Chapter 2

Writing a Literature Review

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Writing a literature review requires a somewhat different set of skills than writing an empirical research article. Indeed, some people who are very good at writing empirical research reports are not skilled at composing review papers. What are the characteristics that differentiate literature reviews that are likely to be published and make a difference from those that are difficult to publish and make a limited contribution?

I have been thinking about this topic quite a lot recently. As the current editor of *Psychological Bulletin,* the literature review journal of the American Psychological Association, I constantly deal with the issue of evaluating review papers. I had written a number of literature reviews myself prior to becoming editor; however, in the process of editing the journal I have had to consolidate what were vague, sometimes unverbalized cognitions regarding the properties of an excellent review into criteria for guiding editorial decisions.

Before writing this chapter, I started to outline my recommendations. As a last step before beginning to write, I read a similar paper written by Daryl Bem that was published in *Psychological Bulletin* in 1995. I was surprised at how similar Bem's and my ideas were; sometimes he even used the same words that I have used when talking about writing reviews to groups at conferences and to my students. Based on

this similarity, one could conclude either that great minds think alike or that there is considerable interrater reliability between people who have been editors about what constitutes a high-quality review paper. Although I wish the former explanation for the similarity were true (I admire Bem's writings), the latter is the more likely explanation. In fact, in my experience, even people who occasionally review manuscripts for *Psychological Bulletin* tend to agree on the structural qualities of an acceptable review paper, although they sometimes disagree on the value or veracity of specific content in a given review paper.

In this chapter, I discuss the various types of literature reviews and provide guidelines for writing a high-quality review article. The expectations for, and criteria for acceptance of, review papers in the top journals are, of course, more stringent than those for acceptance in second or third tier journals. Nonetheless, many of the same rules apply for writing a review for a premier journal and for other journals.

THE PURPOSES OF REVIEW ARTICLES

A good starting place for considering the purpose of a review paper is the discussion of review papers in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 1994):

Review articles, including meta-analyses, are critical evaluations of material that has already been published. By organizing, integrating, and evaluating previously published material, the author of a review article considers the progress of current research toward clarifying a problem. In a sense, a review article is tutorial in that the author

- defines and clarifies the problem;
- summarizes previous investigations in order to inform the reader of the state of current research;
- identifies relations, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the literature; and
- suggests the next step or steps in solving the problem. (1994, p. 5)

In my editorial in *Psychological Bulletin* (1997), I outlined three types of reviews that I expected to publish in the *Bulletin.* I would now add a fourth. The purposes of these types of reviews differ somewhat, although the various types of reviews are not mutually exclusive.

1. In a common type of review, an author uses existing empirical data to answer old or new questions. For example, the author might review studies on age-related changes or sex differences in a given aspect of psychological functioning or behavior and evaluate whether, to what degree, and under what conditions age changes or sex differences seem to occur (e.g., Eagly & Steffen, 1986). A review of this type may be based on quantitative methods such as meta-analytic procedures that combine empirical findings across studies or can be based on the author's qualitative review of the literature. In this type of review, the major contribution generally is the *generation of new knowledge,* although theoretical or conceptual predictions usually are examined, for example, the new knowledge is linked to conceptual frameworks already in existence or formulated in the manuscript.

2. Reviews often are a vehicle for analyzing and evaluating the specific predictions of existing theories or conceptual models. Such a paper may include solely a qualitative review of the literature (i.e., a review that does not involve any statistical computations across studies) and/or quantitative methods for combining results across studies. With meta-analytic procedures, an author can use a set of studies to empirically test theoretical claims and potential moderating variables that qualify when and if a predicted effect or relation is obtained (e.g., Eagly, Chaiken, Chen, & Shaw-Barnes, 1999; Postmes & Spears, 1998). The primary goal of this sort of paper is *theory testing.*

3. Another slightly different type of review is one in which the author integrates and/or compares conceptual frameworks and empirical findings from different subdisciplines or conceptual approaches in psychology or from psychology and other disciplines (e.g., economics, genetics, or anthropological work). For example, an author might evaluate the cognitive developmental conception of children's theories of mind stemming from developmental psychology in light of ethnographic work from anthropology and related disciplines (Lillard, 1998). The primary purposes of this type of review are *theory integration or theory testing.*

4. In some reviews, a new conceptual model is the center point of the paper and an author uses this conceptual model or theoretical prediction to organize a body of literature into meaningful patterns.

