

Peer Review Case 3

Overview of this session

In this session, learners will consider the implication of unethical conduct in the peer review process. Learners will view a brief case study video and respond to questions related to the presented scenario.

Learning objectives

Through this case, learners will:

- 1) learn about ethical conduct during the peer-review process
- 2) learn how to manage conflicts of interest and bias related to the peer-review process

Lesson description

Instructional Event	Action		Time	Technology
	Instructor	Learner		
1. Introduce learning objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Give an overview of this session– State learning objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Listen and react to instructions– Recognize the necessity of this session	5 min	
2. Observe the case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Present the case study and review discussion questions with audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Watch the presentation and review discussion questions	2 min 8 sec	Internet Capability
3. Talk about discussion questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Ask learners for feedback and discuss questions/topic– Facilitate discussion and provide answers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Ask questions related to the case study– Share ideas or experiences related to discussion questions topic	~10 min	
4. Explain essential concepts that learners should know	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Summarize discussion points– Reiterate core concepts of session	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Listen	55 min	
5. Provide feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– - Ask for feedback and address any remaining questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Ask anything related to this session	5 min	
6. Enhancing retention and transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Provide additional materials including links to other resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Review additional materials as needed	2 min	

Overview of video

In this video we observe a PI engaging in unethical behavior with regard to the peer-review process. Lisa is asked by the Journal of Biophysics to complete a peer-review of a manuscript submitted for publication. Lisa is given one month to return her comments to the editor of the journal. Lisa notices the similarity of the study to work currently being done by her colleague, Bill, and encourages Bill to publish his research as soon as possible. Lisa stalls the peer-review process to allow Bill to have more time to complete his studies. Lisa eventually reviews the original manuscript but requests significant modifications that will be time-consuming. This affords Bill enough time to submit his work for publication.

Discussion questions

1. Did Lisa act appropriately in telling Bill to publish quickly?

Lisa did not act appropriately in relaying this information to Bill. When performing peer-reviews of manuscripts or grant applications, individuals are expected to treat the materials they receive as confidential documents and are to not share any information with anyone other than the person completing the peer-review. Lisa's behavior appears to have breached this confidentiality agreement. Also, while she did not explicitly disclose all the manuscript's information, putting pressure on him to publish was a demonstration of unethical behavior.

2. Did Lisa act appropriately in delaying the review? In giving a critical and demanding review of the paper?

Peer-review duties are time-sensitive. When agreeing to perform a review, Lisa agreed to the journal's timeframe and expectations for carrying out these duties. Delaying her responsibilities has implications for the journal and scientists that submitted the manuscript as well as the research community at large. Consider the financial implications this behavior can have on all parties involved. While Lisa is likely not getting paid to complete the peer-review, there are financial constraints on the journal and the researchers who submitted the manuscript. There are implications to the research community in postponing the publication of research that could potentially impact the field of study. The feedback Lisa eventually provided was likely biased to some extent. Demanding additional revisions, unless scientifically justified will only compound the issue of time and financial stress. Reviews should be constructive, and Lisa should have justified why she is requesting additional modifications.

3. Is there anything Lisa should have done differently when she received the submitted paper?

Lisa should have recused herself from reviewing the manuscript and disclosed her conflict of interest. This should have been done prior to reviewing the manuscript and involved a discussion with the editor of the journal and perhaps the conflict could have been managed.

4. What should Bill have done when given the encouragement to publish?

If Bill was given confidential information by Lisa to advance his work, this would also be considered unethical behavior. Bill should not have continued communicating with Lisa about his research progress. If Bill suspected Lisa was breaching confidentiality in her review duties, he may consider contacting the editor of the journal to disclose his concerns.

Additional discussion prompts

There are several ethical considerations presented in this scenario including:

- Lisa clearly has a conflict of interest and chooses not to disclose this information. Should Lisa have excused herself from the review?
- Was Lisa acting fairly to the journal she agreed to help?
- Was Lisa acting fairly to the researchers that submitted their work for review?

- Was it ethical to take as long as she did to review the manuscript and then ask for major revisions?
- Did Lisa treat the manuscript as a confidential document? Did she demonstrate a breach in the confidentiality?
- Based on the feedback Lisa gave in the video, can we assume Lisa gave objective and unbiased feedback to the researchers? Do you think Lisa demonstrated any bias while performing her review duties?
- Did Bill act unethically in this scenario?

Additional resources

- ORI Peer-review resources: <https://ori.hhs.gov/peer-review-0>
- ORI Conflict of interest resources: <https://ori.hhs.gov/conflicts-interest-and-commitment>
- ORI's *Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research*: [ORI Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research | ORI - The Office of Research Integrity \(hhs.gov\)](#)