



Editorial

Writing Editorial Reviews That Strengthen Environmental Scholarship

GUIDANCE FOR REVIEWERS

High-quality peer review sits at the heart of credible environmental scholarship. In a research field where policy, livelihoods, and ecosystems intersect, the role of the reviewer is not simply to critique manuscripts but to steward knowledge responsibly. A constructive, ethical, and rigorous editorial review helps ensure that published work is methodologically sound, conceptually robust, and genuinely contributes to advancing environmental sustainability. Yet, reviewing well is a learned scholarly practice. This editorial offer guidance on how to write an effective editorial review — one that supports both the integrity of the journal and the development of authors.

Begin with Purpose, Objectivity, and Respect

A strong review is guided by clarity of purpose: to evaluate scholarship, not scholars. The reviewer's tone should be professional, fair, and respectful, regardless of manuscript quality. Harsh or dismissive language undermines the spirit of academic exchange. Constructive critique — even when firm — can challenge arguments while still supporting intellectual growth.

Good practice includes:

- avoiding personal or disparaging remarks
- grounding critique in evidence
- distinguishing major issues from minor edits
- acknowledging strengths where appropriate

Environmental science is a diverse and global field. Reviewers should also be mindful of linguistic diversity and varying academic traditions, offering clarity and encouragement rather than penalising difference.

Focus First on Contribution and Fit

Before line-by-line commentary, the reviewer should ask: *Does this manuscript meaningfully contribute to environmental knowledge or policy?*

This includes considering:

- originality and novelty
- theoretical or applied relevance
- alignment with the journal's aims
- potential readership value

An effective editorial review provides a brief overview of the manuscript — not as a summary exercise, but as evidence that the reviewer has engaged meaningfully with the work. This helps editors assess both accuracy and interpretation.

Evaluate Structure, Argument, and Method

Clear structure and coherent argumentation are central to scholarly impact. Reviewers should comment on:

- clarity of research questions or aims
- logical flow of argument
- appropriateness of theory or conceptual framing
- transparency of methodology
- validity and reliability of data
- interpretation of findings

In sustainability research particularly, reviewers should assess whether claims are proportionate to the evidence presented. Over-generalisation, weak causal inference, or policy claims unsupported by data should be flagged constructively.

Where methodological improvement is possible — more sampling detail, clearer variable explanation, strengthened analysis — reviewers should suggest practical ways forward.

Promote Ethical and Responsible Scholarship

Environmental research often involves communities, ecosystems, or sensitive data. Reviewers should be alert to:

- ethical approval
- informed consent
- fair representation of participants
- acknowledgement of uncertainty
- responsible and decolonial research practices

Suspicion of plagiarism, data fabrication, or ethical risk should be reported confidentially to editors — not addressed directly to authors.

Write Clearly, Systematically, and Constructively

A useful review is structured and readable. Many reviewers find it helpful to organise feedback into:

- **General comments** — overall assessment
- **Major issues** — conceptual, methodological, or interpretative concerns
- **Minor issues** — clarity, language, presentation

Constructive reviews:

- explain *why* something is problematic
- offer alternatives
- prioritise revisions
- avoid rewriting the paper for the author

Comments should be actionable rather than vague.

For example: “The discussion would benefit from clearer linkage to your research questions and comparison with existing literature on urban heat mitigation.”

is more helpful than “The discussion is weak.”

Maintain Confidentiality and Integrity

Reviewing carries ethical responsibility. Confidentiality must be upheld. Conflicts of interest — personal, institutional, or financial — should be declared. Reviewers must commit to impartiality and timely delivery.

Contribute to Mentorship and Inclusion

Many authors — particularly from the Global South, early-career scholars, or non-native English speakers — benefit enormously from supportive reviewing. A good review not only assesses quality but also *builds capacity*. When reviewers offer balanced, developmental feedback, they contribute to a more inclusive and globally representative environmental research community.

Remember the Shared Goal

Ultimately, editorial reviewing is collaborative, not adversarial. Authors, reviewers, and editors share a common purpose: to advance environmental sustainability scholarship that informs policy, practice, and public understanding. A well-written editorial review improves manuscripts — but it also strengthens the integrity, reputation, and impact of the journal itself.

As environmental challenges intensify globally, the quality of the knowledge we publish matters more than ever. Thoughtful reviewing is one of the quiet but vital acts of academic stewardship that help ensure that research is not only published — but trusted.

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