

bad

The golden rules for good reviewing

1. If you are asked for a review, ACCEPT (regardless of time constraints or possible conflicts)! You don't want to be regarded incompetent or unmotivated, even if you are, don't you agree? The most you can do is ask the editor whether he really needs a second reviewer. One is enough, isn't it? If the first review is positive, the editor may ask for a second. If it's negative, there's no need anyway.
2. Once you're an assigned reviewer, relax! Everything needs time to reach maturity, so does a review. Therefore take your time and simply wait for the deadline to approach. The author won't expect your decision anyway within the next four months, probably he/she has gone on holidays. When it comes down to writing, you will see that pressure of time can be a relief, most of all in giving an excuse to yourself for your sparing comments.
3. If you think about your responsibility, relax again! You're just a small cog in the scientific wheel. Here's what I mean: one bad review doesn't make bad science. Adding a bad review to what is not bad science doesn't either (NEVER look up the term *Sorites paradox!*). As far as author and his/her fame is concerned, well, Rome wasn't built in a day either, was it? And MANY people, like Gottlob Frege, became famous only after their death, isn't that a comfort?
4. If you are uncertain what to think of the paper, REJECT it! You can't do anything wrong, most papers are rejected. It'll cost the author to find some other journals to try again. But so what? Not your problem. On the contrary, he/she is probably a competitor: either his/her views are compatible, then make the best of it, steal some of author's ideas, improve your own papers, and you'll be the fittest to survive; or his/her views are in conflict with (and may contradict) your views, then it's all the better that they are not gonna be published.
5. Only if you have identified author as an expert of your field or as a member of your peer group, DO NOT reject the paper, if it's not too bad. Then be friendly, positive, generous (you might overlook obvious flaws or give hints for improvement). Remember, in most other cases you will REJECT the paper.
6. Else, NEVER treat the author like an expert, even if it is clear from his text that he/she is! He/she is just writing a damned paper, so what? He/she COULD be an expert, or not. But this is not gambling, but science, right? And, most importantly, you're the competent one of the both of you, don't forget that! So, preferably treat him/her like an idiot, that makes things easiest.
7. NEVER be fair to the author. Life is not fair in general, and the author has to learn that. Also, your own last paper was rejected for obscure reasons. Why should the author be more lucky? So, if you can come up with any comment that is beside the point, but puts a bad light on author, feel free to write it down!

8. NEVER tolerate the presentation of bold ideas (even if they are well-motivated and worked-out). Science is about making small steps, not big leaps (the author may fly to the moon for the latter). Let him/her feel your disgust about not following this rule! And if author should even dare to oppose to what is consentaneously accepted in your paradigm (at worst by explicitly contradicting your favorite experts), CRUCIFY him/her verbally! Don't let this blasphemy be left unpunished!
9. DO NOT start your review with passages showing that you understood and appreciate author's main ideas, roughly retracing the argumentation of the paper. Simply go *in medias res*, state that the paper is not recommended for publication, and/or what the alleged problems are. You do not need to be specific, it suffices to say that some of author's assertions are „beside the point“ or „absurd“.
10. If you have identified a passage in conflict with your scientific opinion, good! Trust your assumptions, base your criticism firm on that ground. The author CANNOT be right! DO SHOW author your view of how to treat the phenomena. Don't be shy, unleash your arrogant Hyde-side, you won't ever be called over the coals!
11. ALWAYS be selective! You cannot cover all aspects of the paper in your review, anyway. So, for example, leave out the interesting parts of the paper and concentrate on the less important ones. Remember, this is not about praise and approval, or fairness and justice, but about rejection!
12. WHO TOLD YOU to be meticulous in your analysis/reading and careful with your judgment? Bullshit! JUST have a look at the text and write down what comes to your mind. In general, DON'T rely on the concept of objectivity, it is overrated and inhuman. Let your judgment be guided and biased by your subjective opinions, and act on instinct. Just kick ass, that is, reject!
13. ALWAYS inflate the negative points of your review. Do NOT mention positive aspects, let alone weigh up the aspects. Don't get distracted by feelings of sympathy or consent for author's ideas, STAY FOCUSED!
14. If you don't understand a part of the paper, don't hesitate, simply state that it is WRONG! The author hasn't got any possibility to complain or argue, anyway. DO NOT check whether there is an explanation in the text you have, only skimming it, missed.
15. If you have no real point to make, state what you do NOT LIKE about the paper (style or order of presentation, figures, examples etc.). Or read with sagging concentration, which might lead to understanding problems (see last point). If you finally have some negative remarks (bagatelles are sufficient; don't forget to list each spelling error separately), simply REJECT!
16. In your manner of writing, be condescending and sarcastic, if possible! Don't give the impression that you are unsure or that the author may in fact be right about the passage you complain about. Even for slight mistakes, let author know that they depreciate the whole paper. And don't be polite, every now and then intersperse some (insulting) phrases like „if the author bothered with THIS or THAT“ or „and the rest of the paper is *full of errors*“.

17. If you think some literature is relevant but not discussed by the author, do not just mention that, but **BLAME** the author. How dare he/she does not know some exotic approach only you happen to be acquainted with? Or he/she apparently knows the works of Adam and Eve's era, but doesn't list them?
18. If other aspects come to your mind while reading (although author might not find them relevant at all), **ELABORATE** and pretend that this is just what the author should have thought about! Don't be shy, write a page or two. Then it will get less apparent that you in fact have no critical points to make (although you of course **REJECT** the paper).
19. As a rule, do **NOT GIVE ADVICE**. Reviewing is not about improving author's paper or part of the authoring process, it is about rejecting! You **CERTAINLY CAN** tell author how he/she should write his/her paper, though, this is not giving advice but only being a smart-ass.
20. In general, be short, to the (negative) point, and, if possible, be **OPAQUE**. Let the author chew on your comments. Transparency is for wimps and presenters.
21. If none of these rules apply, say, for example, if you are overwhelmed by the sheer ingenuity of the paper: this is not supposed to happen, **REJECT!**
22. **NEVER** tell the editor about your overall impression of the paper or the certainty of your judgment, given your specific competence (which might not suffice for an objective estimation), this would make things only more difficult / time consuming. Things get much too complicated if the editor has to distinguish between „poor papers“ and „papers which the reviewer finds poor but might in fact be good“.
23. wait, there's the **DEFAULT RULE**: if you're bored as hell by author's paper, as you cannot identify what exactly is new and interesting despite 40 pages of detailed discussion and formal elaboration that apparently adds little if anything to the current theoretical dispute in the field; if the paper is mediocre and rather confusing than illuminative; if you have the feeling that both author and you could have spared your time for something more interesting; **THEN** you definitely should **NOT REJECT** the paper but **PRAISE** its detailed analysis and adequate treatment of the topic that contributes a great many of interesting aspects to ongoing theoretical discussions, being coherent and convincing in its argumentation, and beyond that even formally sound and complete! Keep in mind that by having identified the weak points this will give you the opportunity to give a talk at the next peer group conference and to write a (better) paper, both of which will probably make you look good!

In case you didn't notice: this is a satire. It does not address the trivial case of reviewing bad papers, of course (where some of these rules may actually be rightfully applied), but only the case of reviewing good papers that are treated wrongly. It is also not about offending reviewers in general (I've often been a reviewer, too). The rules might contain some grains of truth, though, based on experience.