Tough Questions:
Is My Paper Worth Reading?
Will It Get Read?

C Brown

May 29, 2001

I've just retyped the 30 or so questions from the Levin and Redell paper that is on reserve. I urge you to read the original paper! Also read LeBlanc's "How to Refereee Research Papers and Grants" and McCutchen's "Peer Review: Treacherous Servant, Disastrous Master". All are on reserve in Carlson.

Original Ideas:

Are the ideas in the paper new?
How do you know?
Can you state the new idea concisely?
What exactly is the problem being solved?
Are the ideas significant enough to justify a paper?
Is this work significantly different from existing related work?
Is the related work referenced, and have you read the cited material?
Are comparisions with previous work clear and explicit?
Does the work comprise a significant extension, validation, or repudiation of earlier but unproven ideas?
What is the oldest paper referenced? The most recent? Similar work at another institution? TRs, unpublished reports, theses, personal communications?

Reality

Does the paper describe something actually implemented?
If implemented, have results been used and what has usage demonstrated?
If not implemented yet, why publish now?

Lessons

What have you learned from the work?
What should the reader learn from the paper?
How generally applicable are these lessons?

Choices

What were the alternatives considered at various points, and why were choices made the way they were?
Did the choices turn out to be right? and if so, for the original reasons? If not, what lessons learned? (How often do you find yourself saying "this works, but for the wrong reason"?)

Context

What are the assumptions on which work is based?
Are they realistic?
How sensitive is the work to perturbations of assumptions?
If a formal model is presented, does it give new information and insights?

Focus

Does introductory material contain excess baggage?
Do you include just enough material from previously published work to enable your reader to follow your argument?

Presentation

Are the ideas organized and presented in a clear and logical manner?
Are ideas and terms defined before they are used?
Are forward references kept to a minimum?
Have alternate organizations been considered?
Was an abstract written first? Does it communicate the important ideas of the paper?
Is the paper finished?

Style

Is writing clear, concise?
Are words spelled correctly and used correctly?
Are sentences complete and grammatically correct?
Are ambiguity, slang, and cuteness avoided?