



# From Open Review to Reproducible Review: FAIR Metrics Analysis of Open Peer Reviews for Brain Informatics Literature<sup>\*</sup>

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## Abstract

Brain informatics helps researchers discover and derive new insights from existing data and metadata in brain sciences, medicine, and healthcare, making the documentation of information methods, platforms, and data sources in scholarly meta-research especially important in this field. Evaluation of new reports by expert peer reviewers remains essential to maintaining the integrity of this published research, but determining the best way to assess the quality of these peer reviews has not been addressed adequately and poses an open question about what should be open peer review. Previously, we proposed the paradigm of reproducible peer review, in which a second reviewer should be able to draw on the same factual claims as the first reviewer in order to reach the same conclusion. We introduced a new family of metrics for peer reviews as an extension of the existing families of Fair Attribution to Indexed Reports (FAIR) Metrics to evaluate how well reviewers attributed the claims substantiating their recommendations to the original sources of that information. However, we only demonstrated this new family of FAIR Metrics on five example peer reviews. We report here the results of FAIR Metrics analyses of published open peer reviews on 14 brain informatics articles. These analyses demonstrate the value of the FAIR Metrics by highlighting ways in which the brain informatics community can improve the reproducibility of the peer review process. We call for open peer review that emphasizes references to or quotes from the specific passages of the work under review, indication of which standards of the publication venue the work meets or fails to meet, and citation of the literature when drawing on prior knowledge of the problem domain.

## **Keyphrases**

Brain informatics, open peer review, PORTAL-DOORS Project, PDP-DREAM Ontology, FAIR Metrics, NPDS Cyberinfrastructure.

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### Peer review in brain informatics

As early as 2007, various authors, including Zhong et al. (2007) and Taswell (2007); Taswell (2009), were highlighting both the potential of brain informatics as an emerging field that leverages artificial intelligence to aid humans in solving problems related to brain health as well as the dependence of that emergence on the availability of well-curated data and knowledge resources on the internet and web. Since the 19th century, peer-reviewed journals have played an increasingly important role as sources of such information (Burnham 1990). However, few studies have systematically assessed the effectiveness of peer review at maintaining the quality of these resources (Jefferson et al. 2002), and the lack of clear standards for accountability of editors and reviewers and justification for recommendations or decisions has become an impediment to fully realizing the social good that peer review can achieve (Tennant and Ross-Hellauer 2020). Open peer review serves as a possible solution to the limitations of current practice. Because journals cannot guarantee that the quality of peer review will be satisfactory for a given purpose, they should publish the reviews alongside the articles so that readers can decide for themselves (Wolfram et al. 2020). While this move toward increased open transparency can create more opportunities for public discussion and debate of the merits of reports and the quality of the review process, it alone is not sufficient to address the lack of systematic standards. We previously proposed a further step toward establishing clear and systematic community standards that we call reproducible peer review: The reviewer should support their recommendation with sufficient factual claims, each clearly attributed

to a source, such that a second reviewer can follow their reasoning and arrive at the same recommendation (Craig, Lee, et al. 2022).

#### FAIR Metrics for peer review

For reproducible peer review to gain traction as a standard of excellence, and not just a catchy phrase, the reproducibility of peer reviews must be measurable. To that end, we recently introduced a family of FAIR Metrics for peer review of peer reviews at two recent IEEE Conferences (Craig and Taswell 2024b; Craig and Taswell 2024a). These metrics draw on similar principles that we have previously used to guide the design of the family of FAIR Metrics for adherence to good citation practices when searching, citing, and discussing the historical record of publishined literature in a scientific field (Craig, Ambati, et al. 2019; Craig, Athreya, et al. 2023). Most importantly, the metrics should measure how well the authors support reproducibility by clearly attributing claims to their sources, and whether claims are equivalent when they convey the same meaning, regardless of wording or paraphrasing. Furthermore, it is not enough for the results of the reviews to be reproducible. The evaluator must record the details of the FAIR Metrics analyses in a transparent and explainable manner. To support this approach with an objective method, we created a module of the PDP-DREAM Ontology with classes and properties useful for creating machine-readable semantic records of the analyses (Craig, Athreya, et al. 2023). We subsequently extended this module to enable creation of records of FAIR Metrics analyses of peer reviews of scientific reports (Craig and Taswell 2024b). The PDP-DREAM Ontology is a formal ontology that codifies the DREAM Principles, the design principles that guide the PORTAL-DOORS Project, but it also supports the inclusion of smaller modules for such specific purposes (Craig and Taswell 2021).

The key distinction between the family of FAIR Metrics for research reports and the family of FAIR Metrics peer review of peer reviews focuses on the practical reality that we do not expect peer reviews to introduce novel ideas. Thus, we focus only on how well a review supports its recommendations with factual claims properly attributed to their sources (Craig and Taswell 2024b). Additionally, we separate claims into types based on the subject of the claim and thus the kind of attribution needed: claims about the work under review, about the publication venue, or about the problem domain to which the reviewed work or venue relates.