As just one example, authors have presented a new model of how people respond to the receipt of aid from others (and the underlying processes), and then used the model as a basis for organizing relevant literature and theory (see Fisher, Nadler, & Witcher-Alagna, 1982, and Shell & Eisenberg, 1992, for examples). Another example is Bjorklund's (1997) review in which he proposed a somewhat novel prediction based on evolutionary theory (i.e., that infants' and young children's immature behaviors and cognitions sometimes are adaptive) and organized his review around examining the merit of this proposal. The primary goal of reviews of this type is to *develop and evaluate new theory or conceptual arguments.*

The four types of reviews listed above do not include the most common type of review published in the psychological literature. A fifth type of literature review involves the organization, presentation, and summarization of preexisting theory and empirical findings. There is limited, if any, generation of new knowledge or theory. For example, if a field is new, an author might review what is known in an effort to organize and consolidate a sparse or scattered database so that one can more easily draw conclusions and provide direction for future research. The primary purpose of these types of reviews is the *integration and presentation of existing knowledge.*

There are also many other kinds of reviews, such as those in which authors evaluate the usefulness of a particular measure, trace the history of a given concept or type of research, or provide information on how to use specific clinical, intervention, or laboratory procedures. Reviews such as these generally, but not always, are published in books aimed at a specific, fairly specialized audience.

SELECTING A JOURNAL

Whether a literature review is likely to be accepted by a high-quality, peer-reviewed journal depends, in part, on the type of review and its appropriateness for a given journal. Literature reviews that organize and summarize an existing body of literature or spell out how to use various measures or procedures certainly have a useful place in psychology. Such reviews educate people without specific expertise in an

area, are helpful to readers who want to cite a summary of the current state of knowledge in an area, and provide a jumping off point for researchers who want to move beyond the current state of empirical knowledge. However, reviews that merely summarize current knowledge generally are most appropriate for books or perhaps a special issue of a specialty journal on the specific topic. Although they sometimes may be published in some journals, they currently are not common in the premier psychological journals. Review articles that are most likely to be accepted in peer-reviewed review journals are those in which authors generate new knowledge, generate or evaluate theory (broadly defined), and/or integrate ideas and findings from different disciplines in a new way. In brief, top quality reviews are expected to provide a novel contribution of some sort and to deal with conceptual issues.

In my experience, it is relatively easy to write a review that merely summarizes existing knowledge. In contrast, writing a review that is conceptually based and provides a novel contribution is much more difficult. Doing so usually requires that your thinking about the topic of the paper has "jelled," which generally occurs only after being immersed in a domain of study for some period of time. A review that provides an increment in knowledge or theory also requires a bit of inspiration. Of course, you can compute a meta-analysis on some issue without broaching new conceptual territory – and such a meta-analysis may generate new knowledge – but the review is likely to be a bit hollow, sterile, and uninspired if you have not reflected extensively on the topic. There is no substitute for a thoughtful and creative analysis of a domain, even if a review paper includes an empirical meta-analysis.

Not all journals that publish reviews require that articles extend the boundaries of our knowledge and thinking. As noted previously, a solid, comprehensive review, especially if carefully conducted, is acceptable in some peer-reviewed journals. A good way to evaluate the fit between your review and a specific journal is to examine reviews previously published in that journal to see if their contribution is similar to that in your manuscript.

