

WHY? Double blind reviews are not often so “blind.” Reviewers many times find about the identity of the authors by performing Google searches using keywords from the submitted article. Many times they do not even need to do that, as authors have well established research programs, which are known to the community and it is immediately apparent from where the submission is coming from. Also, although rarer, there have been instances where authors found the identity of reviewers through gossip and leaking from some conference officers. Open reviews do away with a system that at times is either hypocritical or provides a false sense of “security.”

A more important reason is the quality of reviews the current system produces. Chances are that you have found yourself on the receiving end of rude and/or uninformed reviews. Unfortunately, some reviewers use foul language and adjectives like “stupid” and the like to manifest their opinion about the content of the submission. Other times, they dismiss an article with an aphorism of the type “I do not like it,” without providing a documented reasoning. Yet, other times, they have a long list of destructive points without offering any constructive criticism that will help the authors to improve their work in the future. The worst thing is that the whole process reminds a talk between deaf people. The authors do not have the chance to respond and the reviewers never get to know some of the errors they did themselves (they are humans after all). A rebuttal phase that was introduced in some conferences the last few years is a step in the right direction, but it is mostly cosmetic.

HOW? (Please see also the attached graph) In AVSS 2008 each committee member will be given a small number of papers to review. The names will be known both ways. Reviewers are encouraged to communicate with the corresponding author of each paper and ask any questions that may have about their submission. This communication should be in writing (i.e., email or conference system messaging) and will be part of the review record. This dialectic communication is important to establish mutual understanding. The reviewer will need to write a commentary (minimum 1 page and maximum 2 pages) - a template can be found at the submission area of the AVSS 2008 webpage. The commentary will have the form of a short paper and the following sections:

- Comment on Motivation and Novelty
- Comment on Methodology
- Comment on Experimentation
- Comment on Presentation and Form
- Summary
- Support References

The reviewer will need to do a thorough job and include documented constructive and destructive points presented in a civil and dispassionate manner. The reviewer will also fill out a grade form giving actual numbers to each one of the comment categories. This grade form will not be released to the authors – only to the area and conference chairs.

Overall, this is quite a bit of work for the reviewer and for this reason he/she will be rewarded. Submissions that will be accepted will have the edited commentaries included as attachment papers. Of course, the authors of these accompanied papers will be the reviewers themselves. The “commentary papers” will be fully citable and searchable IEEE papers – so, they will be CV items.

Of course, since the commentaries may become papers on their own right, they need to be reviewed, too. The Area Chairs will review the reviewers. Acceptance of a submission will not necessarily entail the automatic publication of all the commentaries. For example, the reviewers may need to do some revisions based on suggestions by the Area Chairs.

Based on the reviews, the Area Chairs will eventually produce recommendations for acceptance letters and rejection letters. The rejection letters will have various shades – for example, encouragement for resubmission in a future AVSS venue, after suggested improvements in research happen, or suggestion to submit to another more appropriate venue, or definitive rejection. The final letters will be delivered to the authors by the Conference Chairs themselves, who will assume the final responsibility of breaking the good or bad news.

WILL IT WORK? This is an experiment and nobody knows if it will work or not. There are incentives built for all actors to try their best. For example, for the reviewers, the specific reviews may be a lot more work than usual, but the ultimate commentary papers that may produce, they will probably be their easiest papers ever. As a metaphor, it always takes a lot more effort to produce a movie than writing a newspaper critic about it 😊 For the authors, there is a chance that they get something useful back and in the process make friends and future partners out of the dialectic review process, even if their paper does not make it. This may be especially good for young people who work isolated and are in need of professional mentorship, which in the current system is in short supply. Nevertheless, many things may go wrong and the experiment may fail. Even in this case, we hope that the effort will spur other more inspired efforts that may succeed in the future. One thing is for sure: the current review system has deficiencies and has a lot of room for improvement. And, one cannot overestimate the importance of scientific review in our profession.

AVSS 2008 Open review process

