

Peer Review Haiku

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Like many of us, I have been reflecting on the state of our scientific review process, partly thanks to Past President **Jose Cortina's** presidential agenda, which has reminded us all of the many problems with the review system as it currently exists. It is all too common to receive a review of your work from someone who has apparently not read your paper, or who hates it, or who doesn't understand it—or all of these things simultaneously. Locke, Williams, and Masuda (2015) demonstrated this phenomenon brilliantly in recounting the saga of a recent publication experience. If it happens to them, it can happen to all of us, and this is bad for science and worse for our sanity.

Cortina and Locke et al. offer many good, substantive ideas for how to move our field forward. I like these ideas. Over the past 10 years, however, I have cultivated an alternative approach. You could think of it as a coping strategy to deal with these bad reviews. I call this strategy Review Haiku.

I can't remember where this habit got started—I'm sure I didn't invent it. But it has become a ritual. Some people make lemonade out of lemons. I make poetry out of nonsensical and mean reviews. For instance, *"I am not familiar with the analysis you used, or the statistical program you described, but it is not all that clear to me*

how your analysis added anything of value to the manuscript. Your conclusions thus became all the more befuddling" somehow feels less maddening when it is translated to

your analysis
isn't all that clear to me--
befuddling

And *"The monikers used in this paragraph are offensive and genderally biased. The male is assigned a positive name while the female is named with an inferior and unflattering label"* is easier to tackle when it reads

monikers used:
offensive, unflattering
gender bias!

The rules of Review Haiku are simple. The lines of the haiku should be actual quotes from the review. It is tempting to try and capture the essence of the review with a paraphrase but don't do it.

A traditional haiku captures something complicated and expresses it simply. Simplicity is important. You may have learned the "5, 7, 5" syllable structure at some point. It is not critical that you keep to this syllable limit, but do keep it short. Traditional haiku has many other rules that you should feel free to break as needed.

Share the haiku with others. This reminds your more junior colleagues that bad reviews happen to everyone, and gives us all something to look forward to.

A few recent (real) examples are below. Some people say I have taken this ritual too far; I now demand haiku from my co-authors and have them posted on the wall of my office. I say maybe I haven't taken this far enough.

Textbook perfection
Not a lot of problems but...
Not enough studies

Poorly organized
Conduct a better study
Is not strong enough

I don't understand
Unique and unrealistic
I don't understand

What can we learn from Review Haiku? Reviewers are human beings and are thus fallible. Reviewing is a skill like any other and reviewers can be good or bad at this skill.

Sometimes, as fallible humans, they can let ego, time pressure, bias, or lack of knowledge interfere with their job.

Reviewers can also be incredibly helpful and constructive. In fact, the bizarre and mean-spirited reviews of the past have been increasingly infrequent in my experience. It was a small struggle to find appropriately laughable comments for this article.

Most importantly, no matter how petty or wrongheaded a review may be, there is almost always a nugget of useful advice or insight to be taken away. A haiku can help you find it.

New researchers are often advised to develop a thick skin to deal with the stress and ego bruising that comes along with the peer review process. I have found my haiku to be more than stress therapy though; finding the essence of someone's objection to your work is a critical piece of addressing and improving it. At the same time, it does take the teeth out of the more biting remarks. Imagine if decision letters, instead of multipage takedowns of your hard work, were just three lines.

*seventh R&R
add some more analyses
and please cite me more*

Notes

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Reference

Locke, E.A., Williams, K. J., & Masuda, A. (2015). The virtue of persistence. *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 52(4), 104–105.

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