In an analysis of the degree to which ratings of criteria similar to those just discussed predicted acceptance of manuscripts in

Psychological Bulletin in 1993–1996, Sternberg, Hojjat, Brigockas, and Grigorenko (1997) found that all ratings predicted final decisions, that the ratings were highly intercorrelated, and that the two strongest predictors were contribution to the field reviewed and appropriateness of manuscript for the journal. Thus, it is important to consider the degree and type of contribution of a review paper, as well as its appropriateness for a given journal, when evaluating if a manuscript is likely to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. Moreover, the breadth of the topic should be taken into account. If your topic is of interest to a narrow audience of psychologists, it probably is more appropriate for a specialty journal in a given discipline (e.g., *Personality and Social Psychology Review, Human Development,* or *Developmental Review*) than for a journal targeted at a broad audience (e.g., *Psychological Bulletin*). Choosing the appropriate journal for submission can save you from losing many months in the review process, time that is particularly valuable if the content of a paper is likely to become dated.

COMMON PROBLEMS IN THE CONTENT OF REVIEW PAPERS

Your odds of writing a publishable review are increased if you are aware of what editors and reviewers expect in the content of reviews. One of the best ways to get a feel for this is to read reviews in top-notch journals and in the journal to which you plan to submit your manuscript (if they are not the same). Below I outline some important points to keep in mind when organizing and writing your review article.

Provide a Take-Home Message

As noted by Sternberg (1991), the past editor of *Psychological Bulletin*, a central ingredient of a top-notch review paper (and hopefully an ingredient in any review article) is a "take-home message."

Literature reviews are often frustrating because they offer neither a point of view nor a take-home message. One is left with a somewhat undigested scattering of facts but little with which to put them together. (p.3)

Stated somewhat differently,

Authors of literature reviews are at risk for producing mind-numbing lists of citations and findings that resemble a phone book—impressive cast, lots of numbers, but not much plot. (Bem, 1995, p. 172)

In brief, reviews should have a point that a reader can take away from the paper. Of course, that point needs to be clear and well justi-fied if the paper is to be convincing. You are more likely to present a clear message if the central message is adequately introduced in the introduction and if you provide readers with a conceptual framework early in the paper that can be used to assimilate and integrate the review of empirical evidence that follows the introduction. By provid-ing a conceptual framework and/or guideposts (i.e., advanced orga-nizers) for readers early in the paper, you help the reader to see things from your perspective.

The Review of the Empirical Literature

There are several issues that arise regarding the quality of the sec-tion of the paper that includes the actual review of the existing empir-ical literature.

Breadth of the Review. The breadth of desirable coverage of the empirical literature (or theory) varies with the purpose of the litera-ture review. If you are attempting to evaluate the pattern of findings for the body of research on a particular issue, it is important that the review be inclusive. Most or much of the relevant empirical work, especially research of high quality, should be discussed. Bodies of research using diverse methods usually should be included (unless an author is focusing on a particular method), and the range of findings should be reported. Of utmost importance, the review should not be biased in coverage toward research supporting your point of view by excluding empirical work inconsistent with your perspective. A biased review is of little use to the discipline and is poor science.

There are cases in which the review of particular parts of the empirical literature would be expected to be more selective, albeit still representative. For example, if you are presenting a broad model and need to illustrate one of many points related to part of the

model, an in-depth review of the literature may be unnecessary and could be distracting. Nonetheless, if you cite a small subset of studies, this subset of research should represent the best work available and you should note discrepancies across studies that are relevant to your argument.

Thus far I have been discussing breadth of coverage in terms of the range and number of studies included in the review. A related issue is the level of detail provided about particular studies or bodies of research. An inclusive literature review does not require that you discuss every study in detail. Often bodies of research can be summarized in a few sentences, especially if the methods used are similar across studies. If presentation of details is deemed important, findings and characteristics of the sample and design can be summarized for specific studies in a table that is available for the reader's perusal. A long discussion of the characteristics and findings of many individual studies is desirable only when it is necessary to make a point, such as why findings differ across studies.