In the previous work, we demonstrated use of FAIR Metrics with five example reviews (Craig and Taswell 2024b): one simple example review of a fictional paper, two reviews of a rejected submission to the ACM Multimedia call for grand challenges, a revised version of which is available as (Craig and Taswell 2024c) from *Brainiacs Journal*, and two published peer reviews of a recently published neuroscience article (G. Lu et al. 2024). In the current work, we apply these same FAIR Metrics to evaluate examples of published peer reviews of works related to brain informatics. This analysis allows us to identify key areas where editors and readers can maintain standards to support reproducibility of peer review and, thereby, a more well-curated scientific record of published literature.

## **Methods**

#### Literature search

We searched the websites of six publishers advertised as practicing open peer review. On each site, we searched with the two queries "brain informatics", "brain imaging data management" without quotes and selected the first four articles that appeared to be about brain informatics based on their abstracts and that had at least two published peer reviews. We considered only reviews of initial submissions, as reviews of revised versions rarely had new critiques and instead merely acknowledged that the authors had made the recommended changes. The reviews we evaluated are of the following 14 articles, grouped by publisher and journal:

- 2 from eLife Sciences Publications, both in *eLife*: Scheffer et al. (2020); Markiewicz et al. (2021);
- 4 from F1000Research, all in *F1000Research*: Attendees (2016); Crusio et al. (2017); Navale et al. (2020); Guiet et al. (2021);
- 2 from Open Research Europe (also part of the F1000 publishing group), both in *Open Research Europe*: Tarnanas et al. (2021); Ilias et al. (2023);
- 1 from IOS Press, in Semantic Web Journal Sy et al. (2023);
- 3 from Nature Research: 1 in *Nature* Oh et al. (2014), 1 in *Nature Communications* Collins et al. (2024), and 1 in *Nature Human Behavior* Li et al. (2024);
- 2 from Oxford University Press, both in *GigaScience*: Craddock et al. (2015); O'Connor et al. (2017).

We assessed two reviews per article for a total of 28 reviews.

#### **FAIR Metrics calculations**

For each peer review, we calculated FAIR Metrics according to the process described in Craig and Taswell (2024b). We can summarize this process in five steps: 1) Read the review, and identify the key factual claims that the reviewer used to support their recommendation. 2) Classify each claim as pertaining primarily to either the work under review (the Target work), the conference, journal, or book publisher to which the authors submitted their work for publication (the publishing Venue), or information relevant to the scientific problem domain of the target work for the chosen venue (the Domain knowledge). 3) Classify each claim as correctly attributed to a source or misattributed. A correctly attributed claim has a cited source and accurately reflects the meaning of one or more statements in that source. A misattributed claim either has no cited source or misrepresents the content of that source. 4) Tabulate six counts of classified claims:  $A_T$  and  $M_T$  for correctly Attributed and Misattributed statements about the Target,  $A_V$  and  $M_V$  for correctly Attributed and Misattributed statements about the Venue, and  $A_D$ and  $M_D$  for correctly Attributed and Misattributed statements about the Domain. 5) Use these counts to calculate four ratio FAIR Metrics of peer review quality for the Target, Venue, Domain and combined Justification ratios:

$$F_T = (A_T - M_T)/(A_T + M_T)$$
 (1)

$$F_V = (A_V - M_V)/(A_V + M_V)$$
 (2)

$$F_D = (A_D - M_D)/(A_D + M_D)$$
 (3)

$$F_J = \frac{A_T + A_V + A_D - M_T - M_V - M_D}{A_T + A_V + A_D + M_T + M_V + M_D}$$
(4)

#### Semantic records of FAIR Metrics analyses

As described in Craig and Taswell (2024b), we have extended the PDP-DREAM Ontology FAIR Metrics module with classes and properties

Table 1: Classes of the FAIR module of the PDP-DREAM Ontology for assessment of peer reviews; "new" indicates introduced here.

