

Comment Review: Paying Peer Reviewers – Benefits, Risks, and Challenges

(Reflecting on Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva's article in *Naunyn-Schmiedeberg's Archives of Pharmacology*)

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Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva raises an important and increasingly debated issue in academic publishing: whether peer reviewers should be financially compensated for their work. Peer review is considered the bedrock of scientific publishing, ensuring the integrity, validity, and quality of scholarly articles. As the pressure on the peer review system grows—with rising submission volumes, reviewer fatigue, and concerns about review quality—the question of payment becomes both practical and ethical.

One of the main arguments in favor of paying reviewers is fairness. Peer review requires time, subject-matter expertise, and intellectual labor. In many cases, reviewers contribute substantial value to improving manuscripts, yet their work remains unpaid and largely invisible. Financial compensation could recognize this labor formally, potentially increasing motivation, accountability, and timeliness. It might also reduce delays in editorial decisions, a persistent challenge in scholarly publishing.

However, compensation introduces significant risks. Payment may alter the intrinsic motivation that traditionally underpins peer review, which has long been framed as a collegial and community-driven responsibility. If reviewing becomes transactional, there is a concern that reviewers may prioritize speed over depth or accept assignments outside their expertise simply for financial gain. Additionally, introducing payment structures could widen inequalities between well-funded journals and smaller or non-profit publishers, potentially reshaping the publishing ecosystem in unintended ways.

Another major challenge is implementation. Key questions remain unresolved: How much should reviewers be paid? Who funds this compensation—authors, institutions, or publishers? Would payment compromise objectivity or introduce bias? Transparent systems would be essential to prevent conflicts of interest and maintain trust in the review process.

Teixeira da Silva's discussion also implicitly raises a broader systemic issue: the commercialization of academic publishing. Large publishers generate significant profits while much of the intellectual labor—writing, reviewing, and often editing—is provided without compensation. Paying reviewers may be seen not merely as an operational change, but as a corrective step toward a more equitable distribution of value within the publishing industry.

Ultimately, the debate is not simply about payment, but about sustainability, integrity, and fairness in scholarly communication. While financial incentives could alleviate reviewer fatigue and improve efficiency, they must be carefully structured to preserve independence, quality, and ethical standards, with input from the academic community. The debate remains open, and ongoing dialogue is essential to safeguard the integrity and sustainability of peer review.

The article contributes meaningfully to ongoing discussions about reforming peer review and challenges stakeholders—editors, publishers, institutions, and researchers—to reconsider long-standing assumptions about academic labor.

Referencias

- Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva. Paying peer reviewers: benefits, risks, and challenges. *Naunyn-Schmiedeberg's Archives of Pharmacology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00210-025-04969-0>