Nonetheless, you do not want your paper to have a "trust me" feel to it. In general, the reader should have some idea of the methods used in the work and the nature of the empirical evidence (e.g., Are the data correlational or from an experimental design? Do the studies involve cross-sectional or longitudinal samples? What types of families tended to be involved in the research?). Often you can provide the essential information very briefly. The degree to which such detail is necessary depends, of course, on the centrality of the study or studies to the point you wish to make.

Relevance. Often authors review theory or research that is not central to their premise or focus. They get off on a mental tangent that serves only to confuse the reader. The content of your review should be on *relevant* literature and pertinent points; otherwise, the logic of your argument or analysis gets lost. I return to the issue of logic of the argument shortly.

Accuracy. It is a problem if the content in a review of the literature is incorrect or misleading. In addition to a review being biased based on the selection of studies, authors sometimes misrepresent the results of studies or the views of a theorist. Sometimes these misrepresentations are based on an honest difference in individuals' interpretations or understanding of data or theory. However, often

misrepresentations are due to careless reading and reporting of findings. In addition, sometimes an author knowingly slants the findings in a particular direction by omitting relevant information. It is not a problem to differ in your interpretation of findings from other researchers or authors – indeed, having a novel point of view can be the contribution of your paper. But when this is the case, it is wise to lay out carefully your reasons for interpreting the findings as you do. If an author ignores or simply dismisses others' interpretations of the literature without sufficient cause or misstates others' views to make a point, he or she eventually will be seen as an advocate of a particular perspective, not as a scientist.

Another component of accuracy is being sure that the conclusions you present as stemming from your review of the literature actually do follow from the review. Often authors make assertions following their discussion of the literature that are not really substantiated by the material reviewed. Of course, it is reasonable (and even desirable) for you to go beyond the work reviewed and to speculate about relevant issues, mechanisms, processes, and the like. However, it should be clear to the reader what is speculation not grounded in the literature review and what conclusions are firmly based on your review of studies.

Inclusion of Critique. A strong review paper is written from a critical point of view. The author does not simply accept what is out there in the existing literature; he or she evaluates the methods of studies, other authors' conclusions, and other aspects of relevant theory or research that are relevant to evaluating a body of work. A critical evaluation of relevant work includes pointing out strengths as well as weaknesses in existing research and theory. Taking a critical perspective does not mean that you must tear apart every study. Criticism usually is most helpful if you provide an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a body of work, including the evidence for specific points or conclusions. For example, you can point out the strengths and weaknesses of various methods (e.g., self-reports, experimental manipulations), as well as note when findings converge across methods (and, thus, are likely to be more reliable).

Being critical does not mean being nasty or insulting. Your critical remarks should be focused on the work itself rather than on the researcher or author of that work. *Ad hominem* criticism in manu-

scripts (or from reviewers) usually is not welcomed by editors or readers and is deemed inappropriate and nonconstructive. Moreover, as was pragmatically noted by Bem (1995), the person you attack is likely to be asked to review your manuscript!

The Ending. The concluding section of a review can be especially useful to readers if you go beyond merely summarizing the findings from the review. This includes not only noting gaps in the literature, unanswered questions, and future directions for research, but also drawing novel conclusions (if justified or plausible), proposing alternative explanations or processes to explain findings, and discussing the implications of your findings for theory. Authors generally are given more latitude when discussing the findings of a review of the literature than when discussing the results of an empirical paper based on one study or a series of studies. Thus, review papers provide an opportunity for you to be creative and present your own interpretations and integration of the literature, even if your thoughts go somewhat beyond the information directly provided by the review. Creativity is a valuable commodity and can enhance the contribution of your manuscript.

