
Double-blind reviewing

From July 2009, the *SAJS* has adopted a system of double-blind reviewing, whereby the names of authors of papers submitted are not known to the scholars to whom they are sent for peer review (the authors' names remain known to the associate editors who make decisions about manuscripts). Such a system of double-blind peer review, in which neither author nor reviewer identity are revealed, is practised in only a minority of science journals, but is the norm in the social sciences and humanities. The evidence in its favour is compelling.

Most obviously, if a reviewer is unaware of the status or identity of an author, the manuscript should be more objectively reviewed. Where there are relatively few workers in a field; or

in small research communities (such as South Africa), the identity of authors may be evident to reviewers in any event. But double-blind review should at least have the effect of reducing the effects of nepotism, victimization and even reciprocal altruism.

Bias among reviewers may be subconscious as well as conscious. A recent study (Budden A.E. *et al.*: *Trends Ecol. Evol.* **23**, 4–6; 2008) reported that since the journal *Behavioral Ecology* introduced double-blind review there has been a significant increase in female first-authored papers. This pattern was not observed in a very similar journal that informs its reviewers who the authors are (what is called single-blind review). No negative effects of introducing double-blind reviewing could be identified. Any comment on the practice will, however, be welcomed by the editors of the *SAJS*. □