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Publons: An Overview

Publons: The Solution to Several Long-Standing Problems

Roger Watson

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As an editor – and I edit two journals – I am aware that one of the major difficulties of the role is finding reviewers for manuscripts. I am also aware that many people who purport to be reviewers for my journals may be registered on our system but have never done a single review. On the other side of the counter, in my "day job" as a university academic, I receive a frequent and regular flow of requests to carry out reviews for a wide range of journals. I have always carried out this work conscientiously; I see it as a necessary and reciprocal aspect of my role. However, I am also conscious that I have less and less time to do this and, sometimes, I wonder if my time could not be better spent. After all, the workload is unmeasured, unrecorded, and uncredited. In parallel, where once I heard my less experienced colleagues exult that they had been sent a manuscript to review, I

now hear them questioning why they should bother. Academic life has changed and there is much less time now than there was, say, 20 years ago, to devote time to what was once considered to be a normal aspect of our jobs.

ENTER PUBLONS

Publons is an innovation that addresses most of the problems around reviewing raised above. Publons does not make the process of reviewing easier for reviewers, but it does help editors find reviewers and it increases the visibility of the work done by reviewers. As explained on the Publons webpage:

> Publons helps you get the recognition you deserve for keeping watch over science and research. Easily import, verify, and store a record of every peer review you perform and every manuscript you handle as an editor, for any journal in the world, in full compliance with all editorial policies.

The pedigree of Publons is good and if you need any convincing then look at the list of reputable publisher partners which includes: Wiley, BMJ Open, Springer Nature, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Wolters Kluwer, American Psychological Association, Sage, The Royal Society, Taylor & Francis, Royal College of Surgeons – and many more.

Publons offers training in reviewing and this is a good feature; I often hear new academics – the ones who want to do reviews – complain that they do not receive any education or training in how to provide peer review of a manuscript. The Publons Academy, provides this service, about which Publons say:

> …our free online course, teaches you how to critically review a manuscript with tips and advice from Nobel Prize winners. You'll practice your new skills by writing reviews of published papers. You then invite your supervisor to provide

> *feedback on your reviews and endorse your skills so we can start matching you*
> *with top journal editors looking for reviewers.*

Once you have registered with Publons, a personal dashboard is created where you can provide your profile and upload a suitable image. As part of the registration you can choose to login with a social media account such as Facebook or an academic profile page such as ORCiD – I would recommend the latter. If you want to know more about ORCiD, read one of my previous pieces in Nurse Author & Editor (Watson, 2017). Within the profile you can indicate your research area which helps others to find you. You can also register your reviews and, if you are an editor, your editing activity. If you have been sensible and used ORCID to create your profile, then you can easily pull in your publications to your Publons dashboard. There is also the possibility of scoring – anonymously – other publications which you can find using a doi and then you can also see how others have scored the publication. However, probably the most important and unique aspect of Publons is the registration of reviews and the ability, then, to demonstrate this for staff appraisals, for example. It is merely the fact that you have reviewed that is recorded; details such as the article and your review are not shared. The journals partnered with Publons make the process easy by prompting you about the possibility to register a review and they provide a link whereby the process is automated. Publons remains relatively new, having been launched in 2012 but by 2017 more than 200,000 researchers had joined. I strongly recommend all researchers to register.

REFERENCE

1. Watson, R. (2017). Grow Your ORCiD Profile. *Nurse Author & Editor*, *27*(2), 2. Retrieved from http://naepub.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/NAE-2017-27-2-2-Watson.pdf

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roger Watson, PhD, FAAN, FRCN is Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Advanced Nursing;* Editor, *Nursing Open,* and Professor of Nursing, University of Hull, UK. He is also a member of the Authors-in-Residence for *Nurse Author & Editor.* Contact Roger by email: r.watson@hull.ac.uk and follow him on Twitter: @rwatson1955. His ORCiD ID is orcid.org/0000-0001-8040-7625

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