



# **Guide for Writing Peer Review Reports for MERLOT**

**January 2021**



# Guide for Writing Peer Review Reports for MERLOT

The purpose of this document is to provide Peer Reviewers with a guide that they can use to learn to write Peer Review Reports that meet MERLOT standards. Editors may provide Peer Reviewers with some discipline-specific guidelines as well.

There is a MERLOT Peer Review Report Form that is used to help you formulate your thoughts as well as to calculate the ratings for the material. This is a Word document so that you can spell and grammar-check your Peer Review Report before submitting to MERLOT.

## MERLOT Peer Review Report Form

### Outline of Peer Review Report Form:

**What's included:** Peer Review Report forms include and Introduction, Description ( seven fields that describe the teaching-learning material and Evaluation (six fields that evaluate (Evaluation and Observations).

- Introduction (includes six fields and is completed after the review is finished.
- Description
  - Overview
  - Type of Material
  - Technical Requirements
  - Learning Goal(s)
  - Recommended Use(s)
  - Target Student Population
  - Prerequisite Knowledge
- Evaluations and Observations
  - Quality of Content
    - Strengths
    - Concerns
  - Potential Effectiveness as a Teaching/Learning Tool
    - Strengths
    - Concerns
  - Ease of Use
    - Strengths
    - Concerns

**Guidelines:** Keep the following guidelines in mind when you are writing your peer reviews.

- Complete all fields. If a field does not apply, write “none.”



- Follow the guidelines for each field and include only the information that is asked for in each field.
- Write to your primary audience – faculty searching for online materials want something they can successfully use in their courses.
- Be comprehensive.
- Always **spell check** and edit for **grammar**.
- You can only have no Concerns if you rate the resource 5.

## Introduction

**What's included:** The top part of the Peer Review Form contains some basic information to help identify the material you are reviewing. These include the Name of the Material, the MERLOT Artifact, the Material URL, Your Name, the Date the Review is Completed, and the Review Time Required.

**Guidelines:** Make sure the correct URLs are included to help keep track of which material you reviewed. Also, the Date and Time will not be completed until you finish the review.

## The Description Fields

### Overview

**What's Included:** This field contains a brief overview of the teaching-learning material. It highlights the subject matter, features, type of material, and learning goals. It provides a brief overall description that allows the user to decide if the material is worth looking into further.

**Guidelines:** Keep the following guidelines in mind when you are writing the Overview.

- Answer and include a description of each of the following:
  - What is the material about? What subject matter does it teach?
  - What types of learning components and features are included on the site?
    - Features might include:
      - Images/graphics
      - Video
      - Audio
      - Quizzes (with immediate feedback?)
      - Other Interactivity
      - Links to related material
      - Learning assignments
      - Teacher's guide
      - Glossary of terms
    - What is the Type of Material? (e.g., Simulation; This should correspond to the Type of Material field. See part VI of this Guide.)



- What are the Learning Goals? (This should correspond to the Learning Goal Field. See part III of this Guide.)
- What is the Target Student Population? (This should correspond to the Target Student Population Field. See part IV of this Guide.)
- Other descriptions of the material you may want to include in the Overview:
  - Reference or credit to the author or host of the material.
  - A statement describing the material as part of a series of sites or learning materials (e.g., “This is the first section of a three-section tutorial.”). List the sites that follow and/or precede the material you are reviewing.
  - Information about whether or not there are any costs involved in using the material.
  - Additional websites by the author that might be used with the material.
- Be descriptive only. Avoid evaluative statement of the material in the Overview. Evaluations should be limited to the Evaluations and Observations section of the report.

### Type of Material

**What's included:** Gives the type of material using twenty-two standard MERLOT categories. The choices are:

- **Animation:** The dynamic and visual representation of concepts, models, processes, and/or phenomena that allows users to view, on their own, such processes in space or time. Users can control the pace of the visual presentation and can step backwards and forwards through the processes being viewed, but cannot determine and/or influence either initial conditions or outcomes/results of the visual presentation.
- **Assessment Tool:** An assessment tool is an instrument that has been designed to collect objective data about attitudes and skill acquisition. The tool will be measuring some aspects of a domain.
- **Assignment:** An assignment is some type of activity designed to be used as a task for students to complete, normally outside class. It can be based on a material in MERLOT, but normally these are stand-alone activities.
- **Case Study:** A case study illustrates a concept or problem by using a real-life example that can be explored in depth. Normally it involves one situation or organization.
- **Collection:** A collection is a group of subject-specific materials; for example, a collection of web sites, images, or applets. The key to identifying it as a collection is that there are a number of materials there.
- **Development Tool:** Any tool used for development of web sites, learning objects, or anything used to develop materials. This can be a program or application used to create, debug, maintain or support other programs and applications.
- **Drill and Practice:** Drill and Practice are activities that require users to respond repeatedly to questions or stimuli presented in a variety of sequences. These exercises



allow users to practice on their own and at their own pace and to develop the ability to reliably perform and demonstrate knowledge and skills.

