**Referee’s Report Instructions**

In theory, all of the articles you see published in the front-line scientific literature have gone through a rigorous peer-review process, where at least three independent referees have read the manuscript of the article prior to publication and offered a judgement on whether that paper should be published in a given journal. The referees should also offer justifications for why they have reached their conclusions and, ideally, constructive suggestions for where the manuscript could be improved. In effect, the referees need to write a clear and concise report justifying their opinions that they have formed after a *critical analysis* of a report of *novel* scientific work.

**Your Challenge**

You need to pick one of the pre-prints[[1]](#footnote-1) that we have posted on Moodle. Read the manuscript and act as the referee. You need to write a 2500 word report that clearly summarises what you think the main strengths and weaknesses are of the manuscript, where you think any improvements could be made and concludes with a recommendation of what the editor of the journal needs to do next – should they publish with no corrections, publish with minor revisions, publish with major revisions, or reject the manuscript.

Editors of major scientific journals have to potentially process decisions on hundreds of manuscripts per week. They are busy and value clearly justified recommendations by their referees. To help them with this, your referee’s report needs to be clearly structured and you need to present evidence for why you are making your recommendation to the editor. This needs to be in the form of a lucid, logical argument based on scientific evidence, both evidence found in the manuscript and evidence found in the existing peer-reviewed literature.

**Reviewing Manuscripts**

When reviewing manuscripts prior to publication, you need to critically evaluate the evidence in front of you. That is to say, you are trying to make a judgement by answering the following questions:

1. Is the work presented in the manuscript novel?
2. Does the work add any new insight to the existing scientific literature?
3. Are the methods presented in the manuscript appropriate and adequately described?
4. Are the techniques presented in the manuscript appropriate for what the authors are trying to do?
5. Are the results reliable and correctly reported?
6. Is the presented data interpreted correctly?
7. Are the conclusions concise and adequately supported by the results that were presented?
8. Could I make any suggestions for improvement that are fair and constructive?

For the last point, you need to focus more about the science that is presented, rather than grammatical and stylistic points.

**Marking Scheme**

Summary of the main points of the manuscript 20 %

Appraisal of the quality of the methods selected and described 20 %

Appraisal of the novelty and importance of the work 10 %

Identification of strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript 20 %

Justification of referee’s final recommendation of publishing (or otherwise) 20 %

Clarity of referee’s report 10 %

1. A pre-print is a manuscript containing the description of a body of research that has been submitted to a journal for publication. Typically, it has NOT been published yet, so you do not know if it has been judged “publishable” by referees. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)