Editorial corner – a personal view

Reviewing: Why, when, what and how?

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Researchers nowadays prefer to publish reviewing papers instead of writing book chapters. This is mostly due to the facts that books have a much smaller readership than journals, the book chapters are not properly cited, and citation data bases disregarded book contributions (fortunately this policy seems to be changing now). Last but not least, reviewing is a straightforward tool to boost the citations of the authors (which is frequently a key parameter for academic promotion). By surveying a given topic you may figure out those open issues which are worth of following in your future research. Another driving force of reviewing is to draw the attention for unsolved, acute problems when you are leaving a given research topic. Thus reviewing is an indispensable tool for guiding, ‘channeling’ the research. Reviews usually address emerging ‘hot’ topics. When you have missed the right moment for that, you may still come out with good reviews thereby focusing on well selected, actual and until that time disregarded aspects. In that case you have to insert in the title of your paper ‘recent advancements’ or the like. This is a better strategy than to deliver an ‘ $n+1^{\text{th}}$ visitation’ to a well surveyed topic. Editors like ‘critical reviews’. To the right criticism, however, you should have the necessary knowledge, overview and even some courage. Old, i.e. at present less ‘fashionable’, research themes may also deserve surveys. In this case the task of the writer is not only to ‘dig in’ properly in the history of the selected topic but also to pinpoint open left issues which can be clarified by contemporary experimental methods.

A review is, however, not merely a worded list of the related publications. The success, i.e. the acceptance by the community, well reflected by the citations, depends on the structuring of the information released. The outline of the review should be perfectly organized (the outline itself is a suitable advertisement for the paper) and to cover all aspects you want to refer to. To support this, you may think about new grouping, and even to introduce novel definitions. Beside of the clear definitions and well structured outline never forget about the ‘artwork’. The artwork, included in a review, is of paramount importance! Researchers follow the scientific literature (if at all) via ‘eye scanning’. Therefore good summary charts, ‘self-explaining’ schemes are the real ‘eye catchers’ and ‘selling tools’ of your review. A review is never ‘complete’ irrespective of the number of cited works. A mini review may be as useful as an exhaustive one provided that the current information is adequately shared with the reader.

According to my opinion reviewing is an art and thus not necessarily the task for everyone. You will learn, however, from reviewing activities a lot – so, why not to try yourself in this field, as well?

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