| Name                                | New | Parent                 | Explanation  |
|-------------------------------------|-----|------------------------|--|
| PdpDreamFairEntity                  | No  | owl:Thing              | Equivalent to owl:Thing root class for the module  |
| Document                            | No  | PdpDreamFairEntity     | Resource containing text and possibly other media  |
| Review                              | Yes | Document               | a document that reviews another resource   |
| Statement                           | No  | PdpDreamFairEntity     | Statement in some language   |
| AttributedStatement                 | No  | Statement              | Statement correctly attributed to and cited from another resource, previ-<br>ously termed "Quoted" instead of "Attributed" |
| MisattributedStatement No Statement |     | Statement              | Statement incorrectly referenced from another resource, previously termed "Misquoted" instead of "Misattributed"           |
| AttributedTargetStatement           | Yes | AttributedStatement    | Statement correctly attributed to the report under peer review   |
| MisattributedTargetStatement        | Yes | MisattributedStatement | Statement incorrectly attributed to the report under peer review   |
| AttributedVenueStatement            | 0   |                        | Statement correctly attributed to an editorial policies document of the publication venue                                  |
| MisattributedVenueStatement         | Yes | MisattributedStatement | Statement incorrectly attributed to an editorial policies document of the a publication venue                              |
| AttributedDomainStatement           | Yes | AttributedStatement    | Statement correctly attributed to other prior work in the domain   |
| MisattributedDomainStatement        | Yes | MisattributedStatement | Statement incorrectly attributed to other prior work in the domain   |

Table 2: Object properties of the FAIR module of the PDP-DREAM Ontology for assessment of peer reviews; "new" indicates introduced here.

| Name   | New       | Parent   | Explanation  |
|--|-----------|--|--|
| hasPdpDreamFairObjectProperty                        | No        | owl:ObjectProperty   | Root object property for the module  |
| isReviewOf   | Yes       | hasPdpDreamFairObjectProperty                                  | Subject resource reviews the object resource   |
| hasStatement   | No        | hasPdpDreamFairObjectProperty                                  | Subject resource includes object statement   |
| hasAttribution                                       | No        | hasPdpDreamFairObjectProperty                                  | Subject statement has attribution (whether correct or not) to object resource                                    |
| hasEquivalentStatement<br>hasContradictingtStatement | No<br>Yes | hasPdpDreamFairObjectProperty<br>hasPdpDreamFairObjectProperty | Subject and object statements are semantically equivalent<br>Subject and object statements contradict each other |

Table 3: Data properties of the FAIR module of the PDP-DREAM Ontology for assessment of peer reviews; "new" indicates introduced here.

| Name                        | New | Parent                      | Explanation                                      |
|-----------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|--|
| hasPdpDreamFairDataProperty | No  | owl:DatatypeProperty        | Root data property for the module                |
| hasName                     | No  | hasPdpDreamFairDataProperty | Text value is name for subject                   |
| hasText                     | No  | hasPdpDreamFairDataProperty | Text value is summary phrase for subject         |
| hasFairMetricValue          | No  | hasPdpDreamFairDataProperty | Root for data properties with FAIR Metric values |
| hasFairMetricCount          | No  | hasFairMetricValue          | Root for data properties with FAIR Metric counts |
| hasFairATCount              | Yes | hasFairMetricCount          | Numeric value is $A_T$ count for subject         |
| hasFairMTCount              | Yes | hasFairMetricCount          | Numeric value is $M_T$ count for subject         |
| hasFairAVCount              | Yes | hasFairMetricCount          | Numeric value is $A_V$ count for subject         |
| hasFairMVCount              | Yes | hasFairMetricCount          | Numeric value is $M_V$ count for subject         |
| hasFairADCount              | Yes | hasFairMetricCount          | Numeric value is $A_D$ count for subject         |
| hasFairMDCount              | Yes | hasFairMetricCount          | Numeric value is $M_D$ count for subject         |
| hasFairMetricRatio          | No  | hasFairMetricValue          | Root for data properties with FAIR Metric ratios |
| hasFairFTRatio              | Yes | hasFairMetricRatio          | Numeric value is $F_T$ ratio for subject         |
| hasFairFVRatio              | Yes | hasFairMetricRatio          | Numeric value is $F_V$ ratio for subject         |
| hasFairFDRatio              | Yes | hasFairMetricRatio          | Numeric value is $F_D$ ratio for subject         |
| hasFairFJRatio              | Yes | hasFairMetricRatio          | Numeric value is $F_J$ ratio for subject         |

| Report                 | Review | $A_T$ | $M_T$ | $A_V$ | $M_V$ | $A_D$ | $M_D$ | $F_T$ | $F_V$ | $F_D$ | $F_J$ |
|------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Crusio et al. 2017     | 1      | 13    | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1.00  | 0.00  | 0.00  | 1.00  |
| Crusio et al. 2017     | 2      | 8     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1     | 1.00  | 0.00  | -1.00 | 0.78  |
| Guiet et al. 2021      | 1      | 9     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 2     | 0     | 1.00  | 0.00  | 1.00  | 1.00  |
| Guiet et al. 2021      | 2      | 0     | 3     | 0     | 0     | 1     | 0     | -1.00 | 0.00  | 1.00  | -0.50 |
| Markiewicz et al. 2021 | 1      | 1     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1     | 2     | 1.00  | 0.00  | -0.33 | 0.00  |
| Markiewicz et al. 2021 | 2      | 2     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1     | 1.00  | 0.00  | -1.00 | 0.33  |
| Navale et al. 2020     | 1      | 4     | 1     | 0     | 1     | 0     | 1     | 0.60  | -1.00 | -1.00 | 0.14  |
| Navale et al. 2020     | 2      | 11    | 0     | 0     | 0     | 2     | 2     | 1.00  | 0.00  | 0.00  | 0.73  |
| Scheffer et al. 2020   | 1      | 4     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1     | 1     | 1.00  | 0.00  | 0.00  | 0.33  |
| Scheffer et al. 2020   | 2      | 6     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1.00  | 0.00  | 0.00  | 1.00  |

