

PEER REVIEW

One of the most important pillars on which scientific publications are sustained is the peer review procedure. It is the element that has allowed journals and publishing houses to show an image of impartiality and academic justice that in turn has made possible to reach the vertiginous multiplication of journals and of articles that has been taking place for several decades now.

The selection of the adequate referees in each case is, no doubt, one of the main jobs carried out by the editorial bodies of the scientific journals, and on it rests the recognition and respect that a given publication manages to reach within the scientific community that it serves. Such respect is the highest qualification that can be bestowed upon any publication, more valuable than its impact factor or some other measure of its utilization, which depend on factors that in many cases are outside its control.

The anonymous character of the reviewers is a general practice. That of the authors is not necessarily so. Although there are cases of referees that complain of having been informed of the names and institutional affiliations of the authors, this only happens very rarely. As a matter of fact, a good referee, knowledgeable about his field and of the researchers that work in it, will generally detect the origin of a paper, at least to the level of the working group, without the specific information being given to him. Also, it is not rare that specialists from whom an opinion is requested will refuse to do it with the argument of knowing some of the authors or of having conflicts of interest. To authors, on the other hand, the identity of the colleagues that evaluate their work is not revealed, so as to avoid in this manner the existence of conflicts and possible confrontations.

Peer review is the fundamental support for editors, but it is upon the latter that falls the responsibility to evaluate, in turn, the assessments received, and to balance the different opinions

that could be presented. The desired unanimity of judgement is often absent, and it is in those cases that the editors must define which criterion to follow or, if judged necessary, request additional opinions. It is the role of the editorial body to detect those cases where a given referee could be acting in a biased manner, which while occurring very rarely, is not something unthinkable.

One of the main functions of those who serve as referees and which is seldom referred to, is its prominent pedagogical function. A good referee, besides producing accurate judgements about the pertinence, elaboration and conclusions of a piece of research and its presentation, offers help to the authors in order to improve their text. This is a particularly valuable work in the case of journals to which are submitted, as it happens to be a frequent occurrence in *Interciencia*, manuscripts that are the product of thesis research, whose publication is often required by the teaching institution in order to award the corresponding degree.

The time and effort invested by referees, never adequately paid for, are largely compensated by the satisfaction of having been considered for the corresponding technical evaluation, and his or her opinion taken into account as valid ones by the respective journals. It concerns an essential function in the academic life of colleagues, in the consolidation of the journals that serve to disseminate their findings and ideas, and in the strengthening of the institutions where their activities are carried out.

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