

that spending another 14 days with the same 3 people would have felt that much different. But it is all about context – days filled with ice cream and beaches rather than home-schooling and work are considerably nicer.

In addition to the benefits of the holiday itself, one important advantage for me is bracketing periods of time. It's nice to say it's only X weeks until holiday – the anticipation relieves the monotony. This is particularly valuable now, when every day is exactly the same.

Another benefit of going away is that it changes how you feel when you get back. However, this year, re-entry to work has been a bit muted: after returning, nothing really had changed. If anything, with a possible second wave in the United Kingdom coming, and with pockets of increased restrictions, it

feels like we have gone back a few steps.

Particularly concerning is the new school year. I don't think things are necessarily going to return to normal for parents any time soon. This feeling of a muted re-entry is emphasized by returning not to working at work, but to working from home. And, this year, I don't get to physically see my team right after my holiday: bragging about how nice being away has been while sharing token gifts bought in the airport is normally one way of prolonging the holiday glow! Nevertheless, it's good to be back and refreshed.

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reviewers as an author, I initially feel annoyed and slighted, so I try not to respond right away. Instead, I take some time to digest the comments and not take them personally, which allows me to respond in a more neutral tone.

What can I do if I see or receive unprofessional comments?

Sometimes, it's hard to get past the personal nature of these remarks. I then contact the relevant editors directly (some journals have policies for these instances; others do not). I do this as a reviewer if I see such comments relayed to authors, because many authors might not be comfortable doing so themselves. In my experience, editors are usually receptive to such feedback and often pass it along to the other reviewers. More authors and reviewers bringing comments that are just plain mean to the attention of editors might start changing the culture. I have provided a template for such communications on Twitter, which anyone can use (see go.nature.com/35j5kyz).

This year, I reviewed for a journal that included a 'positive comments' section, where reviewers can praise aspects of a manuscript. I try to do this wherever possible in my own reviews, but journals having this section as part of the review structure will help reviewers to provide uplifting comments.

When I work as a co-editor for scientific publications at Fisheries and Oceans Canada in Ottawa, where I also work as a research scientist, I do not edit original reviewer text. Instead, I send unprofessional reviews back for revision and specifically point out problems in a non-judgemental way. Having more authors and reviewers bring such issues directly to the attention of editors can, I think, facilitate more editors to do this.

Some journals are experimenting with publishing the full text of peer reviews in a manuscript. This could help to raise awareness of the problem, but because reviewers' identities are hidden, there might still be little reason for them to be courteous.

Alongside the personal steps that individual reviewers can take, proper instruction and training on how to review manuscripts constructively, collegially and courteously would go a long way. Such training could be integrated into 'research methods'-type courses in graduate school or offered as institutional workshops. I did a course on writing a good paper; why not a course on how to peer review?

In this dark and strange global pandemic, there is perhaps no better time to actively promote and foster the power of compassion in peer review – not just for the sake of science, but for the people who do it.

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DON'T BE HARSH IN PEER REVIEW

How to reckon with comments from reviewers who use 'being critical' as a justification to be mean. By Jeff C. Clements

I very much enjoy being a peer reviewer. Reviewing manuscripts allows me to stay up to date on the most-current research in my field, and I feel a sense of accomplishment when helping authors to effectively disseminate their science.

However, I have been discouraged by some comments from fellow reviewers that I've seen relayed to authors. Multiple reviews, which were shared with all reviewers, were rife with unnecessary, personal comments that merely served as subjective criticisms of the authors' competencies, rather than as constructive assessment of the research. One comment went as far as implying that the authors themselves were illogical and unintelligent.

Peer review is meant to be highly critical. Many researchers, however, don't receive proper training on being effective peer reviewers (I didn't). We know that we should be critical as reviewers, but we are rarely taught to be kind and courteous. I think that, all too often, this focus on criticism rather than compassion is interpreted as a licence to be mean.

Although some journals redact ad hominem reviewer comments, many do not, and authors commonly receive them. In my field of ecology and evolution, an analysis conducted by myself and colleagues found that 10–35% of peer reviews provided to authors contain

demeaning language and 43% of reviews include at least one unprofessional comment (T. G. Gerwing *et al. Res. Integr. Peer Rev.* 5, 9; 2020). Indeed, I've endured similar comments, including this one: "What the authors have done here I would not even consider science."

These comments can slow down the publishing process. For me, it takes much longer to respond to unprofessional comments than to constructive ones, because it's rare that such feedback provides tangible suggestions to

"One comment went as far as implying that the authors themselves were illogical and unintelligent."

address. Therefore, authors will spend more time thinking about and crafting responses.

More important are the damaging effects that such comments can have on authors. A *Nature* survey last year revealed that bullying is a potentially significant source of poor mental health in PhD students (see *Nature* 575, 257–258; 2019). Personally, harsh reviewer comments have made me feel anxious and like an impostor.

When I receive harsh comments from