that we use to make Resource Description Framework (RDF) documents recording FAIR Metrics analyses of peer reviews, which we have listed in Tables 1, 2, and 3. A well-documented FAIR Metrics analysis of a peer review lists a unique URI to identify the work under review, all key claims of the review, each assigned the correct class corresponding to one of the six categories, the cited source of each claim if any, the six counts, and the four FAIR Metrics ratios  $F_T$ ,  $F_V$ ,  $F_D$ ,  $F_J$ .

### Results

We present specific FAIR Metrics results for 10 example cases from the neuroimaging literature in Table 4. In this small data set, we did not find explicit misrepresentations of reports as making claims that they did not. However, we did find examples of misrepresentations of omission in which reviewers falsely claimed that a work was missing information. Most claims used to justify a recommendation were about the report itself with very few explicitly invoking requirements of the publication venue or knowledge from previously published literature. When invoking outside domain knowledge, reviewers typically made broad generalizations instead of explicitly citing reference sources. Indeed, for the small-size sample studied in our analysis, in order to demonstrate examples of non-zero  $A_D$  counts, it was necessary to loosen the requirements for identifying and referencing a specific project, software tool, or dataset with a website where an analyst of the review (the peer reviewer of the peer review) could find and verify a specific claim. Nevertheless, this result raises concerns about the the validity of peer review claims when not cited and reference with the source evidence.

### Discussion

#### Holding peer review to a higher standard

While the infrequent references to venue requirements may reflect an implicit mutual understanding that a submission meets basic requirements of relevance and proper presentation unless otherwise noted, the near-absence of discussion of how the reports under review fit into the larger context of prior research in brain informatics indicates that the reviewers have not adequately assessed the novelty or importance of the research. At a minimum, a reviewer should agree or disagree with the authors' assertion that the work fills some gap in knowledge, solves some unsolved problem, or otherwise serves as a reproducibility, verification, and/or validation study. If they agree, then they can refer to the same sources the authors used to justify the claim. If they disagree, then they can reference other published literature that present results

answering the same question or providing an existing solution.

The comparatively higher incidence of misattributions of omission suggests a different problem, but the origin of this trend is not yet clear and will require much evaluation of a much larger sampling of open peer reviews. It may simply be due to a lack of attention to detail from reviewers when reading reports, but that does not explain why they then assume that the information they insist is important to include is absent. One possible explanation is miscommunication between reviewers and authors due to differences in their understanding of the terminology of the field. Another is that reviewers simply use inappropriately false accusations of omission as pretext with stock criticisms by which to extend the length of the review. To identify the root of the problem, we will need to do further research that will involve actively engaging with peer reviewers, presenting them with the passages that provide the information they demanded and recording their responses regarding whether they suffice and, if not, how they should provide more detail.

#### **Easing adoption of FAIR Metrics**

FAIR Metrics evaluation, whether of scholarly research submitted for publication or of peer reviews, requires systematic assessment not only of the text itself but also of multiple related publications in the literature. Tools for automating various steps in the FAIR Metrics evaluation process will make their use more practical. In support of this goal, Brain Health Alliance will open the first Multimedia FAIR Metrics Grand Challenge to submissions in 2025. This contest will award a cash prize to the team that develops the best software automating some or all of the steps of FAIR Metrics evaluation (Craig and Taswell 2024c):

- Extract text and image data from different file formats.
- Separate text into discrete statements.
- · Convert information in figures and tables into discrete statements.
- · Distinguish substantive claims from other statements.
- Retrieve cited sources of claims.
- · Search prior work for potential uncited sources of claims.
- · Distinguish whether two claims are equivalent in meaning.

### Conclusion

We performed FAIR Metrics analyses of published open peer reviews of scholarly articles in the scientific field of brain informatics. Based

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on these analyses, we recommend that the brain informatics community hold peer review, and especially open transparent peer review, to a higher standard of reliability and reproducibility. We strongly recommend that reviewers make clear explicitly the sources on which they base their claims by citing the relevant references when making arguments for or against these claims. We will then better support meta-research for meta-science and the development of algorithms for meta-analyses of the historical record of published literature.

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