Guidelines for a MES Review

MES 9

These guidelines have been put together from experience of previous MES conferences and from comments made by MES attendees and reviewers. It is intended to be helpful to those reviewing and also to those submitting research reports. Behind these guidelines is the principle that MES sees itself as a community with the long term aim of improving the quality of research into the social, ethical and political aspects of mathematics education.

Generally, a MES review should be characterized by the following:

- The review points out both **strengths and limitations** of the submission and refers to them to justify the final decision.
- The reviewer **comments in some detail** under each criterion in the review form
- The review is presented in a generally **positive and encouraging tone**.
- Critiques include **constructive alternatives** that help the author(s) move forward with the paper and/or presentation.
- The reviewer **recognises the constraints** on what it is possible to present within the restricted length.

What follows are some examples of what seem to be strong and positive reviewer comments on each section of the review form. They therefore can form the basis of a strong and supportive review

A. Compatibility with the Aims of MES

Overall assess the compatibility with MES

The aim to investigate (*state the aim)* is stated clearly and is achieved in this paper. It is thus compatible with the aims of MES.

This paper is based on a study of student-teacher interactions in (*describe context*). The author(s) not only locate this study in its socio-political context, but also consider how this context is given meaning in these interactions. As such the study enables our understanding of how some students may be excluded from mathematics, and is thus compatible with the aims of MES.

The aims of the paper are consistent with the MES interest in (*state the* interest). However, these aims are surfaced gradually in the paper and could be stated more succinctly at the beginning of the paper.

The paper appears to be compatible with MES interest in (*state the interest*), however, the issues could be stated more clearly upfront, and then pulled through the other sections of the paper.

In its current form the paper is highly contextualized in a particular national context and the specifics of that context are taken as understood. The research problem is not located in the concerns of the MES community more generally. I'm sure there are more general insights about the focus of the paper that could be drawn out for the wider community, but this is not visible in the current paper. I recommend that the author study previous conference papers to get a sense of how this paper might be written in such a way that it speaks to the wider MES audience.

The focus of this paper on (*state the focus*) is interesting and important. It contributes to current debates within the MES community about (*state the issues*).

B. Structure of the Paper

1. Does the author make clear how the work is situated in relation to other relevant literature in the field?

The author situates the study within some of the literature. However s/he could give more attention to more recent discussion by (*give names of authors*).

The author situates the study within some of the literature. However I note that (*concept 1*) and (*concept 2*) are mentioned a number of times in the literature review but are not explained.

The author situates the work within some of the literature, however a broader review – including the work of (*gives names*) – could provide a stronger justification for why it is worthwhile to investigate (*name the research problem*).

The authors cite literature in their home country to argue for the need for research on (*name the research problem*). There is, however, literature from other countries that focuses on the same problem, for example, the work of (*name researchers*). It would be useful for the MES audience to see how the studies in different contexts compare.

The paper could be improved by a stronger theoretical base. The choice of (*name theory*) is not explained and uses of this or other explanatory frameworks by other researchers are not discussed.

The author appears to be using a productive theoretical base. However, a number of questions about the theory should be considered in order to strengthen this use. For example, can (*concept 1*) simply replace the use of (*concept 2*)? Is (*concept 1*) enough for investigating learning?

The author's use of (*name theory*) to investigate (*name the research problem*) is an innovative aspect of paper. The following issues may be of interest to the MES community:
- How is your use of *(concept 1)* different to the use of (*concept 2*) by (*give names*)?
- (*Name a different theory*) has been used extensively to investigate the research problem you raise. What does your theory offer that is different?

The author situates the work in three theories: (*name the theories*). However, it is not stated why all three are needed and it is not absolutely clear how the analytic framework embodies all these sets of work. It may be useful to set the features of the framework alongside these three theories to identify what concepts are in each relevant and how they are related.

2. Where relevant - is the methodology clearly explained and justified?

The methodology provides a brief description of who the participants are and what data was collected. Although the method of analysis is named as (*name of method*), it would be useful to add a few sentences describing what this involves. In addition, there is a need to justify the methodological choices.

