my own feedback. I used to write long lists of problems and then include all of them in the review. But I don't do that anymore. One reason I've stopped doing it is because I feel like it's a waste of time. Another is because I think that the authors probably get more out of my review if the feedback addresses fewer important themes. As a writer I find it tedious to address every little single comment, some of which can be addressed during the final revision. Now, as a reviewer, I try to focus my efforts on what I consider to be the top 3-4 issues/weaknesses. I figure that I'm more valuable to the editor and author if I can offer in-depth feedback on a few issues rather than try to point out every little thing that I consider to be problematic.

RESPONDENT 18

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* I estimate that I spend 4 – 5 hours reviewing a manuscript for a journal article, including writing up the feedback to the authors.

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* As an over-arching comment, I would say that I try to provide the level of feedback and specificity that I would want to receive from a colleague regarding my own work. Sometimes that means giving hard truths, but always with specific ideas for steps that can be taken to improve the product. I find that the issues that emerge with each manuscript tend to vary based on the degree to which the manuscript is developed, both conceptually and methodologically (there is wide variation, in my experience). Some of the most common issues I encounter include:

The authors try to do too much in a single paper, and so fail to do much of anything effectively. I am not sure if this comes from a desire to avoid criticisms for producing the “least publishable unit,” or if the authors hope that their paper will be a magnum opus. Sometimes this issue can be remedied by relegating some of the preliminary analyses to footnotes or appendices, but often, the work simply needs to be split into two papers.

A failure to explicitly discuss the method is perhaps a particularly consistent issue among people who use more advanced methods. This is frustrating, because it leaves the reviewer unsure whether the authors only have a tenuous understanding of their method, and so perhaps have overlooked some critical aspects of the structure of the data. It also seems to be a disservice to the discipline. Not all readers will be familiar with every method used in a journal, so it’s helpful to provide some information that will build the collective level of facility with advanced methods. As someone who teaches graduate courses in statistical methods, it’s disappointingly difficult to find articles to use as examples with my students that use a specific method AND do a clear, concise job of both explaining why that method is appropriate given the structure of the data and interpreting the findings.

Another is misspecification of the concepts, or attempts to draw conclusions that simply aren’t supported by the data. I frequently see papers that contain very good ideas, but use data that can’t really address the questions the author hopes to investigate. One of the key areas of violation here is using survey data where the wording of the question could be construed a few different ways. Authors also frequently try to make grand statements about their findings, or impute a degree of relevance that isn’t appropriate for the question they have asked or the manner in which they have attempted to answer it.

Inadequate coverage of literature, often overlooking a key area that might contradict the findings of the paper is another. It would be great if authors would view this as an opportunity to contribute to an active debate – makes the paper much more exciting and relevant! *Under-selling* the importance of findings, either in terms of advancing an existing debate, or contributing to a “real life” issue or policy question, can also be a problem.

In terms of process, I typically skim the article to look for obvious issues (logical inconsistencies, questionable uses of data or existing theories/literature, mismatch between the question and the analyses, etc.). On a second, more thorough read-through, I’ve got a sense of what the major issues are, and can make more specific notes.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* In order to review a manuscript quickly, I tend not to accept requests to review manuscripts if I am not able to block out half a day on my calendar to complete the review within the requested time frame. When I do accept a request, I actually schedule that window of time, and include it in my “to do” list for that week. Of course, that doesn’t always work, and I have certainly been tardy a few times with my reviews, but when I realize that things are going off the rails with my schedule, I try to communicate that with the editor. I also try to complete the review in one sitting, so having a block of 4 or 5 hours to devote to the process is pretty critical. There is nothing worse than reading part of a manuscript, and needing to put it down and revisit the issues hours or days later.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* I try to be both cognizant of my own limitations regarding the manuscript, and to clearly communicate those to the editor. For example, while I use some advanced quantitative methods in my own work, I am certainly not familiar with every method that might be brought to bear on a particular question, so if I am not familiar with the approach an author is using, I will explicitly state so in my comments. Similarly, if I suspect that I know who has authored a manuscript, I will contact the editor to alert him/her of that fact and make sure they are comfortable with my completing the review. In terms of process, I tend to work back and forth (during my second, more thorough, reading) between the manuscript and developing a skeleton outline for the issues I will raise for the authors. The end result I work towards is a solid set of recommendations that the authors can implement. If they have overlooked key aspects in the literature, I try to suggest specific pieces/authors for them to incorporate, as well as provide a justification for that. If there are conceptual issues with the formulation of their question or analytic strategy, I try to give suggestions. I would also add that the definition of a “thorough” review will vary based on the level of development of the manuscript. I typically try to avoid providing more feedback than the authors can reasonably be expected to incorporate in a single, solid effort at a rewrite. So I address the 3 or 4 or 5 most critical issues (often with several smaller issues also noted), and leave it at that. For me, the most important aspect is not providing exhaustive feedback, but providing suggestions that are specific enough (and *justifying* those suggestions) to be helpful to the author.

