Reviewing ISMIR Papers
Some Personal Thoughts

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Reviewer Q&A Session for ISMIR 2022
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Meinard Müller

- **Academic Background**
  - 1997: Master (Mathematics)
  - 2001: PhD (Computer Science)
  - 2007: Habilitation (Information Retrieval)
  - 2012: Professor (Semantic Audio Processing)

- **Personal ISMIR History**
  - 2003: First ISMIR paper as co-author
  - 2012 & 2015: Scientific program chair
  - 2009-2021: Member of ISMIR Board
  - 2020/2021: President of ISMIR

- **IEEE Fellow (Music Signal Processing)**

- **ACM Senior Member**
What is MIR?

- Research of computational systems to help humans understand music-related data
- Multifaceted area drawing from a diverse set of disciplines
Why is ISMIR special?

- We all love music and technology …
- Independent, young, and vibrant community
- Support for next generation of scientists
- Equal focus on research and education
- Encouragement of interdisciplinarity & diversity
- Support of open access and reproducibility
ISMIR Conference

- Yearly conference
- Open access to all articles
- Copyright stays with authors
- 200 – 500 participants (increasing number)
- 100 – 120 papers accepted (acceptance rate 40 – 50 %)
- ISMIR is where you get the best feedback for your work on MIR
- ISMIR is where you meet people who know and love MIR
Review Decision Process

- **Scientific Program Chairs**
  - ISMIR 2022: Masataka Goto, Rafael Caro, Xavier Serra, Rachel Bittner
  - Organize review process
  - Make final decisions (accept vs. reject)
  - Compile scientific program

- **Meta Reviewers**
  - Help selecting reviewers
  - Review papers
  - Lead discussion phase
  - Provide summary with preliminary decision

- **Reviewers**
  - Review papers
  - Participate in discussion phase
What Should a Review Achieve?

- Help scientific program chairs making a fair and transparent decision
- Help meta reviewers making a balanced recommendation
- Work out strengths and weaknesses of paper
- Give authors feedback on their work
- Help authors improve their work
- Support and shape the ISMIR community
What are Possible Evaluation Criteria?

- Appropriateness of topic
  - Does the paper fit into the scope of ISMIR?

- Scientific and technical soundness
  - Is the notation and math correct?

- Reproducibility
  - Can the results can be understood and reproduced?

- Readability & paper organization
  - Are the essential points worked out clearly? Is there a take-home message?

- Stimulation potential
  - May the paper trigger exciting discussions?

- Novelty and relevance
  - Does the paper make some original and substantial “contributions”?  
  - Does the paper provide “insights”?
What is a “Contribution”? What are “Insights”?

Research Cycle in Applied Sciences

Application

Experiments

Evaluation measures

Data & annotations

Implementation

Computational approach

Modeling

Task

Reflection
The Blessing and Curse of Applied Sciences

- You can make contributions in many ways
  - Novel application or task
  - Novel computational approach
  - Efficient implementation
  - Novel dataset and annotations
  - Novel evaluation measures
  - Interesting experiments
  - ...

- A problem is hardly ever “solved” – so you can always contribute something

- You never “solve” a problem completely

- You always miss some aspects

- Your modelling always goes along with simplifications

- Your work is always vulnerable and disputable

Accept

Reject

Reviewing ISMIR Papers
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The Blessing and Curse of Interdisciplinarity

- You can make contributions coming from various disciplines
  - Information retrieval
  - Signal processing
  - Musicology
  - Library sciences
  - Human computer interaction
  - Machine learning
  - ...

- You can contribute with novel collaborative work

- There are many different perspectives on your work
  - Technical perspective
  - Music perspective
  - Data perspective
  - ...

- You will never do justice to all disciplines

- Your work is always vulnerable and disputable
The Blessing and Curse of ISMIR

- Support of young researchers
- Balance in topics and approaches
- High acceptance rate (40-50%)
- Open exchange of ideas
- Cooperative environment
- Authors and reviewers may have little experience
- Inconsistent reviews
- Paper quality is very mixed
- Get a publication out
- Competitive environment

Accept

REJECT
What You Should Keep in Mind

- Show respect

  - Show that you care and appreciate the article
    - Authors have worked hard
  
  - Stay positive and assume good faith
  
  - Be clear and direct, but also encouraging
  
  - Criticize the work, but not the authors
What You Should Keep in Mind

- Show respect
- Be detailed and specific

- Short reviews are hardly useful (and may even be harmful)
  - “... I like the paper, and I think it should be accepted ...”
  - “... This paper offers no technical novelty and should be rejected ...”