The methodology is explained sufficiently, given the limited length of the paper. It may be useful to refer your reader to appropriate references for more detailed explanations.

The author identifies the analytic tools used in the study. However, s/he does not demonstrate how these are used in the analysis. As a result, it is not possible for the reader to draw conclusions about whether the findings are well-founded. For example, how does the author recognise (*concept 1*) in the interview transcript?

3. Are the discussion and conclusions well founded?

Much more could be said about (*concept 1*) in the context of (*name context*), but given the space available, the argument made in this paper is consistent with the analysis and is located appropriately in literature cited.

The discussion and conclusion section does follow from the analysis. However, this section could be strengthened by closer links to the literature reviewed and a clearer statement of how the work moves the field forward.

The concluding claim that (*name the claim*) is plausible, but seems to be overstated from the evidence presented. The authors should explore how this claim can be supported more strongly using evidence from the study. Alternatively, some possibilities could instead be flagged as needing further research.

The author seems to be arguing (*summarize argument*). If so, this argument needs to be justified more clearly. If not, then the author needs to show...

This is an interesting paper focusing on (*name focus*) in a particular context. It could be considerably strengthened by drawing more analytically on the theory outlined at the start, and then by making comparisons with the literature.

C. Communication and Clarity

4. Is the paper/symposium proposal clear and coherent in both content and form?

My difficulties following the argument of the paper may lie in the lack of flow between and within paragraphs. For example, in the middle of the paragraph describing the context, the work of (*name theorist*) appears and it is not clear how the theory is relating to the context. Another example is ...

The author has set him/herself an ambitious task in this ten-page conference paper, and draws on a range of ideas that need to be brought together. Consequently there are some issues with coherence between theoretical concepts. The presentation may benefit from a diagram clarifying the links between ideas mentioned in the paper.

This paper has the potential to stimulate an interesting discussion of (*name topic/research problem*) in the MES community. Unfortunately, this is not what is foregrounded either by the title, abstract or the development of the paper. Indeed the focus of the paper is not absolutely clear. For example, the author identifies as the research question (*names questions*), then identifies a range of theoretical concepts which are not all clearly defined, and then only takes (*name the concept*) forward into the methodology section. The authors could be invited to steer the paper more directly towards a critical discussion of name topic/research problem.

The methodology seems to contain the necessary information at an appropriate level of detail. However, it would be helpful to the reader if this section was organized by first describing the (*state content*), then stating (*state content*), then (*state content*), and finally giving details about (*state content*).

D. General

6. Any suggestions for the author regarding the presentation of the paper/symposium?

I suggest that you make the link between (*concept 1*) and (*concept 2*) clear in the presentation.

Some of the terms used to describe the schooling system in (*name country*) may need clarification for the international audience that will attend the presentation.

Although this study is contextualized in (*name location of study*), it speaks to a more general problem of (*name problem*) which is pervasive in mathematics education. This is what makes the paper particularly interesting to the MES community and I recommend that the author use this paper to open up discussion of this more general problem in the presentation.

Acknowledging the difficulty of getting the balance right in a conference paper of this length, I would have liked to see more detail on the data analysis. In its current form the paper is weighted towards the introductory part, with the analysis only serving as illustration. It may be possible for the author to present more on the analysis in the presentation. Certainly, if this paper is to be developed into a journal article this will need to be done.

7. Do you think that the paper/symposium requires language editing by the program committee? (If you wish, you may edit the paper yourself using the tracking option.)

Note that a reviewer may choose only to signal that language editing is required. However, if you do decide to provide comments/tracked changes, this should be done in the spirit of a conversation with the author(s) about meaning, rather than a simple "fixing" of grammar. In addition, you may choose to focus in detail on a few instances that need attention and flag that this needs to be attended to elsewhere in the document (rather than editing each instance).

Tracked changes can be accompanied by constructive in-text comments such as:

- I had difficulty following this sentence. Do you mean, "XXX"?

- Is the term "XXX" the same as "XXX"? I suggest using the latter term, as this will be more familiar to your audience.

- I had difficulty following the reference suggested by the word "it" here. Can you clarify? I have made similar suggestions elsewhere in the document.