QUALITY OF WRITING

A good idea is not enough to get a review accepted – you must present your ideas clearly. Many an article is rejected due to poor writing rather than to lack of a good idea (or good data, for that matter, if you are submitting to an empirical journal). I agree with Bem (1995) that the difference between articles that are accepted and the top 15–20% of those rejected frequently is the quality of writing. Of course, clarity of writing will not substitute for a careful review of the literature and creative thinking. However, clarity of writing allows the reader to extract and appreciate the author's creative, analytical, and integrative contributions.

Organization

I often tell my students that when they write a paper, they need to tell a coherent story (also see Bem, 1995). The logic should be linear: Point A→ point B→ point C. As noted by Bem (1995), "a coherent

review emerges only from a coherent conceptual structuring of the topic itself (p. 173)."

As noted by others (Bem, 1995; Sternberg, 1991), no single organization works best for all reviews. One of the best approaches is to organize a review around competing models or around evaluation of a point of view (see Bem, 1995, for examples), but this structure may not work for all content areas. Regardless of the content, you should organize the paper around the central point and the relation of theory and research to this central issue.

I sometimes characterize specific manuscripts as "being written like an undergraduate paper." I am referring to instances in which authors organize their reviews by studies rather than by ideas. One study after another is described, often in too much detail. Studies should not be the unit of analysis; important points to be made should be the building blocks of a review. For example, if an author wants to analyze gender differences in empathy-related responding, the review might be organized according to an analysis of bodies of work pertaining to different conceptualizations of empathy and different operationalizations of empathy-related responding (e.g., self-reports, physiological measures). Then individual studies could be discussed in the context of providing information about particular conceptualizations or operationalizations of the construct.

Take the Perspective of the Reader

Many of the common problems of communication in psychological papers could be corrected if authors simply tried to take the perspective of their readers. Often authors use pronouns (e.g., his or it) when the referent for the pronoun is unclear. Similarly, authors frequently use terms such as "more" or "less" that imply a comparison, but do not indicate what is being compared with what. Consider the sentence, "Aggressive boys were less liked by their peers whereas aggressive girls were more ignored." In this sentence, it is unclear if aggressive boys were less liked by their peers than were less aggressive boys or aggressive girls, and if aggressive girls were more ignored than aggressive boys or nonaggressive girls. Another instance of lack of perspective taking is when authors jump from one idea to the next without an adequate transition or linkage between the two ideas.

When writing any paper, you should actively analyze how a naive reader will interpret what you are saying and where readers will be confused. Readers do not carry the same fund of knowledge in their heads as you do and are not privy to your train of thought. If reviewers or readers are frustrated by unclear references and leaps in logic, they are unlikely to take the energy to read the paper carefully, will miss important points, and may even give up trying to read the paper.

Use Clear Language

There are many ways to improve the clarity of your writing. One is to learn the basics of good writing and grammar that are essential for writing at all levels, professional and otherwise. There are numerous books written on clarity of prose and grammar that are useful guides (e.g., Strunk & White, 1979).

One especially common problem in academic writing is that people tend to use complex phrases and word constructions in their writing. I always tell students to write in the same way that they would explain an idea or findings to an intelligent layperson who does not know the work. I also suggest that they write in a manner similar to how they talk. Most people would never say the things they write; the word constructions in their writing are too convoluted and drawn out. As advised by Bem (1995), "write simply and directly" (p. 173).

Bem (1995) provided a number of examples of concise versus inconcise language, repetitive and parallel constructions in sentences, and concise versus inconcise summarizing of a study. I would like to emphasize one particular problem (also see Bem, 1995) – the use of jargon. Jargon is specialized terminology used in a discipline. Even in the premier journals in psychology, which are read primarily by other psychologists, the use of unnecessary jargon is confusing and undesirable. The content of a review is expected to be accessible to other people not working in precisely the same area as you, and jargon often undermines readers' understanding of critical concepts.

Unless jargon is extremely well known (e.g., "reinforcement"), is more precise or freer of surplus meaning than other terms, or has a specific meaning that is not available in everyday English, it is best to use plain and simple English (Bem, 1995). If you must use jar-

gon, you should define the terms the first time they are presented in the text.