- Your review should help
  - Authors
  - Meta reviewers
  - Program chairs / editors

- Justify the score in detail
- However, do not get lost in details (fixing typos, re-writing, …)
What You Should Keep in Mind

- Show respect
- Be detailed and specific
- Make your perspective explicit

- You may mention your background in the review
- Explain which perspective you take

“… My background is in music sciences, and I look at the paper from a musicological perspective …”

“… In the following, I want to comment on the paper from a technical perspective …”
What You Should Keep in Mind

- Show respect
- Be detailed and specific
- Make your perspective explicit
- Be honest

- Never write something you are not sure of
- Better admit when you are lost and focus on the aspects you know well

“… Since I am not familiar with … I do not comment on the technical contributions … However, from an application perspective, I can say that … ”

- Note: We are all learners in almost all areas
What You Should Keep in Mind

- Show respect
- Be detailed and specific
- Make your perspective explicit
- Be honest
- Take a clear position

- Use the whole spectrum of evaluation scores
- If you find a paper outstanding, give it the highest score
- If you think the paper is really bad, give it the lowest score
- Always give convincing support for your recommendation
What You Should Keep in Mind

- Show respect
- Be detailed and specific
- Make your perspective explicit
- Be honest
- Take a clear position
- Actively participate

Tips for Reviewing ISMIR Papers

- Read guidelines and examples
- Participate in discussion phase
- If you are unsure, ask for help
  - Supervisor
  - Meta reviewers
  - Program chairs / editors
- Better cancel in time than be sloppy
  - Dealing with poor reviews is an editor's worst job
- Be reliable and responsive
  - Chasing after reviewers is an editor's second worst job
Why Should You Become a Reviewer?

- Read interesting articles
- Learn about new research trends
- Get to know “the other side”
- Reflect on your own work and publications
- Support the next generation of researchers
- Become part and give something back to the community
Guidelines for Reviewers (ISMIR 2012)

International Society for Music Information Retrieval (ISMIR)

TECHNICAL GUIDELINES

Scheduling
As soon as you are notified of your assigned papers, please check all of
them to make sure that:
- There is no previous conflict of interest (see section on Conflict of
  Interest below).
- The number of assigned papers and the deadline allow you enough
time to complete your reviews (see section on Commitment and
  Deadline below).
- You are qualified to review the papers assigned.
- None of the papers assigned by you violates any of the paper
  submission guidelines.

If any issues arise regarding these points, notify them immediately to
the Scientific Committee. You may extend the review process for
your assigned papers up to ten days after the submission deadline.

Guidelines for Reviewers
International Society for Music Information Retrieval (ISMIR)

When deciding your recommendation for a paper, do not rely
solely on the abstract. Each paper is an important and
valuable contribution to the field of music information retrieval.

Comments for the Authors
Your comments for the authors are probably the most important part
of your review. They will be returned to the authors, so you should
keep your comments specific, constructive, and professional.

Evaluation Criteria
Your evaluation of the papers assigned to you should be based upon
the following evaluation:

- novelty of the paper
- technical/scientific quality
- suitability of topic
- strictness of topic
- originality
- clarity of presentation
- innovation
- contribution to the field of Music Information Retrieval

Guidelines for Reviewers
International Society for Music Information Retrieval (ISMIR)

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Confidentiality and Anonymity
As a reviewer, you have the responsibility to protect the confidential
ity of the ideas represented in the papers you review. Submissions to the
ISMIR conference must not be shared outside of the conference.

Although the authors’ names are published in the conference pro-
ceedings, you may not discuss them with others unless you have
their explicit permission. The papers are anonymized before they are
sent to reviewers, so you should not assume that the authors are
distinct from the anonymous reviewers.

After receiving the papers, you should number all copies of the papers,
including the original, and use the same number for all copies. You
can then start reviewing the papers.

Acknowledgments
The guidelines for music information retrieval are based upon the
guidelines of the ACM SIGMM conference and are partially based
upon the guidelines of the ACM SIGCHI and SIGGRAPH conferences.

Guidelines for Reviewers
International Society for Music Information Retrieval (ISMIR)

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Guidelines for Reviewers (ISMIR 2012)

Technical Guidelines
- Scheduling
- Evaluation Criteria
- Comments for the Authors

Ethical Guidelines
- Commitment and Respect
- Confidentiality and Anonymity
- Conflicts of Interest
Literature & Links


- ISMIR Reviewer guidelines (ISMIR website)
  https://ismir.net/reviewer-guidelines/


- Blair Kaneshiro, Jordan B. L. Smith: Insights on the ISMIR Reviewing Experience. ISMIR 2021 Blog
  https://ismir2021.ismir.net/blog/insights/
  https://ismir2021.ismir.net/blog/insights2/

- Blair Kaneshiro, Zhiyao Duan, Juhan Nam, Preeti Rao, Peter van Kranenburg, Jordan B.L. Smith: Preparing a Successful ISMIR Submission. ISMIR 2021 Blog
  https://ismir2021.ismir.net/blog/preparing/

- ISMIR 2022 Review Form
  https://ismir2022.ismir.net/reviewform