RESPONDENT 19

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* Usually 1-2 hours. It depends on the manuscript quality. I actually spend more time on a more developed manuscript, because I feel that it actually has a chance of being published. The less developed manuscripts I read quite quickly (the one I just finished was unusually undeveloped -- it read like an undergrad paper -- and I spent no more than 30 minutes on it. But it is an outlier.). I feel that editors should do an initial screening before sending manuscripts out to make sure they are suitable; it is actually quite irritating to spend time reading something that has no chance of being published.

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* I tend to focus on big picture issues -- how the argument holds together; connections between argument and analysis; methodological clarity and appropriateness.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* I am not intentional about trying to be "quick," but I do make choices about how much time I will spend on any particular manuscript, as I described above. For all manuscripts, I read it carefully and identify a few key points to make in the comments to the authors. They don't need me to line edit or to nitpick every point. Instead, I make more global comments that I think will improve the paper overall. I also tend to give writers the benefit of the doubt -- I don't go in looking for errors; I go in to help a colleague improve their work. As a result, my written comments tend to be quite short and to the point. I am not going to re-write the paper for them. If a manuscript needs to develop its literature review, for example, I will say that, and maybe offer an idea or two, but I won't do the developing for them.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* My strategy here is no different than what I said above: Big picture and making suggestions for improvement, without doing the work for them. I do tend to offer more specific line-level feedback on a second (or third) revision, especially things that should be addressed before publication. One other thing to note is that I don't tend to write extensive comments to the editor. I might write a line or two summing up the take away message of the review, but otherwise, the editor and author read the same comments. That also saves time, of course, but that isn't the intention behind my doing that. It just seems more honest and transparent. I also think about what is helpful to me as an author. I don't find four page reviews that comment on every little thing very useful. They come across as petty and leave me wondering what to focus on in a revision. I find global feedback and suggestions more helpful, as they leave the thinking, writing, and revising to me, not the reviewer. I try to offer the authors I review the same courtesy. In fact, as I write that, I realize that this is the same approach that composition scholars advocate using when evaluating student work (Bean 2011, for example). I realize that peer review and grading student papers is not the same thing, but I do wonder about the overlaps. Instead of detailed margin comments to justify a grade (the equivalent of a line by line peer review), Bean argues for broader questions that push the student to develop and improve their argument and presentation. The little stuff tends to fix itself as the author works on the bigger issues. I don't know if there is any evidence in how this plays out in the peer review process, but it seems that without even realizing it, this is the approach I have been using when reviewing manuscripts. I hope this helps -- this is an important

area of investigation, and I look forward to the committee's report. If I can help in any other way, please let me know.

Respondent 20

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* Answer: The actual work time is about 2 hours. For some ms., especially if I have a strong negative reaction, I might review, let a day or so go by and then return to it. Typically, editors ask me, and I assume others, to review ms. in areas with which they are very familiar.

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* Answer: (a) Is the research question clearly stated? (b) Does the theory/approach to the question make sense; i.e., is the question something that can be addressed by the author(s) conceptual approach? (c) Does the literature review, which is hopefully succinct, cover previous research findings related to the author(s) research question? (d) Are the hypotheses stated clearly at the outset. I try to be flexible on this dimension with qualitative ms, which I occasionally am asked to review. (e) Is the research design appropriate for testing the hypotheses? (f) Does the analysis meet acceptable standards; (g) Are the findings presented in tables/figures in a way that addresses the previously stated hypotheses? (h) Is the discussion a natural extension of the findings; I.e., how does this particular research project extend our knowledge in the general subject area? All of the points I listed above call for straightforward scientific writing. I try to give a break to author(s) who I sense might be non-native English speakers

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* Answer: To be honest, oftentimes it's the reminder from the editor that gets me moving on my review, which ups my guilt quotient for not meeting my responsibilities to my profession.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* Answer: Reading the manuscript when I have an appropriate amount of time without any interruptions -usually in my office at home. Please feel free to elaborate on these questions or to address any other issues that you think it would be helpful for us to know, or for the sociological community at large to discuss on this issue. One final point. I wonder if there a built dynamic in the journal review process that ensures that it will take much longer than editors and those who submit manuscripts would like. The more experience that an individual has in a substantive area, as well as the corresponding growth in number of network ties with other scholars in that area, the more likely that that individual will be asked to review manuscripts. At the same time, however this individual will have more and more demands to review manuscripts, serve on P & T committees, etc. Good luck on this project.

