PERSPECTIVES ON *SIMULATION & GAMING*'S
REVIEW PROCESS

Joseph Wolfe, Experiential Adventures LLC

The creation and spread of knowledge about business games and the gaming process is central to ABSEL's mission. This mission is formally accomplished through the activities of its annual conferences and the sponsorship of its professional journal *Simulation & Gaming*. Central to both those activities is the formal review process. This process acts as a filter on what is acceptable or unacceptable research and what ideas and concepts are worthy of current and future investigation. The results of the review process has high impact on the business gaming field as it serves to push its knowledge envelope. The process' results also has high impact on the careers of those who are more successful than others. Those who are successful receive the acclaim of their peers and scoring points for tenure, promotion or compensation. Those who are unsuccessful obtain "none of the above" plus the pain of failure and possible frustration and defeatism that leads to prolonged research inactivity.

Because of the importance of the review process to ABSEL and its members, a panel comprising a "mixed bag" of reviewers will present their perspectives of the review process employed by *Simulation & Gaming*. These perspectives are especially important as the journal's review process results in publication in the field's most-respected refereed journal and the highest possible academic rewards that can be bestowed upon authors who want to make a mark on the field of business games.

The journal's Business Section editor has asked the panelists to make their thoughts known regarding their own particular talents and perspectives. As a group the panel consists of those who have researched and refereed both simulations and experiential exercises, have themselves ex-perienced different degrees of success with their submissions to *Simulation & Gaming* and have been excellent reviewers of the work of others. It is hoped this session will put a human face on the review process which is somewhat secretive and is kept hidden and blind in the name of objectivity. It is also hoped the session will result in a greater willingness of ABSEL's members to submit their work to the journal for professional review and to endure a process that tries to be objective about many things that are subjective in nature.

Each panelist will elaborate on the thoughts presented in the position papers they have drafted. These position papers and their authors are:

Steven C. Gold-- Recommendations for Publication Success in S&G

John Washbush-- My Perspectives as an S&G Reviewer

Nancy Leonard-- Position Paper on Evaluating Experiential Exercises

Precha Thavikulwat-- Observations of a Publication Gamer

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLICATION SUCCESS IN S&G

Steven C. Gold, Rochester Institute of Technology

INTRODUCTION

I have been asked by the Business Section Editor of *Simulation & Gaming*, Joseph Wolfe, to present the reasons I believe have led to my relative success in publishing in this journal and to offer recommendations to others. I have been publishing in *Simulation & Gaming* since the early 1980s. To begin my response, I will first discuss the process that lead me to submit my first article to S&G and the continuing efforts that have enabled me to publish successfully in the journal.

Active Involvement at ABSEL Conferences

In 1980 I attended my first ABSEL conference. I had an interest in business simulations and was encouraged to attend by two ABSEL members, Tom Pray and Dan Strang. I attended all the sessions, some in my area of interest but others outside my direct research interests. I not only sat in on the sessions but I actively participated in the discussions. I made sure I raised questions of interest to my research and to me personally. After the sessions, I continued my discussions by meeting with some of the participants during the refreshment breaks, lunches, and evening activities. Specifically, I recall meeting with Ken Goosen. I was interested in his attempts to encourage more ABSEL simulation authors to present the mathematical models that were used as the "engines" to generate the simulation results. I obtained many good ideas for future research topics at this first conference and made many contacts. I continued this strategy at future ABSEL meetings and was never short on ideas of research topics that were of interest to the organization. It logically followed that what is of interest to ABSEL would be of interest to the editors,

reviewers and readers of *Simulation & Gaming*.

Understand S&G's Interests

Although the interests of ABSEL and S&G are close, their interests vary owing to many considerations such as currency and timeliness, international involvement, and other pursuits external to ABSEL. Fortunately, many ABSEL members are associate editors and S&G reviewers. Because they are listed in the journal I was able to meet many of them have sought their feedback. David Crookall, S&G's Senior editor, has occasionally attended ABSEL conferences. I found my discussions with him to be very useful. Today Joe Wolfe, a relatively new editor with S&G, remains an active ABSEL member. Feedback from these individuals and other associate editors and reviewers, in terms of research interests and the criteria or standards they value has clearly helped me. It would be useful to make an effort to meet and interact with these individuals at the ABSEL conferences and "pick their brains."

