

### **How to Write a Referee Report?**

Referee reports often have three parts: 1. A part that describes the paper, 2. A part that assesses its contribution, 3. Suggestion to strengthen the paper. The first part should describe in words the key results of the paper and the second and third part should describe the strengths and weaknesses of its result. Let me expand on this below.

#### **Part 1: Overview**

In the overview, you should describe the setup of the paper and its main results as well as the techniques that it uses to arrive at such result. In reality, editor also has read the paper so referee reports are often short in describing the results. However, for the assignment, you should go a bit more into the details of the paper and describe it. Using a simple example – two types, two periods, etc – will help with the description.

Remember that I will play a lazy editor and will not be reading the paper! You do not have to reproduce the paper but have enough description plus equations – only as minimal as you can but some will be necessary – so that I understand the results of the paper without reading it. Theory papers often want to do stuff super general which is important but not necessary for describing the results. Use of two type, two period, etc. models is on way to convey the main intuition for the results of the paper.

#### **Part 2: Assessment**

This part in some sense is much harder to do. For this part, you have to be able to have an assessment of the literature – which necessarily requires at least skimming some other papers that come before the paper that you are refereeing – and make a judgement call about the paper's results. At the end of the day, refereeing papers is about making a judgement: is this paper worth publishing in the outlet that is submitted? In making the assessment, thinking about the following questions would be useful:

1. How significant is the result compared to what came before it? Is it challenging a somewhat established intuition using a simple enough framework?
2. How widely applicable is the result? Are other economists in other fields able to use the results of this paper? For theory papers this is particularly important.
3. Is the paper developing a new framework to think about a new question that was not done before? How useful is the framework in thinking about the question at hand?
4. What are the key techniques that the authors develop in solving the problem at hand? How original are these techniques?

In my experience, thinking about these questions can help you assess the main contribution of the paper.

#### **Part 3: Suggestions and Extensions**

In this part, you should think about what the paper should be doing to strengthen its results. If you think that the paper has done a lot already, you should think about extensions and other similar problems that can be studied.