RESPONDENT 21

I take it very seriously and consider it an important part of my contribution to the discipline. Unfortunately, there are far too many incomplete, incoherent, or sloppy papers being submitted to the journals I review for and, in general, the review process is too long because of this and other factors. I applaud you and your colleagues for undertaking this task. I am not at all concerned about you revealing my name, so you can do so if you choose too. Your specific questions are answered below:

1) Net work time is always between 2 and 3 hours, with the average probably closer to 2. If want an exact number, 2 hours and 15 minutes is my best guess. I know you didn't ask this, but I take far too long to actually getting around to reviewing manuscripts. I am usually about 2 weeks past the deadline. I need to find new strategies to avoid the delay, but reviewing can be difficult to squeeze in. I also know you didn't ask this, but in 2012, I reviewed about 20 articles, so this represents quite a bit of work for me.

2) As I assume other reviewers do, I try to look for things related to my strengths. So, if the article is closely connected to my own areas of interest, I will carefully examine the literature review to make sure all relevant articles are cited and discussed appropriately. For all articles, I closely examine the methodology and results sections to make sure the methodology is appropriate for the research question, has been applied appropriately and completely, and that the results are interpreted "in line" with the methodology. My primary methodological strength is in quantitative methods, so I offer much more explicit direction in regards to that. If it is a qualitative paper, I always apply to the criteria laid out in the recent NSF report on the subject, but don't move much beyond since I don't have as much expertise in that. There are many, many issues related to the application and interpretation of quantitative methods that I see crop up over and over again. In fact, I have a document with the standard things I say in many reviews to just cut and paste. A short list includes: 1) a failure to discuss any diagnostic checks to make sure the model conforms to the assumptions of the method 2) not discussing what was done with missing data 3) not discussing if survey weights were applied 4) Not discussing why the method was selected and why it is appropriate for the data and research questions 5) Failing to check for mediation, moderation, or interaction effects when the research questions/hypotheses suggest them 6) using causal interpretations for associational methods. Broadly, something I see over and over again with manuscripts is just general sloppiness. It often appears the people submit manuscripts without having proofread them or shared them with colleagues for comments. Many of the issues that are raised in reviews could be caught ahead of time with more diligence attached to each manuscript.

3) As noted above, I focus on the parts of the manuscript that I can contribute the most too, so usually the methods/results sections. I do read the whole manuscript, but I focus my time and energy on those sections. I also focus my reviews on the most pressing issues, instead of listing them in order. This means that I tend to focus less on minutiae and spend more time on a manuscript's "fatal" flaws. Finally, I do each review in one sitting, instead of spreading it out over a couple of days.

4) The most important thing for me is to print out the article and read it carefully, writing marginal comments out as I see them. I then turn to typing up my review immediately after I am done reading the paper. This means that I think carefully and fully about my comments, since I am writing them out twice. While I am sure I sometimes miss important things, this strategy appears to work well for me. Hope these comments help, let me know if want me to elaborate on anything. Good luck with your report.

RESPONDENT 22

My main strategy for reviewing papers thoroughly and in a timely fashion is to refuse papers that I don't believe I can review in a professional manner – in other words, I'll only take on papers that I believe I can deal with properly. I have no idea how long it takes, on average, to review a paper; it seems to me that the average would not be a useful statistic anyway because there is a lot of variation in how much time has to be put into reviewing, depending on how complicated the paper is. So the range is anything from a couple of hours (usually for a pretty hopeless paper that the editor should have desk rejected anyway) through to maybe 20 hours for something really difficult (though it is rare that I spend that much time). But that's just a guess because I don't keep track of how much time I spend. My strategy is usually to read the paper once, read it again, and then write the review. Often there is a gap of up to a week or 10 days between the first and second readings during which I think about the paper, on and off. I find this is very useful for helping me to understand what is central to the paper and what isn't. But I don't follow this practice religiously: some papers have to be read more than twice and some require that I read other things too, maybe because the authors cited something or because there's something I need to check. Finally, I try to review a paper as soon as I can, rather than waiting for the deadline to approach.

Respondent 23

I've answered the specific questions you posed to me below. However, based on my experience as a reviewer and as an associate editor on a major journal, I would focus on different issues than the four questions you posed. It seems to me that a major thing that slows journal review time down is actually getting enough reviewers to agree to review. I figure that for each article I submit, I need to agree to review at least four articles for the discipline to breakeven (since that is the optimal number of reviewers for the paper I submitted). If people are submitting more articles than their reviewing, then of course it's going to be difficult to get enough reviewers without overburdening good reviewers. I doubt many people actually operate at a one submission to four review rate. I also think that there is a culture in the discipline in which being late on reviews is not seen as professionally problematic. So, I don't think that people take care to schedule their reviewing obligations thoughtfully. I, for instance, won't accept an article to review unless I first put it in my calendar as a to do item. But, when I have edited special issues, I almost always have people who promise a review and then don't deliver it for weeks after the deadline. It is as if people begin reviewing on or after the date of review is due. Finally, I think people don't appreciate how much their own work can improve by reviewing the work of others. As you read more of other people's work, including work at different stages, you can get a more general perspective on what makes quality articles that you can bring to your own work. Since I think people tend to think about reviewing as something that is pure service, as opposed to something that contributes to their own intellectual life, it is hard to get people to do the work. But, if young faculty and graduate students got the message that they would become better writers the more they reviewed, we might have more reviewers stepping up to the plate. Anyway, I hope the answers below help. I very much support the mission of your committee, so best of luck.