Pick a Research Area of Interest and Stick With It

One of my early research papers was "Inside the Black Box" and focused on the modeling of business simulations. I found interest among simulation designers and users in this type of research, and have presented papers centering on this topic for the past two decades. By continuing to do research in a focused or narrow area, you develop relative expertise in that area. It is, of course, an issue of breadth versus depth. Building on prior research allows you to draw upon a similar body of literature. You begin to gain a better under-

standing of the literature and how your research advances the frontiers of knowledge in your specialization. Not only does this help develop and expedite your research, you develop a reputation in the field. After you develop a reputation, you begin to be sought out by journal editors or book authors to submit invited pieces. For example, I was asked to participate in writing some chapters in different books on simulation modeling, and to participate in some of S&G's special issues.

Present Research Papers and Participate as a Discussant

Do not merely attend ABSEL's conferences but try to present "full" papers and to participate as a paper discussant. These activities were very important contributors to my success. By "full" paper I mean putting enough time and effort into the initial research to get it approved for publication in the ABSEL Proceedings as a "full" paper. Research that is not very far along or is not sufficiently developed, is only put in the Proceedings as an abstract and is limited to one or two pages. To get meaningful feedback on your research topic, methodology, results and conclusions, you need to have individuals look at a paper that is reasonably complete. Session participants will also be better prepared to discuss your paper at the session or at informal meetings during the conference. I have even asked certain ABSEL members to look at my paper at a later date and to mail me comments.

A second important factor was my participation as a discussant. I have consistently volunteered to be a discussant. This has placed me in the role of a reviewer and has helped me to think more like an editor. I began to better understand, through experiential learning, the criteria for good research. As a discussant I was required to look for the strengths and weaknesses in the research of others. I was able to turn this experience around to help me better assess my own research efforts. As a discussant I was also forced to take on a more

active role in the conference sessions, and as a result learned and benefited much more.

Become a Reviewer for ABSEL Proceedings and S&G

Similar to being a discussant at ABSEL, becoming a reviewer for ABSEL, and if possible, a reviewer for S&G, you acquire a better understanding of the criteria for good research. I have been a reviewer for the ABSEL Proceedings and S&G for many years. I can clearly attest to the benefits of "learning by doing" or "experiential learning", it works!

Position Your Paper in the Literature

In my own research efforts, I have consistently made efforts to understand the contributions of others and how the paper adds to the frontier of knowledge. I believe it is important to discuss the literature and reference the important contributions of others. As a reviewer, this is one of the first things I look for in a paper. Surprisingly, I find many papers do not adequately review the literature or discuss how the paper differs from others or adds to the field. Again, my experiences as a reviewer have helped me appreciate the importance of this research dimension.

It is also important to highlight strengths as well as shortcomings of the works of others. Do not be overly critical of others but be objective and balanced. Remember to acknowledge the important contributions of others as well as some of the areas that could be improved or alternative approaches that could have been taken. Be aware that your paper's reviewer is likely to be someone you have mentioned in your paper!

Do Not Be Overly Defensive of Reviewer Feedback

Respond maturely, objectively, and thoroughly to reviewer criticisms. Do not take reviewer comments personally but take them

seriously. Carefully try to understand the concerns of the reviewers as they could be right. My attitude concerning reviewers is that they are there to help. Reviewers do not know you and are most likely objective. You do not have to agree with every criticism. But pick your battles wisely with the reviewers. Some of my colleagues do not revise or resubmit articles because they are upset about some reviewer comment(s). This is a mistake.

Co-Author with an ABSEL Member

This is a great way to make friends and have fun doing research. I have co-authored and believe it increases the quality and quantity of my research. In most cases two heads are better than one!

Concluding Comment

Attitude towards research is also important. I predict a researcher that enjoys what he or she is doing, is more likely to succeed than one who views it as pure drudgery and work and a necessity for being promoted. Publishing is an art as well as a science. It requires creative and innovative thinking. Organizations such as ABSEL help encourage such activity by their very nature: friendly, supportive and creative yet somewhat adversarial. ABSEL and its members are fun, and participating in the organization has made my research activities more enjoyable and successful.