- **E-Portfolio:** An e-Portfolio is a digital means of displaying one's work. It is a collection of electronic documents that demonstrate skills, education, professional development and skills to a specific audience.
- **Hybrid or Blended Course:** The organization and presentation of course curriculum required to deliver a complete course that blends online and face-to-face teaching and learning activities.
- **Learning Object Repository:** A Learning Object Repository is a public site at which a number of learning objects resides. Note that it is not a learning object only, but a group of them that have been selected.
- **Online Course:** An Online Course is a complete online course which would be designed for a semester or term. Users can use bits and pieces of the course as well as the entire course.
- **Online Course Module:** A component or section of a course curriculum that can be presented fully online and independent from the complete course.
- **Open (Access) Journal – Article:** A journal or article in a journal that is free of cost from the end user and has a Creative Commons, public domain, or other public use license agreement.
- **Open (Access) Textbook:** An online textbook offered by its author(s) with Creative Commons, public domain, or other public use license agreement allowing use of the ebook at no additional cost.
- **Presentation:** A Presentation includes lecture and presentation support materials such as presentation graphics (e.g. PowerPoint slide shows), lecture notes, or audio-visual materials that are not intended to be used outside the presentation.
- **Quiz/Test:** A Quiz/Test can be any assessment device intended to measure learning. It may be interactive, and it may also include the correct answers.
- **Reference Material:** Reference Material is similar to that found in the reference area of a library. This can include subject specific directories to other sites, texts, or general information. The material here has no specific instructional objectives.
- **Simulation:** A simulation involves an engine that drives the dynamics of the learning material in accordance with specific rules and that simulates real phenomena. Users participate in an approximation of a real or imaginary experience where their actions affect the outcome of the activity. Users must determine and input, on their own, the initial conditions of some dynamic scenario or set of circumstances that generate an output that is different from, and changed by, the initial conditions.
- **Social Networking Tool:** A Social Networking Tool is a tool used to build online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others.
- **Syllabus:** A document or website that outlines the requirements and expectations for completing a course of study.



- **Tutorial:** A Tutorial is sequentially organized information and activities with specific instructional objectives structured to integrate conceptual presentation, demonstration, practice, and testing to teach specific concepts or skills. Users navigate through electronic workbooks to study, practice, and be tested on information designed to meet stated learning objectives.
- **Workshop and Training Materials:** Workshop and Training Materials may include worksheets, hand-outs or any other type of material that would be given out during a workshop or training session.

**Guidelines:** Keep the following guidelines in mind when you are writing Type of Material.

- **Choose the best Type.** The Type of Material you select can be different from the Type selected by the original contributor of the material. If so, please write the correct type of material. Remember, only one Material Type is selected.

## Technical Requirements

**What's included:** Describes the technical specifications (hardware, software, network) that are required to use the learning material.

**Guidelines:** Keep the following guidelines in mind when you are writing the Technical Requirements.

- Technical requirements can include:
  - Specific browser (“Best if viewed using Explorer”)
  - Specific browser versions (“Must use Explorer 5.0 or greater, or Netscape 4.70 or greater.”)
  - Specific operating system (“Windows XP/2000/98,” or “Not available for the Mac”)
  - Specific display or other settings (“Display should be set at 800 x 600”)
  - Specific plug-ins or other software requirements (“Must have Shockwave. Download Available at site” Or “Need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view”)
  - Java and Java-Script must be enabled on browser.
- Technical requirements does NOT include:
  - Technical skills of the user.
  - Technical glitches or bugs.
  - Technical usability issues, such as slow response time.
- When technical requirements are listed on the site, state them in this field.
- If specifics are not listed on site, use the following questions and guidelines to help you write the requirements:

- Is it a Java Applet? –Specify “Java enabled browser”
- Requires disc space (to download features of the site)? –Specify how much space is required.
- Requires plug-in or software? –Be as specific as you can. (popular ones include: Shockwave, Windows Media Player, Real Player, Quicktime, Flash, Adobe Acrobat Reader)
- Be sure to mention the browser that you used to access the site. **You do** not need to try it on several browsers, but it is helpful to let users know which one you used.