1) How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)? How long it takes to review manuscript depends on a variety of factors, including how long the manuscript is, whether the manuscript is a revise and resubmit or not, and how well written the manuscript is. A short manuscript that I'm reviewing for the first time and that is well written may only take 2 to 3 hours to review, including reading the manuscript. Obviously, longer manuscripts take longer both because they take longer to read and because they are usually more complex papers that produce more reviewing questions. Revise and resubmit's take substantially longer to review because reviewers have to read the underlying paper as well as prior reviewer comments, the editor's letter, and the memo on revisions. For an average revise and resubmit this is often close to 75 to 100 pages of text. So, I would guess that the average R&R takes me six hours to review, but this is only a guess (I have never tracked it). Poor writing slows this down and good writing speeds it up.

2) Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts? I don't have a standard protocol for reviewing, like a checklist or something. But, there are often problems with a literature review in terms of adequately developing the contribution of the article, methodological details that have been omitted from the manuscript that make it difficult to evaluate fully, and/or findings where the interpretation seems questionable. It's not

uncommon for me also to remark on the quality of writing, as this varies widely across submissions I review.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* I have a notetaking system that I use as I review. I write short notes about major issues on the cover page, and take in-line notes about smaller issues as I read. This way the priorities that I stress in the review are already formatted when I go to write. Then, I then write a draft review quickly, compare it to the notes in the manuscript that I have made, and then finalize it. I also don't necessarily review an article in one sitting. I like to read my papers to review while I workout on an exercise bike or treadmill or something. It's a "two-fer". Or, I will do all the reviews I have on tap when I travel so that I am reading on the plane. Depending on whether I am reading at the gym or when I travel, it may take me a few days to actually finish the article. But, I think this speeds up my reviewing because I don't wait for some mythical time in my schedule where I have a 2-6 hour block to review (which never comes). Instead, I do a little here and there over a week when I can and then it's done with little impact on the rest of my work. Honestly, I think the thing that makes you review more quickly is just practice, i.e. reviewing a lot. That said, I put a limit on the number of articles I will review in a month (at 2, although I never say no if I am on an Editorial Board). It is not uncommon, though, for me to get 3 to 5 request review in a week, most of which I have to decline because I would quickly only review for a living if I did not. As luck has it, I can even get several requests in a single day (I think my record is 6 in a single day), but again, I decline if I'm already over my reviewing target for the month and I am not serving on the editorial board of one of the requesting journals.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* I try to be thorough by reading the article carefully, and also stepping back from the article to think about the big picture arguments that are being made for contribution as well as how major components of the article such as the literature review, methods, and findings articulate with one another. Again, I think this is something that you get better at as you review more.

RESPONDENT 24

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* --2 to 4 hours, my big problem is getting to the ms. as I am exceptionally busy, particularly since I became chair of my department. To cut down on reviewing time, I now only accept ms. in which I already know something, or if the article is about something that I want to learn about—either a new theory, method or subject. I turn down all articles that are peripheral to anything that I can claim as an area of expertise and I do get my share of those. --I mainly review for sociology journals, but I list 27 journals on my vita for whom I have been an occasional reviewer—they are in the fields of history, comparative politics, politics, European studies, etc.—so I do expect to learn things from the task of reviewing!

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* --I quickly look at the ms, to see if it is coherently written. I tend to look the ms. over quickly to see if I catch any obvious errors—missing references, etc. If the ms. looks like a sloppy first attempt I am less kindly disposed towards it. I also look to see if there are any obvious and major references missing...there are some subjects that you would want to see particular citations for if you are to take the ms at all seriously. Too many people, grad students and faculty under pressure to publish send in incomplete or badly written first drafts and I confess, that this annoys me. I have told a few editors this also. I am not a reviewer who feels that it is my job to instruct an author in writing. If they are non-native writers they should get writing help and I suggest this if I think that there may be a language issue. It happens, not often, but it happens.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?*

