FREE FIELD GUIDE / FOR RESEARCHERS BEFORE THEY HIT SUBMIT

The pre-submission checklist reviewers wish you used.

The things that decide a paper's fate are usually settled before a reviewer reaches your results. This is the pass I run on a manuscript, drawn from reviewing more than fifty papers. Print it, tick it, and hand reviewers fewer reasons to say no.



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50+ peer reviews
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Reviewers are not hunting for genius. They are checking whether the work is honest, careful, and clear enough to trust. Most rejections come from avoidable gaps, not weak ideas.

Work top to bottom. Anything you cannot tick is a question a reviewer will ask for you.

01 The claim

- [ ] **Your contribution fits in one sentence.** A reviewer can restate what you did right after the abstract, without guessing.
- [ ] **You claim what you did, not what the field needs.** Motivation is not a contribution. Name the specific thing this paper adds.
- [ ] **The title matches the paper you actually wrote.** No promise in the title that the results do not keep.
- [ ] **Every claim has a home.** Each contribution listed in the intro is demonstrated somewhere in the results.

02 Related work and positioning

- [ ] **The closest competitor is cited.** Especially the method you beat. A missing rival reads as a blind spot or worse.
- [ ] **You explain how you differ, not just that you differ.** One clear line per key prior work.
- [ ] **Recent work is present.** The last twelve to eighteen months are covered. Reviewers notice the gap immediately.
- [ ] **No strawman baselines.** The comparison is fair, current, and tuned with the same care as your own method.

03 Method a reviewer can reproduce

- [ ] **A competent reader could reimplement the core idea from the text.** If they cannot, the method section is unfinished.
- [ ] **Every symbol is defined.** Once, at or before first use. No notation that only you can decode.
- [ ] **Design choices are justified, not just described.** Why this loss, this backbone, this threshold. “We used X” is not a reason.
- [ ] **Data splits, preprocessing, and hyperparameters are stated.** In the text or an appendix. Enough to rerun you.

04 Experiments and evidence

- [ ] **Baselines run under the same conditions as your method.** Same data, same splits, same budget. Otherwise the comparison is not a comparison.
- [ ] **Results report spread, not one lucky run.** Mean and standard deviation across seeds or folds.
- [ ] **Ablations isolate what drives the gain.** The reader can see which piece actually earns its place.
- [ ] **"Better" is tested, not asserted.** A gap of 0.3 points needs a significance test or a confidence interval, not a bold number.

05 Calibration and honesty

- [ ] **Your confidence matches your evidence.** Every claim sits at the strength the data supports, no louder.
- [ ] **Limitations are named before a reviewer names them.** Naming a weakness yourself is a sign of control, not defeat.
- [ ] **Failure cases are shown.** A method that never fails reads as incompletely tested, not flawless.
- [ ] **The abstract does not overclaim.** Nothing in it goes beyond what the results section actually delivers.

06 Figures, tables, and writing

- [ ] **Every figure survives grayscale and print size.** Axis labels, units, and legends are legible when shrunk to a column.
- [ ] **Captions are self-contained.** Reviewers skim figures first. Each should make sense on its own.
- [ ] **Tables report the metric you claim in the text.** Best result honestly marked, no quiet cherry-picking of columns.
- [ ] **The paper is proofread.** Typos and broken references spend goodwill you cannot spare.

07 Compliance and submission

- [ ] **Ethics, data, and consent statements are present where required.** Non negotiable for medical and human data.
- [ ] **Reproducibility is addressed.** Code and data shared, or a clear reason they are not.
- [ ] **Formatting matches the venue template.** Page limits, anonymization, reference style, all to the letter.
- [ ] **You reread the guidelines for this venue.** Each journal and conference has its own checklist. Yours should match theirs.

Reviewers are not looking for perfect. They are looking for honest, careful, and clear. *Give them confidence that matches the evidence, and you give them fewer reasons to reject.*

More field notes on writing papers, getting past reviewers, and trustworthy AI you can actually explain:

`calibratedresearcher.com/field-notes`

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