## Learning Goals

**What’s included:** Describes the skills and knowledge the learner will acquire by using the learning material.

**Guidelines:** Keep the following guidelines in mind when you are writing the Learning Goal(s).

- A learning goal is knowledge or skills that the learner will gain or develop **upon using the learning material**. For example, a learning goal is a statement that the learner “will develop a deeper understanding...”, or “will be able to accurately identify...”
- **Describe** the learning goal from the perspective of the student/learner. Do not merely state the “purpose” of the site.
- **Describe** the learning goal using your best judgment.
- If there is a learning goal stated on the site, **or otherwise by the author, and** you feel it is clearly stated and accurate, feel free to use it. Be sure to credit the author or site by stating “As it is stated by the author ( or on the site), the learning goal is ‘...’.” Conversely, if there is a learning goal stated by the author and you do not believe it is correct, substitute your description.

## Recommended Use(s)

**What’s included:** A description of how to use the learning material, or for what purpose the site can be used.

**Guidelines:** Keep the following guidelines in mind when you are writing the Recommended Use(s).

- How might the materials be used in a course? Examples may be in class, as homework, as reference, etc.
- Recommend concurrent materials or activities



## Target Student Population

**What's included:** Description of the student population(s) who would use the learning materials

**Guidelines:** Keep the following guidelines in mind when you are writing the Target Student Population.

- It is important to express a **STUDENT** population, even if the learning material supports a wider range of people (from students, to faculty, to special interest groups).
- Describe the **discipline** area (academic major, minor, program area) and their **educational level** (freshman, lower division, upper division, graduate, etc).

## Prerequisite Knowledge

**What's included:** Describes the knowledge or skills a learner needs prior to using the learning object. This may include proficiency of a subject matter or skill.

**Guidelines:** Keep the following guidelines in mind when you are writing Prerequisite Knowledge.

- Be as specific or general as necessary.
- Describe the prerequisite academic concepts and skills.
- Describe the computer and information competence skills.

## The Evaluations and Observations Fields

Each MERLOT Editorial Board defines the evaluation standards it used for its discipline. The discipline-specific evaluation standards must fit within the general evaluation standards that apply across all Editorial Boards. The following guidelines provide these general evaluation standards.

### Quality of Content

**What's included:** Describes two general elements about the content of the material—its validity and its significance.

**Guidelines:** Keep the following questions in mind when writing the strengths and concerns for this evaluation standard.

- Use the following questions to help you evaluate and provide reasoning for your valuation of Quality of Content.
  - Is the content valid/accurate/reliable?
  - Does it accurately depict reality?

- Is it valid compared to convention or other resources?
- Is the content complete in scope without missing important and relevant information? Is the content current/up-to-date?
- Does the content teach important/valuable/educationally significant concepts, models, or skills in the discipline?
  - Does the content cover core curriculum within the discipline?
  - Is the content a pre-requisite for understanding more advanced material in the discipline?
  - Does the content cover material that is difficult to teach/learn?
- Is the validity and significance consistent throughout the material?
- If the site contains links to other resources, are they appropriate and valid?
- Write a paragraph with “bullets” for each of strengths and concerns. You **MUST** have something in the Concerns area unless you award a rating of 5. If there are no concerns for this standard, write “none” in the field. (HINT: Look at your Peer Review Report rating scale statements. Those you rated high are Strengths and the ones you rated low are Concerns.

### Potential Effectiveness as a Teaching/Learning Tool – Strengths and Concerns

**What’s included:** Describes the learning material’s likely ability to improve teaching and learning given the ways faculty and students could use the material.

**Guidelines:** Keep the following guidelines and questions in mind when writing the strengths and concerns for this evaluation standard.

- Describe the context for using the material. Defining the purpose of the learning material is critical to evaluating its potential effectiveness. You can describe if the materials can be used as (1) an explanation or description of the problem, (2) a demonstration or exploration of the problem, (3) a practice problem, or (4) an application to “new” problems.
- Describe how using the material enhances the quality of the teaching and learning process.
  - Does the material facilitate learning? Will learners be able to effectively achieve the learning goals?
  - Are concepts, models, or skills presented with clarity, focus, and organization?
  - Compared to other methods of teaching the same concept, models, or skills, is this learning material just as effective or better? Is it an innovative, new, original presentation of the concept?
  - Does it engage the learner, create intrigue, or otherwise motivate the learner to achieve?
  - Does it appeal to multiple learning styles? Multiple learning processes?
    - Does it engage multiple senses through audio, video, images, and text?
    - If it is interactive, does it do so effectively?