META-ANALYSES

Many reviewers use meta-analytic techniques to combine the results of multiple studies. This can be a very effective procedure for testing empirical questions when sufficient studies exist on the given topic. Meta-analytic procedures are very useful for testing main effects and moderating (i.e., statistical interaction) effects that are hypothesized in models.

The statistical procedures for computing a meta-analysis have been discussed in detail elsewhere (e.g., Cooper & Hedges, 1994; Hedges & Olkin, 1985), as have the components of a meta-analysis (Rosenthal, 1995). I wish only to point out a few of the common errors that I have seen in meta-analytic reviews.

One common error is an author assuming that the meta-analytic section of the paper eliminates the need for a thoughtful introduction section, analytic thinking, and discussion of conceptual issues. The author primarily presents the results of the analysis and assumes that says it all. The inclusion of meta-analyses does not eliminate the need for conceptual integration. Moreover, some relevant data often are not available in a form that can be used in a meta-analysis; research of this type should be reviewed qualitatively if it is pertinent.

Second, a meta-analysis is only as good as the data set of studies used in it. Thus, if you undertake a meta-analysis, your search procedures for obtaining relevant papers should be inclusive, and usually you should include unpublished papers such as dissertations and conference papers (to avoid the problem of bias toward studies in which the results are significant). Moreover, you should describe your search procedures in detail, including what keywords were used in the computer search and what search programs were used (e.g., MedLine, PsychLit).

If you conduct a meta-analysis, there are many decisions you must make regarding aggregation of data from individual studies, the selection of statistics, and so forth. The procedures chosen should be

clearly described and, if they are not normative, justified. Moreover, in most cases, it is important that you use the typical range of statistics suggested by experts in meta-analysis (e.g., confidence intervals, estimates of homogeneity of a group of studies).

The important point to keep in mind is that meta-analysis is merely a statistical tool. Thus, the other requirements for a good review generally hold. In addition, the same care that is expected for reporting analyses in empirical articles is applicable to the reporting of meta-analytic procedures and results.

REVISING

Once your draft of an article is finished, it is unlikely to be ready to send off for review. I usually revise and write at least four or five versions of an article before sending it off for review, and additional versions when I am revising after feedback from editors and reviewers. Virtually no papers are accepted at the premier journals without revision. However, you substantially decrease your chances of being allowed to revise if the original draft of the manuscript is poorly written and if there are many grammatical and typographical errors.

In rewriting a paper, most of us need to spend considerable time and energy working on issues such as clarity of wording, clarity of presentation of ideas, and organization of ideas. Often what is needed is some distance from the paper. After you have read and reread the same paper many times, you know the paper so well that it is difficult to note missing words or links between ideas. Putting the paper aside for a few days or weeks and then coming back to it can provide you with a whole new perspective. It also is very useful to ask co-workers to read the manuscript and provide feedback prior to submitting the paper. Ideally, one reader would be familiar with your content area and could comment on content-related issues whereas another reader would be someone without expertise in your particular content area who could provide feedback on clarity of communication in the paper. After more than 20 years of publishing, I still never submit an empirical paper or a major review paper without having at least one other person read it (and usually more than one).

Extensive rewriting, if combined with high quality in terms of content, may earn you a reject–revise review. If the editor leaves the door open for a revision, this generally is cause for guarded celebration; the odds of the paper being accepted have gone up substantially. This is especially true if you think that you can address most of the important issues in the reviews and can provide good reasons for not complying with the suggestions that you do not want to incorporate into the revision. As suggested by Bem (1995), "turn to the task of revising your manuscript with a dispassionate, problem-solving approach" (pp. 176–177). Do whatever seems reasonable (and perhaps slightly unreasonable) to respond to the reviewers' and editors' concerns. Keep in mind that reviewers generally are experts in an area and that many of their comments likely have merit.