My Perspectives as an S&G Reviewer

John Washbush, University of Wisconsin- Whitewater

As a reviewer, I like to see a presentation that is clear, direct, and stakes a claim for its significance immediately. Any paper, I believe, should tell a story. The story need not be profound, but the details of the story should be clear. I am as open to negative results in research as I am to positive results. Not finding what you set out to find is often more interesting than confirming one's suspicions.

I also prefer simple, direct, and active language and do not abjure the first person. In essence, what I hope to see is a paper that is configured as follows:

This is what we set out to do.
This is why we investigated the topic.
This is how we did the work.
This is what we found.
This is our interpretation of what we have accomplished.

To set a tone for all that follows in the paper, I want first to be presented with a very precise statement, in the form of an abstract, that captures clearly and simply the essence of the paper. Armed with this, I feel prepared for working with what follows. If the abstract is poorly done, I develop a very negative attitude toward the paper, and I often find that the introductory material of the paper's proper tends to wander and makes me do work the author should have already done. Now that I have an early formed negative attitude to the paper, I find it hard to support publication and even harder to offer helpful suggestions about ways to make improvements.

Writers often drop references to the work of others in flippant ways and some of them are frequently out of context. I prefer to see a dis-cussion of the referenced material so I can make an informed decisions about its propriety, support for the current work, relevance to what the paper is attempting, and, if method is an issue, how other procedures have applicability here. When a paper proposes a replication, or a study very similar to the work of another, I want to see a clear summary of the method employed previously. This helps me assess and compare methodologies and is very important to me in evaluating the meaning and importance of subsequent findings. I prefer to be treated as a rather naïve reader, and I like to find robust explanations rather than cryptic comments or assertions about the topic or concept(s) being treated. The author needs to prove to me they have adequately and accurately grounded the paper in the literature. However, when references are cited which have questionable bearing, I get those negative feelings again. I do not want to see padding or something that looks like padding. Stick to the issue's essence and indicate clearly the relevance of the citations made.

The article's method and procedures discussion should be stated clearly. I do not care whether hypotheses are stated in their positive or null form, but I do want to see a consistency in the approach that has been adopted. I am not a statistical genius, so I prefer careful attention to explaining the statistical procedures that may be used and why they are appropriate. If the author overkills, I can always suggest some scaling back. I will never be offended by being treated as less than sophisticated in this respect. Authors should avoid, however, the temptation to display extremes of erudition. More often then not, I react negatively, and I am bothered by having to do the author's work in justifying the relevance of

the point being made. When data is used, their source should be clearly identified as well as their structure and their appropriateness to both the issue at hand and the analysis being employed.

The analysis of results should be presented in whatever ways promote expository clarity. A profundity of meandering tables adds little if anything to a paper. Stick to the main issues precisely. I also react negatively to being presented obscure or partially formed arguments that purport to show something that might or might not be present in the data. This type of treatment should be reserved for the ending discussion. Brevity and clarity in presenting results is perfectly fine.

The ending discussion is not a place for a laborious summary of the entire paper including a rehashing of the literature and method. Preferably, begin this section by stating what the paper has found or produced. Discuss the significance of the results, whether positive or negative, but avoid flights of fantasy accompanied by possibilities or insights that are tenuously supported by the research findings. The implications of the work done previously deserve credible explication. Ideally, results should challenge readers to expand understanding or even continue in the process of investigation. The more precisely and forcefully this is done, the better. In my presentation at the ABSEL conference I will display positive examples of what I have cited in this paper gleaned from past S&G issues.

As a final comment, if I want to read Shakespeare, I will seek out and read Shakespeare. Transmission of the essential worth of a study effort that is clearly and effectively done may not rank as great literature, but it will advance the field of study in clear and powerful ways. If one suffers from linguistic frustration in writing a scholarly paper it would be better to try writing poetry on the side.

