

# CHI2023 Course on How to Peer Review for CHI (and Beyond)

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## ABSTRACT

A key challenge for people that are new to reviewing is pitching the review at the right level, and getting the tone and structure of a review right. This course aims to help participants understand a) the different expectations of different venues and submission types, b) the processes they use to make decisions, and c) good techniques for producing a review for these different circumstances. Combined with developing a good understanding of these different expectations, participants have a chance to critique anonymised but real reviews, and try to guess the venue they are written for and the recommendation they make.

## CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**.

## KEYWORDS

Peer Review, Reviewing, Reviewer

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

A key challenge for new reviewers is comprehending the expectations that different venues (journals verses conferences verses workshops) may have, for different types of submissions (full papers verses demos verses late breaking work), and the subsequent decisions processes for each. Consequently, it is not uncommon for new reviewers to be unnecessarily harsh or overly lenient on issues for a particular venue and type, and to put too much or too little time into reviews. This problem is exacerbated in highly interdisciplinary research fields like HCI, where even established reviewers need to be aware of expectations for different types of work [8].

At the same time, we are becoming increasingly dependent on expanding the reviewer pool, making tweaks annually to CHI's reviewing process to reduce demand in the face of annual growth in submission numbers [3]. Meanwhile, people in our field raise concerns in community forums<sup>1</sup> about the experience levels of

<sup>1</sup>CHI Meta Discussion

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Table 1: Typical Schedule

Unit	Part I
1	Venues and Submission Types
2	Roles, Processes, & Decisions
Break	
Part II	
3	Producing Useful Reviews
4	Critiquing Examples of Reviews

reviewers looking at many CHI papers, whilst others recommend more stringent forms of review to increase rigour in our field [6]. This growth and its demand on increasingly novice reviewers is a concern that many fields experience and try to confront [1, 10].

Encouraging people to review is also a challenge, as we feel busy with many demands, where this feeling was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in a way that many researchers still feel as a knock on effect. With many experts being needed further up the reviewer framework (as e.g. senior reviews (ACs) or subcommittee chairs (SCs), we become dependent on new novice reviewers perhaps reviewing for the first time. Many students learn by being coached by their supervisors, perhaps by the supervisor giving students papers to draft-review before completing the review themselves. Many reviewers, however, do not have this opportunity.

### 1.1 Learning Outcomes

This course<sup>2</sup> is designed to help people to:

- (1) Understand the different types of contributions submitted to different venues.
- (2) Understand the different processes used by different venues (for different types of submissions)
- (3) Reflect on what senior reviewers want from a review (and therefore how they might be structured)
- (4) Critique example reviews for different types of submissions for different types of venues

### 1.2 Audience and Prerequisites

This course is aimed at new PhD students, or other students intending to pursue a research programme, or indeed anyone that feels that they are 'new' to reviewing and want to broaden their experience. The course may also be useful for people that have begun reviewing, but want to be prepared for reviewing contributions in other types of venues. In general, there are no prerequisites to participating in the course.

<sup>2</sup><http://bit.ly/peer-review-tutorial>

## 2 COURSE CONTENT

The course, which has been delivered in person at 4 previous occasions, and fully online three times<sup>3</sup>, is broken up into two main halves: comprehension of venues and submission types, and understanding the components of a good review.

*Part 1* is focused on the first two learning outcomes. It is intended to help participants reflect on why we submit different types of submissions to different venues, and what those venues want. For example, a workshop typically wants material that invokes discussion and presents exciting early ideas. Whereas full peer-reviewed venues like journals and some high ranking conferences, want important, novel, significant, and rigorous submissions. By doing this, we also discuss the different roles involved in making the decision, and the processes used by people in those roles to make them. We compare, therefore, typical journal processes (including advertised flow diagrams, and the instructors experiences as a Deputy Editor and Associate Editor), extreme examples of conference processes (as used at e.g. CHI), and those used by small groups of workshop organisers.

The process involved in the first part also serves as a chance for the instructor to comprehend the variety of research fields (in this case different fields relating to CHI) of participants, and the types of venues people might submit to.