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* --Questions 3 and 4 are connected for me. First, I look at the architecture of the paper. Before reading a word in sequence, I look at beginning and end. I try to see if I can pick out the motivation and central question of the paper. Surprisingly, many papers are either not motivated or under-motivated...by which I mean the author does not convince me or even sometimes bother to try why we should care about a particular question or the author's particular take on the question. I look to see if I can identify the evidence and methods. I read the reference list. Someone told me that Juan Linz always did that and I do it without fail. You can tell a lot about what the author knows and is thinking from the references, and again, I look for red flags, obvious missing references. Usually from this first survey of the paper, I can get a sense if the paper is going to be an R and R, or a reject. I sometimes reject, rarely accept with minor revisions. I tend to R and R if I possibly can. If everything looks good from my initial examination of the paper, then I actually read it, and look at argumentation, deployment of evidence, etc. I usually can zero in pretty quickly on what a paper lacks and what it needs. I try to think positively, and many papers, if the author has done a lot of research (often the first article from dissertation variety) are salvageable even in a major journal. I am not a reviewer who writes 3 page single spaced reviews helping the author re-write and acting as though I am writing a mini-article on the paper. My reviews are usually a page to a page and a half max...and they usually only go that long if I have something substantive to say about the case itself. I tell the author precisely

what I find to be lacking and I am not unkind but I do not mince words –i.e., if the point of the paper is not clear, or the motivation is lacking I tell the author to specify it—I do not suggest motivations or points that is for the author to decide. If the paper is badly organized, unfocused, wordy etc, I say it but leave it to the author to fix, some time’s citing a few examples. I never ask the author to write a paper other than the one that they have written but I do ask them to write the best version of what they are trying to write. I always start the review with a positive sentence, but not so positive that the author will be shocked if they are rejected. My reviews usually fall into three parts: an overall assessment telling the author what I think needs to be done generally; a substantive critique if I know the case; and then specific references to points that need to be answered or are incorrect with page numbers attached, and of course, I list those missing references if I find any.... I am always absolutely candid in my comments to the editors with very precise reasons for my editorial decision. I review regularly for a top journal in sociology and I can remember only one instance where my assessment (in a positive direction) was at variance with the editorial decision. Reviewing is hard work but it is also useful because one gets a chance to read so much new work. From reading the other reviewers, my guess is that what delays reviews is that too many people do not know HOW to review. They take the injunction to give the author useful critique as an injunction to almost re-draft the paper themselves. I read excessively long reviews that are often not helpful to the author, and they are merely reviewer meditations...or the reviewer attempting to impose their vision on an author. Hope this helps

RESPONDENT 25

1) *How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average (counting only time actually spent reviewing the manuscript--i.e. only the net work time)?* It usually takes me from 6-8 hours. I usually take about a day to do a review--unless the paper is just terrible, in which case it takes far less time.

2) *Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up with manuscripts?* I look for papers with a good "take away" message. If I've learned something interesting and important, I think the paper has potential. As most editors will tell you, the "So What?" factor is paramount. I see quite a few papers that are pretty well done, and often interesting, but in the end, they don't deliver much news. Quite often papers try to summarize too much at once. Some authors try to offer a *Reader's Digest* condensed version of a dissertation. That almost never works. Some authors do not integrate their conceptual/analytic "background" into the actual analysis. The paper begins with a heavy dose of "theory" then offers the "data" often in a very interesting, descriptive fashion. Then the "theory" reappears at the end, with the authors saying, "As you can see from our data, the theoretical apparatus is useful." I like to see the theoretical/analytic apparatus applied throughout the discussion of the data. Many authors--many of them likely to be graduate students--write papers which are very capable demonstrations of how a particular theoretical approach (say, for example, Goffman's notion of framing, keying or self presentation) can be applied to a particular situation or data. (Often the kid of paper crafted for a graduate seminar.) These can be very nice demonstrations, but in the end, they only serve to show that, say, Goffman certainly had a good set of ideas--but the author doesn't offer anything really newsworthy.

3) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript quickly?* Do it immediately!!! It takes me 6-8 hours no matter when I do it. If I really want to do it in a timely fashion, I do it right away. Don't set it down. Figuratively, it just gets buried, until the reminder notice comes and I do it in a day.

4) *What are your strategies for reviewing the manuscript thoroughly?* I try to offer comments that could make the paper publishable--that can help the author improve the paper so others will learn something and find the issues under consideration as interesting as the author does. OTHER STUFF REGARDING "SPEEDING UP THE PROCESS" When I was editor of [XXXXXXXX], One of the few things I thought to be under my control (and about which I could actually do something positive) was the "turn around time." This was 10 years ago, just when we were beginning to do most of our communication via e-mail, but just before on-line submission and review (e.g., MsCentral) became popular. I worked like a dog to keep things moving quickly. My "staff" of one person did the same. We never took days off. I spent 20 hour per weekend writing response letters. We set a 4 week deadline, sent out a 3 week reminder, and hounded delinquent reviewers relentlessly. We cut the turnaround time almost in half--mean & median of about 7 weeks from receipt of a ms. to mailing of a review/acceptance/rejection, with a mean of 3.75 reviews per ms. But that was all accomplished *inside* the editorial office by just sheer persistence and blind stupidity. I don't think it's possible to do that with the less personal automated submission, communication, review system. I communicated directly with reviewers. Now, reviewers never contact the editor directly. They