- If it is interactive, does it provide immediate feedback regarding the learner’s response accuracy?
- Does it provide examples when appropriate that help illustrate concepts? Does it demonstrate relationships between concepts?
- Does it provide effective introductions, overviews and summaries when applicable?
  - Does it have flexibility or versatility of use?
- Write a paragraph with “bullets” for each of strengths and concerns. You **MUST** have something in the Concerns area unless you award a rating of 5. If there are no concerns for this standard, write “none” in the field. Again, look back at the individual sentences in the ratings form

### Ease of Use

**What’s included:** Describes how easy it is for students and faculty to interact with the learning material.

**Guidelines:** Keep the following questions in mind when writing the strengths and concerns for this evaluation standard.

- Describe the features of the material that makes it easy to use
  - Is information presented in ways that are familiar to students?
  - Is the material easy to navigate?
  - If it is interactive, does it provide feedback for user actions? Will the user always know if they are waiting for a response from the system, or if the system is waiting a response from the user?
  - Is it self-contained, or are instructions necessary?
  - If there are instructions or “help”, are they clear, relevant, and complete? Are they available when needed?
  - If applicable, does it clearly tell users when an error is made, and how the user should continue?
  - Is the presentation clearly designed with no distracting design elements (e.g., color, animation, too much on a page)?
  - Are the terms/new jargon, defined?
  - Are related parts of the site clearly related, while parts that offer different content areas, or audiences are clearly separated?
  - When the site requires plug-ins, does it provide links to easily access the plug-in for downloading?
  - Are there any major bugs (e.g., links that do not work)
- Write a paragraph with “bullets” for each of strengths and concerns. You **MUST** have something in the Concerns area unless you award a rating of 5. If there are no concerns for this standard, write “none” in the field.



## Star Ratings

**What's included:** Peer Reviewed materials are rated 1 – 5 stars, with 5 stars having the highest excellence, for each evaluation standard and overall. You can assign ratings in .25 increments. The purpose for these ratings is not to take the place of text in the peer review report, but to act as search indicators. Users of MERLOT are able to search or sort materials by number of stars.

- The rating scheme is as follows:
  - 5 Stars: The material is excellent all around.
  - 4 Stars: The material is very good overall but there are a few minor concerns.
  - 3 Stars: The material meets or exceeds standards, but there are some significant concerns.
  - 2 Stars: The material does not meet minimal standards, but might have some limited value.
  - 1 Star: The material is not worth using at all.

**Examples:** Rating the three evaluation standards (Quality of Content, Potential Effectiveness, and Ease of Use) allow users to separate the different aspects of the learning material. Three combinations of ratings are provided below as examples:

- Example 1: High Quality, High Potential Effectiveness, and Low Ease of Use.  
Possible interpretation: Good curriculum but will require extensive user support and training.
- Example 2: Low Quality, Low Potential Effectiveness, and High Ease of Use.  
Possible interpretation: Bad curriculum but easy for a new users to get accustomed to using instructional technology.
- Example 3: Medium Quality, Low Potential Teaching Effectiveness, and High Ease of Use.  
Possible interpretation: Materials are accurate and easy to navigate but require extensive background knowledge.

In all three examples, people reading the reviews should be better informed about how they might (or might not) use the material in their classes.

**Guidelines:** What constitutes excellence and minimal standards for each of the three criteria and the material overall will be determined by each Editorial Board. However, the criteria are the same for each Editorial Board discipline.



## Additional Information

**What's included:** There are three additional fields that are completed: The overall rating, the Additional Information and the Information for the Author.

**Guidelines:** The overall rating is created as an average of the three ratings: Quality of Content, Potential Effectiveness as a Teaching/Learning Tool, and Ease of Use. Each of the criteria is considered of equal weight.

- Determine the average rating mathematically and enter it. NOTE: The system calculates the average, but you are able to increase or decrease it as you wish.
- Additional Information is material that you want to include in the Peer Review, but you did not have a place to add it. The information will appear along with the Peer Review.
- Information for the Author is material that you want to send to the author. It can include some suggestions for improvement, or even praise for the work. This will be sent to the author with the Composite Review but will not appear with the review.