Position Paper on Evaluating Experiential Exercises

Nancy Leonard, Lewis-Clark State College

Background

During my conversation with Joe Wolfe, when he asked me to participate on a panel to address *Simulation & Gaming*'s evaluation process, he asked the question "Why do we throw softballs to experiential exercise authors and hardballs to computer game authors?" This seemed an odd question to me because I had just reviewed and rejected an experiential exercise that had been submitted for publication. In fact, I threw a hardball at that exercise! I believe Joe asked me to join the panel because of the rather candid conversation we had when I submitted that review. In that conversation, we talked about some of the problems that we felt existed in that exercise, as well as some of the problems we felt existed in many of the exercises that have been published in *Simulation & Gaming*. So, I guess this is what I get for being so blunt!

Based on that conversation, and my thoughts since Joe asked me to participate, I would like to submit the following issues, along with my position on those issues, for discussion by the panel and the audience. I believe there are problems both with the quality of exercises that are submitted for review and problems with the review process itself. Both of these problems stem from a lack of specification of appropriate criteria for evaluation. Based on this belief, I will suggest elements I feel should be included in experiential exercises, simulations, and games submitted for review and suggest issues that might serve as a basis for the development of criteria for evaluation. I will also propose general guidelines for review of experiential exercises, simulations, and games.

Elements to be Included in Submitted Experiential Exercises, Simulations, & Games

For many years now, experiential exercises, simulations, and games reviewed in *Simulation & Gaming* have begun with a set of Basic Data. These include a combination of the following:

- Instructional Objective
- Game Objective
- Target Audience
- Playing Time
- Debriefing Time
- Number of Players
- Materials Required
- Equipment Required
- Room Setup
- Price

I commend this effort and would like to see an established set of "Basic Data" required for all submissions. While this data is important in the write-up of the exercise, other important issues should also be addressed. These include:

- Theoretical Grounding and Discussion of Relevant Constructs
- Pedagogical Implications
- Implementation Issues
- Notes to Facilitator and Discussion Points
- Debriefing
- Support Material

Theoretical Grounding and Discussion of Relevant Constructs

In many published exercises, very little information is given about the theoretical grounding of the exercise. I would like to see a thorough research bibliography and discussion of the constructs illustrated in the exercise. Recent and relevant publications should be cited.

Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogical components should be clearly stated. The exercises often lack a discussion of why and how an exercise should be used to illustrate constructs in the prescribed discipline. There are cognitive, behavioral, and affective elements of teaching. How will the exercise relate to each? The authors need to clearly state how the subject discussed would fit into the curriculum, what constructs are illustrated in the exercise, along with when and how this exercise should be used.

Implementation Issues

The implementation process and/or appropriate sequencing of the exercise in relation to course material are often ignored. The implementation process should be laid out with appropriate sequencing of the exercise in relation to the course material. Any other issues that might arise during actual implementation of the exercise should be addressed.

Notes to Facilitator and Discussion Points

An important element in an exercise is related to the order of information to be revealed. This process is often important to the learning process and the facilitator needs to know what should be revealed when. These exercises are often used by novices or "first-time" users, and should include "cautionary" statements. Some exercises excite people and/or frustrate people and the facilitator needs to be prepared to deal with these issues. Discussion points should be suggested.

Debriefing

Many exercises ignore the importance of debriefing. Without bringing students "back to reality", and linking the outcome to the appropriate construct(s), the exercise is useless. The debriefing section should include questions, reflective exercises, etc. to facility a quality debriefing.

Support Material

All support material should be provided in a format suitable for reproduction and use. There also needs to be a clear indication of what material should be provided to students and what material is necessary for the teacher.

Beyond this, the exercise should be original, creative, and useful. The submission should include an accurate Abstract suitable for publication. It should begin with a clear and concise Introduction stating why the facilitator should use the exercise. The exercise should be written in clear and proper English, at a level suitable for its intended audience.

Suggested Guidelines for Review of Experiential Exercises

All reviewer comments should be aimed at helping the author improve the exercise or the write-up of the exercise. Even if you think it should not appear in *Simulation & Gaming*, other reviewers' evaluations may lead the Editor to request a revision for possible publication. We function in a close-knit group and submissions can often be identified by style or past submissions. Reviewers should be cautious and not provide biased reviews based on knowledge or suspected knowledge of author(s).

All reviews should be completed in a timely manner with response in less than three weeks. If the reviewer is unable to complete the review within this type frame, he or she should notify the Editor immediately so that the exercise can be sent to a different reviewer. Feedback should be provided to the author(s) within 6 weeks of submission.