can decline to do a review almost anonymously. It's all automated, less personal, and I suspect slower in getting responses. The technology is faster, but the mechanisms for speeding people up are now missing. Reviewers probably feel less directly involved in a "human" process. They feel less personal obligation to the editor. They don't get any sense of urgency. As an editor, I tried to use people who I knew were good reviewers. I kept track of who had said yes and no, and sometimes tried to persuade some of the "nos" into doing a review. I hand wrote a personal thank you note to each reviewer. I'm not sure if any of this helped improve the journal, but it cut the turn around time drastically. I believe that most reviewers do a review in a matter of hours. The trick is to get them to invest the hours sooner rather than later. If you ask for a review in 6 weeks you are likely to get it in 6 weeks. If you ask for 4 weeks, you will get it in 4 weeks. If you ask for 2 weeks, you will get a lot of people declining to do the review. The trick is to find the right "window" to allow. I thought 4 weeks was about right. I can't think of much one could do to get a reviewer to do a review right away instead of setting it down for a month or two and doing it only when pressed by a deadline. I'm as guilty of this as the next guy. As editor, I used to ask my editorial board members to help me out from time to time with an "emergency" review. They always responded within about a week. It can be done, but the editor needs leverage. I don't know how to increase that leverage these days. Offer a modest stipend for a timely review? That would probably be out of the question for most journals. Social Problems did about 1500 reviews a year. It would be hard to pay a review staff of that magnitude. I hope this helps. Let me know if I can respond to further direct questions. One more thing: Many journals have now employed co-editors. Many editors have been using a set of associate editors to actually handle reviews, etc. Some editors use graduate students to do a first screening of papers before review. All these innovations are time consuming. This *may* (I'm not sure that it does) improve the quality of review that a paper gets, and it *may* improve the quality of published papers (again, I'm not sure), but I am sure that it slows down the turnaround time. I have yet to see an office with a complex division of labor where the division actually results in quicker processing. At [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX], there was a very good team of associates who were asked to help the editor on reviews and decisions. There was a very smart, conscientious, hard working editor. But trying to insure that input was received from all precincts really slowed down the process.

RESPONDENT 26

Manuscript reviewing must be one of the most important, least formally trained professional functions that we serve, and I am pleased to contribute to a conversation about standards and tricks of the trade. Over the past 15 years, I have reviewed about 100 manuscripts for some 25 journals. During this period I have also served as associate editor and consulting editor for the [non-ASA Journal]. Much of my thinking about manuscript reviewing comes from my experiences with the [XX], but I have reviewed papers for a wide variety of other journals, including generalist and specialty journals in sociology and interdisciplinary journals in demography and urban studies. My comments are geared toward graduate students and relatively green assistant professors or other professional sociologists. I have received many brilliant reviews of my papers by obviously seasoned veterans, and I have no illusions that I have anything to teach a very large fraction of my colleagues. Nevertheless, for the less experienced here are some thoughts on the four questions I was provided by the ASA committee, plus one I added at the end. 1. How long does it take you to review a manuscript on average? Writing a good review takes me between two and four hours. I usually read each paper twice, in a fashion discussed in my answer to question 3 below. This takes one to two hours. Then it takes another one to two hours to write a one- to four-page review. I don't have much of an explanation for why some reviews take two hours and some four. I might say that if I am well-versed in the literature it takes less time, but then I sometimes fall prey to Freud's "narcissism of small differences" and spend a long time pondering the minutiae instead of cracking on. 2. What are your strategies for reviewing manuscripts quickly? My first thought is that I have none, really. That is, I usually wait until the deadline approaches or passes. I do not apologize overly for this. As the Tillys argue in *Work under Capitalism*, all work (in their terms) is motivated by a combination of incentive, coercion, and commitment to some collectivity. The article reviewing process features almost none of any of these, except perhaps a diffuse sense of "service to the profession." Which, like, that and a ticket to Philadelphia...¹ I guess the implicit bargain is that you should review promptly and thoroughly so others will review promptly and thoroughly for you, but there are obvious flaws with that line of thinking. My less glib answer is that in order to do a review quickly, you should carve out a full half-day to do it. It might not take that long, but if it doesn't, then so much the better; for the rest of your day you're playing with house time. I find that I write reviews more efficiently if I do them in one sitting, rather than piecemeal. This is probably because reviewing a paper is like pushing a boulder down a hill—the hard part is overcoming the inertia of rest. 3. What are your strategies for reviewing manuscripts thoroughly? In general, I think it's important to read a paper twice. Uploading the major concepts into your brain on the first pass enables a deeper understanding of the paper on the second because you are already familiar with the main points. In addition, reading a paper twice

