

How Peer-Review Can Help Graphology

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Cite as: Bradley N (2001) [How Peer- Review can help graphology](#) *Graphology*, (October) 58 pp 31-33

Available at <http://www.wmin.ac.uk/marketingresearch/graphology/2062preng.htm>

Introduction

Graphology has been criticised in numerous ways over the years. These criticisms have included the observation that there are "relatively few publications in respectable, refereed scientific journals that support graphology" (Beyerstein 1992:192). This comment is sealed with a later footnote: "Even fewer of the published studies favouring graphology are found in the highest quality journals with the most stringent peer-review standards and which do not charge authors for publication" (Beyerstein 1992:198).

This criticism can be removed by understanding the nature of peer-review and the double blind referee mechanism. Existing graphological journals can be easily adapted to incorporate this 'quality control'. In addition to this, supporters of the subject should submit manuscripts to the non-graphological journals which are held in high esteem by such critics.

The Nature of Double-Blind Peer Reviewing

Most academic subjects which are taught today have accompanying resources, these include the journals that allow academics and practitioners to keep their knowledge up-to-date. The "respectable" and "highest quality" journals are subject to peer review, which in many cases is double-blind. This means that an editor will send a manuscript to two or more "reviewers" for their comments. The identity of the author will be withheld from the reviewers, so the review is "blind". The reviewers are chosen by the editor from his or her network to be the most suitable for the particular articles. So for example, if the topic concerns Freud - the reviewers must be well-versed in Freudian Psychology, if the topic concerns mathematics - mathematicians will be chosen.

Reviewers are required to answer various questions which 'grade' the article, and to provide open-ended comments. The editor is likely to return these comments to the original author/s, and may request that the article is modified. The reviewers' identities remain confidential throughout. In some cases editors do not submit an article to reviewers, and reject it outright, they do not want to waste their reviewers' time and goodwill.

Reviewers are normally unpaid. Their motivations to do the job include prestige of working in the field, appearing on the Editorial Listing, receiving a free subscription, being privileged to read 'State-of-the-art' research and so forth. In reality the editor's own leadership qualities determine the nature of the review team and subsequently the overall 'quality' of the journal being published.

Contributors of articles also have their own motivations. Again they are normally unpaid. Modern academia functions on the principle that Institutions are "better" if their professors, lecturers or teachers are "research-active". Government subsidy is often given to Institutions which have an ongoing record of

research, which is shown by published articles. However, anyone can publish articles, so preference goes to papers which have attracted a peer-review seal of approval, and presumably to avoid the possibility of friendship networks "dishonestly" securing funds, a "double-blind" mechanism has emerged.

The system clearly has its advantages and disadvantages some of which are mentioned above. One 'hidden benefit' has been argued by editors such as Carson, Baker et al (1998). They argued that they are providing free assistance to contributors, and progressing the development of the particular subject, even if it remains unpublished.

Evans (1995) outlines various advantages which include "protection from plagiarism; improving scholarship by ensuring relevant literature is cited; work receives added value by the process of revision. Various disadvantages were described in some detail by Evans (1995) and, more emotionally, by Rotfeld (1997).

One disadvantage is the speed. The entire process takes at least six weeks. Add to this the possibility of re-submission, delays from reviewers, no space for publication and the time received in relation to the publishing cycles, then some articles may not appear for a year after submission.

Another disadvantage relates to the quality of the referees. They can make factual errors themselves or may let their opinions bias their view of the research. They may confuse their job with a tutorial rôle: "They should not be continually raising new lessons for the author to "learn" " (Rotfeld 1997). To add insult to injury, the "anonymity of reviewers means that the author has little recourse" (Evans 1995). The system is, however, an accepted way for quality to be controlled.

Implications For Graphology

Graphology is taught at Universities in several countries, and it is hoped that this trend will continue. This being the case, it is essential that the double-blind-peer-review process is implemented by editors of graphological journals. It is, after all, an academic norm, and is recognised worldwide.

In actual fact, this does not require a major upheaval, and in many cases a "peer-review" process is already in place: most graphology conferences (which lead to many journal papers) have a conference paper committee, most journals have an editorial board. What has not been well established is a masking of the author's identity before a paper is reviewed and accepted. It should be stated here that a reviewer (even for existing "respectable" non-graphology journals) can often guess the identity of author/s' from the style, subject content etc. - just one defect of the mechanism.

Should journals such as *La Graphologie*, *Scrittura* and *Graphology* implement double-blind peer review, there is unlikely to be a change in the number or quality of submissions received. It might however achieve an awareness, amongst non-graphologists and graphologists alike, that these journals have implemented "accepted", "appropriate", and "official" quality controls. Contributors will also benefit, since they will be aware of the tasks they face in order to submit work to non-graphology journals. This must surely happen on the road to securing greater recognition for the subject.

Appended to this article is an evaluation form developed for the double-blind peer-review of Graphology Papers. Any organisation is welcome to copy the form, and if necessary to modify it. It would be convenient for such a form to be used universally, for both conference paper evaluation and journal paper evaluation. This would mean that the "quality control measure" is implemented before graphological knowledge is made public. The editor or conference organiser will always make the final decision, but this mechanism will permit informed judgement to be made. A word of caution! It would be unwise to apply the criteria retrospectively to published articles since they are likely to have been superseded. This may, however, be an interesting way of evaluating potential referees against each other!

Concluding Remarks

There is no great mystery about the double-blind-peer-review procedure. The strength of such a system is the flexibility it offers to ensure that the quality of work conducted is acceptable to current scholars of a particular subject. It does have disadvantages which prompt one to ask whether people who store great belief in the system are misguided. After all - no-one audits the editors and the referees - we might ask: how blind *is* the procedure?

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Notes

1. This article was written on 20 July 1998 by Nigel Bradley. An Italian translation was made by Silvio Lena and appeared in *Attualità Grafologica*, 1998 (July-Sept) 17(3) Issue 68. 12-13. A French translation was made by Lise Viens in September 1998.
2. The article was prepared as a discussion paper for the Association Deontologiques de Graphologues meeting in Spain on 10 October 1998 and The International Graphological Colloquium meeting in Canada 29 October - 1 November 1998.

GRAPHOLOGY PAPER EVALUATION

Article Title.....

 Author/s Code

Draft date

Despatch date from Editorial office to refereee

INSTRUCTIONS TO REFEREE

A. Circle a score for each aspect.

B. Add other comments here, or on a continuation page.
Avoid annotations to the article.

C. This form may be sent to the author, ensure your anonymity is preserved.

D. Please complete and return this form within 21 days of receipt.

Q1. Suitability of the article to the aims of the journal/conference.
(Consult the written statement of objectives)

Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 Poor

Comment: _____

Q2. Suitability of the title to the content

Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 Poor

Comment: _____

Q3. Degree of originality (look for plagiarism)

Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 Poor

Comment: _____

Q4. Contribution to knowledge

Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 Poor

Comment: _____

Q5. Comprehensiveness of references/credit to others

Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 Poor

Comment: _____

Q6. Quality of Literature Review (indicating that the author/s have marshalled relevant knowledge)

Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 Poor

Comment: _____

Q7. Suitability for publication in present state

Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 Poor

Comment: _____

Q8. Are there any changes you would recommend?

Yes _____ No _____

Comment: _____

Q9. To your knowledge has this article appeared before?

Yes _____ No _____

Comment: _____

Referee Code _____ **Evaluation Date** _____

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