Conclusion

My personal position is that application of these and possibly other author guidelines and reviewer guidelines would significantly improve the quality of submissions and publication of experiential exercises.

Observations of a Publication Gamer

Precha Thavikulwat, Towson State University

I am a publication gamer. This game has two sides-- the reviewer's side and the author's side. I play both sides and I win some and I lose some, on both sides.

As reviewer, I have reviewed for *Simulation & Gaming* since 1992, and I have been one of its associate editors since 1995. I specialize in the design of computerized business gaming simulations, so the submissions I review for the journal usually fall within that domain.

Over the years I have reviewed 24 submissions for *Simulation & Gaming* of which 16 were first-time reviews. I recommended acceptance of two first-time submissions. Of the remaining 14, 4 were revised and resubmitted, and of these I eventually recommended that 1 be accepted. Thus, my recommend-acceptance rate is about 13% on first-time reviews and about 19% overall.

My duty as a reviewer is primarily to find flaws in the works submitted so that readers of the journal will not be misled, and secondarily to give the authors constructive comments. Counting the flaws of the work I reviewed, I find four instances where the topic did not fit the scope of the journal, four instances where the piece was purely editorial, two instances of untimely anecdotal accounts, and one instance each of pedestrian discussion, a poorly-controlled study, incorrect mathematical logic, and insufficient information.[1] The bulk of the papers I reviewed had writing problems that included poor organization, misleading choice of words, and a lack of conformity to an acceptable academic style.

Generally, I commented least on submissions that did not fit the journal's scope. In one instance, I solicited the help of a colleague to review the submission because the topic was not in an area where I had expertise.

For submissions that were purely editorial pieces, I tried to find areas of new knowledge within those pieces. I would highlight the areas in my comments and encourage the authors to submit a new paper focused on one of the areas. Although the journal *does* publish many purely editorial pieces, I believe such pieces should be solicited by the journal's editor and not subjected to blind peer review. Thus, I recommended their rejection.

The submissions that were rejected were basically anecdotal accounts or described experiences with simulations that did not appear to be substantially different from those already in widespread use. Although recommending rejection of those submissions, I suggested lines of research that I thought would be fruitful, in the hope that the authors would remain within the field despite the rejection.

Writing problems were pervasive in the submissions I reviewed. On the reasoning that these problems can readily be corrected before publication, I avoided using them as a reason for recommending rejection, but I did point them out in my comments.

On at least two occasions, I subsequently regretted having made some of my comments. The authors were right and I was wrong. We

---

[1] Pedestrian discussion refers to a submission that reads like a section of a textbook. The concepts are already widely known and well accepted. A poorly controlled study is one where the causes are so confounded that the data cannot be said to support or refute any single hypothesis. Incorrect mathematical logic is not simply a computational error, which might be easily remedied, but a flaw in the logic itself. Insufficient information is omitting data need to confirm the authors' interpretation of the results.

matched wits and I lost. The contest would not be as interesting if I did not occasionally lose.

As author submitting papers to S&G, only once was a submission of mine accepted outright. I successfully fended off the reviewers on six other submissions. One never got past them even after revision.

Although most reviewers' comments are on the mark, they sometimes suggest changes that would reduce the value of the submission. They seem to suggest additions more often than deletions. Bolstering the literature review, for example, is often suggested. The suggestion is difficult to refute and compliance is almost always possible. But compliance requires time. In my case, it generally delays publication by about a year. Certainly, the final work is more complete, but it is not as timely.

The author's challenge is to find a nice way of letting the reviewer know that he or she is wrong when that is necessary. The task is delicate. Still, the author's plight is never that of a pauper to a prince. If the reviewer gets offended, the author is free to shop elsewhere. One journal's loss is another journal's gain.

Publication is a game to me, but research is serious stuff. My mission is to discover new knowledge. From time to time, I take a break from research to play the publication game. Unfortunately, the dominant culture in business schools now flows in an opposing direction. It takes publications seriously, but considers research a game. Incentives are given to elicit publications, while the conditions that favor discovery deteriorate. This too will pass. I shall resist the tide. I sense that my way is the ABSEL way and I hope you agree.