¹ Two notes for journal editors: first, if you can think of ways to provide incentives or appeals to commitment to the collective, use them. Coercion probably doesn't work as well because it leads to shirking. Second, I bet that if you check your data you'll see that most reviewers wait until after deadlines have passed. I suspect that's because missing a deadline triggers a negative stimulus—guilt—and we want it to stop so we write the glabdanged review. So you might as well move up the deadlines a bit. I doubt that most reviewers have such complicated schedules that we need a month of lead time to squeeze in a review. If you start sending us gentle reminders after two or three weeks I bet you'll shorten the median time to completed review without sacrificing much quality. In other words, my argument is that time to completed review is less a function of work load and more a function of the lack of extrinsic motivation for completing the task by the deadline.

lessens the chance that you will miss or misinterpret some detail that you thought at first blush was a fatal flaw. Most of us have had the experience of receiving rejections from journals, the case for which seems to have rested in part on a reviewer's claim that we said "X" when we demonstrably said "Not X." Relatedly, it protects you from committing the sin of reading a paper far enough until you've found the thing that you think torpedoed it, and then dashing off a quarter- or half-page "reject" review. We've all had reviews from That Guy. Don't be That Guy. Here's a tip to help you read a paper twice: incentivize reading it the first time by getting out of the office and treating yourself to something, say, coffee and a tasty muffin. Look, you know you're going to get coffee at least a couple times this week. So when you have a paper to review, don't just bring the coffee back to your office and then try to read the manuscript all the way through. You'll begin with the best of intentions, and then someone will knock on your door or your email will make that noise it makes, or you'll glance over and see that one thing you simply must do right now. And pretty soon the day is over and you didn't read the paper. So get out of the office, generate your own incentive, and read the paper all the way through. On this first pass, make notes in the margins. I print out almost nothing these days, but I find that I have to scribble on manuscripts. I guess iPad users can do this virtually. Let this round be a little like word association—let yourself react to the writing and see what comes of it. This round is when I find most of the obvious problems that don't require much further thought. After you're done reading, pat yourself on the back, and then take a day or two to let the paper marinate. When you think about it, ignore the annoying poor grammar and misaligned decimal points in the tables and ask yourself deeper questions, like "what is the main point of this paper?" and "would this journal publish a first-rate paper on this topic?" and "is this a first-rate paper?" and "if not, is there a reasonable chance that these authors could revise this paper so that it would be a first-rate paper?"² Then, during your half-day block, read the paper again and start writing your review immediately thereafter. Write about the big issues first. For example, it's important to assess whether the authors have posed a clear and well-supported research question, detailed what is novel or innovative about their research, and justified the major analytic choices they make. Then move on to the little issues—clarity of exposition, word choice, misinterpretation of Durkheim's concept of "mechanical solidarity," interpretability of regression coefficients, and the like. Finally, remember that authors who receive a revise and resubmit or conditional acceptance are obliged to respond directly to the reviewers' critiques. So, in anticipation that the paper will be resubmitted, it is useful to point out actual revisions that could be made, instead of writing irritatingly vague statements like "the literature review didn't make sense," or "I didn't like the authors' choice of modeling strategy" or "the authors didn't cite some important prior research." What about the literature review didn't make sense? What could they have done differently with their models? What are some examples of important omitted citations? 4. Are there standard things that you look for, or standard issues that crop up? Here is a list of what I see as the most common general flaws, along with suggestions about how to frame your critiques of them.

The paper was sent to the "wrong" journal. This doesn't happen very often, but occasionally you'll get a paper that clearly should have been sent to *Gender & Society* but was in fact sent to *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. This is obviously a judgment call, but here you should know

² The last three questions on this list are straight [personal reference deleted], so all compliments and complaints should be addressed to him.

something about the journal for which you are reviewing. It is, of course up to the editors to decide if they want to publish a paper—this is their most fundamental prerogative. Still, you can suggest to the author that this is not the sort of paper that the *Journal of X* usually publishes and make recommendations for how the author might pitch the paper differently so that it is more in line with the journal's focus.

The paper was sent to the right journal but the question isn't properly justified. Sometimes authors don't explain how their narrow research focus would appeal to a wide variety of readers, especially for generalist journals. For example, I once reviewed a paper for the *AJS* that was on the topic of an extremely small slice of an extremely rare occupation, with perhaps 75 incumbents in the United States at any given time. I asked the authors to explain how the processes they were exploring in this occupational tranche were applicable to other kinds of elite professions, thereby broadening its appeal. Or sometimes the question is phrased in such a way that it seems... uninteresting. Not every idea is a good one, and some questions will strike you as picayune or just plain boring. Often there is a kernel of a good idea buried in there somewhere but the authors haven't shown why their question is worthy of answering. Here you can provide some guidance in terms of rephrasing or justifying the question.

