

Confidentiality of the Review Process

It has been a long-standing practice of the IEEE Electron Devices Society to treat all manuscripts submitted for publication to our journals as privileged information. This information is provided to reviewer(s) solely to assess the quality of the submission for publication. Hence, sharing of the contents of the manuscript for informational purposes outside or even within one's organization is strictly prohibited. In the event that the designated reviewer is unable or unwilling to review the submission, the designee may pass on the manuscript, for review only, to a professional colleague. A corollary to privacy of manuscripts is the privacy of reviews themselves. Reviews are also confidential communications provided to the author(s) for the sole reason of giving feedback regarding technical and other publishing aspects of the manuscript. Hence, sharing of these reviews is also an inappropriate use of information. Please note that members of the editorial board are also required not to share either the manuscript or the reviews with anyone except with individuals involved in the editorial process.

While the reasons for treating both aspects of the review process as confidential may be different, the goal is to make the process fair and equitable. The reasons for treating the manuscripts as privileged information are clearly to protect the authors. The reasons for treating the reviews as confidential are more subtle and are given below.

1. The reviews must be conducted in an anonymous manner. The author can seek clarifications through the editor as part of the ongoing review process. However, there is no way to prevent misinterpretations by a 3rd person who, without violating anonymity, cannot seek further clarification from the reviewers as to what was exactly intended.
2. If the reviewers were told that their comments could be used for purposes other than giving feedback to the author, then they may not be willing to provide candid reviews.
3. If the reviews were made available in the public domain, it could have legal implications as well. Positive comments could be viewed as an endorsement of the quality of work with consequent financial support or investment. On the other hand, negative comments could be construed as defamatory. In either case court actions could result from the affected party.
4. These reviews are provided to the author as a service free-of-charge and hence their use for any other purpose is not authorized.

Acknowledgement of an anonymous reviewer's contributions towards enhancing the quality of a paper is appropriate and, is in fact, encouraged. However, new ideas generated as a result of the reviewers' comments remain the property of the author to be used as desired. None-the-less this freedom should not result in disparaging or defaming IEEE, its employees and volunteers in any way.

The purpose of this announcement is to sensitize all stakeholders to these practices to promote strict adherence. Please note that the responsibility of compliance lies solely with technical professionals, editors, reviewers and authors alike, and not with their respective organizations. Submission, reviewing and handling of a manuscript will be interpreted as an implied consent to the above.

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