You should, of course, feel free to argue, in a constructive way, about any suggestion by an editor or reviewer that you feel is wrong or unwarranted. However, it is wise not to simply ignore suggestions rather than discuss why the suggestions are problematic. It is a good policy to include a letter with your resubmitted manuscript in which you outline in some detail how you handled the reviewers' suggestions and your reasons for not making some suggested modifications. Indeed, many editors request a letter of this sort.

When writing this letter to the editor, keep in mind that reviewers as well as the editor are likely to read it. Original reviewers usually are asked to re-review revised manuscripts, especially if they had criticisms of the manuscript. Thus, it is in your own best interest to bite your tongue when writing this letter and not detail why a reviewer's comments are stupid, just plain wrong, or biased. Reviewers are people, and they often get defensive or downright mad if they are embarrassed or insulted by an author's letter. Your goal should be to have your manuscript re-reviewed by a dispassionate, rational reviewer rather than by a defensive or angered reviewer.

So, for example, when you get the silly suggestion that you reanalyze your correlational data controlling for age when age was not related to any variables in your correlations, vent with your friends or colleagues and then do the correlations. Do not say: "I did not reanalyze controlling for age because the reviewer obviously did not read my paper well enough to note that age was unrelated to any of the

variables in the correlations." Rather, you might say. "As suggested by a reviewer, I reanalyzed controlling for age and it had no effect on the results." And perhaps, if you feel other readers might wonder about the same issue, you might add, "and I now mention this fact briefly in a footnote."

When a reviewer suggests that you discuss an issue that is tangential to your point, you shouldn't say, "This reviewer obviously doesn't know the area because he/she suggested I discuss work that is not relevant." Rather, you might say something like the following: "Although the work on topic X is interesting, it is not directly relevant to the point I hope to make. Thus, I simply have briefly cited that body of work so interested readers can access that work. If this is not satisfactory, please let me know." (See Bem, 1995, for other examples of right and wrong responses.)

Persistence, hard work, self-regulation, and a strong ego are important in getting you through the review process. Don't give up on revising your review simply because it is a frustrating, difficult, and time-consuming process or because you are angered by the reviews. Keep in mind the slogan of the Arizona lottery, "You can't win if you don't play."

SUMMARY

As I noted in my editorial outlining the types of papers I hoped to publish in *Psychological Bulletin* (Eisenberg, 1997):

The best reviews are those that provide readers with a well-articulated message and a framework for the integration of information. In addition, reviews are expected to be well organized, comprehensive, critical, and balanced and to communicate clearly to a broad audience. Moreover, a high-quality review identifies relations, gaps, and inconsistencies in the literature and includes ideas regarding the next steps for a solution to the problem. (p. 3)

This is not mere verbiage; I try to carry through on these ideas in the review process. To assess the aforementioned qualities (and others) in papers submitted to *Psychological Bulletin,* I ask reviewers of manuscripts to rate on a five-point scale (from low to high) all manuscripts on the following criteria: (1) significance of paper topic, (2)

interest to a broad audience of psychologists, (3) appropriateness for the *Bulletin,* (4) quality of analyses (e.g., meta-analysis; respond only if relevant); (5) balance and fairness in coverage of alternative views, (6) accuracy of information, (7) adequacy of literature review (was the literature adequately sampled?), (8) theoretical contribution of manuscript, (9) existence of and persuasiveness in arguing for a well-articulated point of view, (10) importance of conclusions, (11) quality of writing (clarity, coherence, and organization of the prose), (12) appropriateness of the paper's length (is it concise?), and (13) overall evaluation. Some of these criteria may not apply to some other journals or may not be explicitly assessed by other editors (for example, a review published in a specialty journal need not interest a broad audience of psychologists). Nonetheless, many of these criteria doubtlessly are used to evaluate reviews in most peer-reviewed journals. Contribution to the field is the bottom line, but that contribution is likely to be obscured if your writing is not well organized and clear.

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