The research question isn't clear or there are too many of them. My pal used to say that “a good paper is about one thing.” That's an exaggeration, perhaps, but it's probably fair to say at least that “a good paper isn't about ten things.” Sometimes authors want their paper to be about one thing but they articulate it so poorly that it seems like it's about ten things. Other times they really do want it to be about ten things. When authors cram too much into one paper it can be difficult to tell what they are trying to do empirically. Typically the theoretical background also suffers, since it tends to be a mile wide and an inch deep. I ask such authors to clarify precisely what their research question is. As I suggested above, it's more useful to show them how they phrased it ten different ways, and on what pages, than simply to say “your research question isn't clear.”

The paper is bizarrely or sloppily executed. I have read papers with 15-page introductions that are stuffed with references to prior research, followed by two-page “Review of the Literature” sections. This is weird. I have also read papers with a million typos or other writing problems. It is completely valid to call out authors on these things. They need to understand that sloppy work signals sloppy thinking, even if the study is otherwise well-conceived. At a minimum, the authors ought to appreciate how much time it takes to review their work (probably 20 or more person-hours, if you include all concerned), and should be critiqued for not treating the reviewers with the respect they deserve. I frequently tell authors that their paper needed a round of vetting by one or more colleagues who will ruthlessly stamp out all problems of organization, grammar, spelling, and clarity of exposition.

The methods are lovely, but to what end? I sometimes feel like authors put the methodological cart before the research question horse and don't explain why the method they chose is right for the question, or why their fancy pants method is better than the gabardine slacks method. I am always willing to be convinced that methodological innovations solve problems that have plagued past researchers, but I do need convincing. There are many fine examples of papers that

do this, and I think authors should be asked to provide some justification for retina-blisteringly complex methods.

The front end doesn't match the back end. Sometimes a manuscript has an interesting idea, is couched in a well-developed literature, and poses one or more provocative questions. Then you find that the analysis either doesn't answer any of those interesting questions or presents results that are germane to just one of five ideas introduced in the front end. In the former case, you should note to the authors that their analysis answers a question they are not asking (or does not answer a question they are asking). In the latter case, you should request that the authors first clarify precisely what question their analysis answers, and then cut a large chunk of the front end, since it never gets examined in the analytic portion of the paper.

It isn't clear what the findings mean. This is a variant of the preceding flaw, except that here there is a clearer match between the question posed in the front end and the analysis carried out in the back end. But sometimes the problem is that there are 97 regression coefficients spread out over four tables and twenty models and you can't tell which ones you're supposed to pay attention to. In that case, the authors need to walk the reader carefully through the tables so that they see precisely what findings correspond to what hypotheses or questions. I increasingly suggest to authors that they find a simple way to present their key findings and relegate their hierarchical linear models with nuclear warheads³ to an appendix.

The conclusion doesn't conclude much. I am as guilty of this as anyone, but some conclusions peter out, like the authors ran out of gas on the last lap. I appreciate conclusion sections that summarize the key findings and then connect them back to the front end of the paper, that is, make an argument for how the paper advances our understanding of the issue that is supposed to be the topic of the paper. If authors don't do this, suggest that they do, and if you're knowledgeable enough about the literature, suggest ways to do it. 5. What tone of voice should I take in my review? I prefer a conversational tone, in second-person voice, like you are reviewing a paper for a colleague with whom you have a courteous but brutally honest relationship. I find that this tone helps me write more quickly, because I don't obsess over the proper word choice or turn of phrase.⁴ One tip for enhancing the collegiality of your review: start with some positives. I have several boilerplate (though sincere) lines that I plug in at the beginning of most reviews that compliment the authors on their idea or their methods or whatever. Then, conscience inoculated, you can drop the hammer. In so doing, however, I see no reason why you should ever adopt a snarky or belittling tone. I have read many snarky and belittling reviews, so I know that this is not a uniformly shared opinion. But even terrible papers were written by well-meaning humans, and they don't deserve to be put down, especially when you are exploiting the anonymity of the double-blind review process. What authors know is that editors and other reviewers can see your jerky comments and that makes them feel bad. Why would you want to make someone feel bad? Just say what you have to say and let the quality of your logic and evidence motivate your conclusions. No *argumentum ad hominem* or other nonsense. Finally, remember that you are not the last word on a paper. This should trigger some humility in you, but also should reduce some of your stress and get you moving faster. You

³ My all-time favorite [personal reference deleted].

⁴ If you haven't read chapter 2 of Howard Becker's *Writing for Social Scientists*, do so in the near future.

don't have to write the perfect review because there will be at least three or four other pairs of eyes on the paper. I also find that this thought encourages the collegial tone I mentioned above—you are just one of several people helping the authors write a better paper and the journal editor make a well-informed decision.