*Part 2* is focused on considering the structure of reviews, based upon the reflective understanding of venues built up in part 1. The purpose of a review is considered from the perspective of different people that will read it, using scenarios from different types of venues. This includes both what will be useful for the authors, and what will be useful for the senior reviewers. For this particular delivery context, the course will increase the focus on recommendations specifically from CHI for reviewing papers and the needs of ACs, SCs, and papers chairs, but still consider other types of venues both within and external to CHI.

This process is then followed by the critique of a series of anonymised proto-reviews (based on reviews that the instructor has had access to in the past), which comes in two challenges: a) identifying the type of venue the review was produced for, and b) what the recommendation of the author is. This is complemented by activity that examines 5 different anonymised proto-reviews for the same journal article, which vary dramatically in their recommendation and quality.

### 2.1 Practical Work

The course is typically ~75% practical work, involving: facilitated discussions designed to bring participants through stages of understanding, and practical experience of critiquing example reviews.

*Part 1* uses whiteboards, post-it notes, flip-chart paper, and marker pens to take participants through a series of 8 incremental activities. The majority of the first half, therefore, is facilitated workshop activities around tables, augmented with information in slides as and when relevant; the outcome of the activities is shaped by the knowledge and experience of the instructor to reach certain final states.

*Part 2* includes the majority of ‘taught material’, however it still includes one minor activity (looking at example review forms as a group), and the main review-critiquing activity that makes up the entirety of the 4<sup>th</sup> unit. This final unit is 100% discussion-led practical work, critiquing a) whether reviews match a venue, b) whether they match the recommendation, and then c) whether each of 5 reviews for the same article provide good and bad feedback.

### 2.2 Resources

Although certain formal guides exist (e.g. [12]), these vary heavily from discipline to discipline. Instead, as we progress through the content of the course, we consider official resources produced by publishers like Springer [11], Elsevier [5], and Nature [13], as well as advice from experts in our own community [2, 4, 7, 9]. A recent community contribution is a detailed working-document guide to reviewing for CHI<sup>4</sup>. This course complements such guides (with often act as a checklist and process overview), with more generalised and reflective insights into reviewing practices.

Participants are able to keep copies of the example reviews, and are given a digital handout with key information slides and links to resources.

### 2.3 Accessibility

The workshop is primarily an engaging discussion, rather than being highly dependent on resources. Much of the course, therefore, is suitable for many as long as the venue is accessible. If attendees have disabilities that limit communication, then appropriate table-specific adaptations can be made to facilitate communication e.g. through the workshop materials on the table. The two main documents involved (slides and example reviews) will be produced in high contrast versions and a large font version can be produced if required according to advance attendee information provided.

## 3 INSTRUCTOR BACKGROUND

The course is delivered by Dr Max L. Wilson, as Associate Professor at the University of Nottingham. Max, who sits on the CHI Steering Committee, has been a reviewer for CHI for 15 years, and has reviewed for many other conferences including CSCW, UIST, SIGIR, CHIIR (and its former IiX), ISWC, WWW, UbiComp and MobileHCI. Max has also reviewed for journals including: JASIST, JWS, IJHCI, IP&M, TOIS, TOCHI.

Max has served as a senior reviewer (AC) for CHI and CSCW since 2014, as a Subcommittee Chair (SC) for the Understanding People subcommittee for 3 years, and as Papers Chair for CHI2023 and CHI2024. Max has been an Associate Editor for IJHCS and IP&M, and now serves as the Deputy Editor for IJHCS. Max has also acted as Papers Chair for IiX2014, posters chair for IiX2012, Courses Chair for CHI2016 and CHI2017, Panels Chair for CHI2018, and on the Best Paper Committee for CHIIR2018.

Max has delivered this particular course on six prior occasions, at national PhD student events, and at specific universities in the United Kingdom.

<sup>3</sup>The course was due to be delivered at CHI2020, but was ultimately cancelled. In 2022, it was collaboratively delivered with another instructor to reach across timezones.

<sup>4</sup><https://nehakumar.medium.com/an-unofficial-guide-to-seven-stages-of-reviewing-for-chi-7938880fc895>

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