

Description

In part 1 and part 2, we focused on the common reasons for revision and rejection by journals. Here we focus on how to deal with reviewer comments. To date, there is very little literature advising authors on how to deal with referees' comments when the manuscript is returned. In fact, much of the probability of publication depends on how appropriately you respond to the referee's comments. We now list steps on what to do in the following four situations.

Situation 1: Accept with Minor Revision

Example,

"The paper is well written, presents new matter, and can be published with minor revisions:

1. *There is a typographical error in the third paragraph.*
2. *Figure 2 is redundant and can be deleted"*

These short and specific comments would include simple reorganizing, rewriting parts for clarity, adding or correcting specific points as directed by the referees. They are usually very easy to deal with and should be corrected quickly.

Proceed with all changes without argument, aiming to get the revised manuscript back to the editor as quickly as possible to generate speedy acceptance.

Situation 2: Major Revisions Required

Example,

"Why don't you apply a better statistical test? It is unclear to me why you have used this method…"

This sentence is a general comment, which is harder to answer. It would involve substantive changes such as re-organizing the paper, re-calculating data, writing for a different audience or from a different viewpoint.

It is important to carefully read all the comments/suggestions that have been usually made by more

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than one referee. Normally, it will take days to address all the requests so do not underestimate the task involved.

In some cases a complete re-write is required based on suggestions made by the referees. A complete re-write will take considerable time and needs to be done systematically so that the re-submission is a definitive “re-write” and not just a collection of “minor” revisions.

Help!

1. **What do I do when the comments by different referees are conflicting?**
2. **Where comments on one or more aspects of the manuscript by two referees reports are conflicting, it is reasonable to go with one referee’s comments, justifying your reasons for doing so.**

Situation 3: Reject but Invite to Re-Submit

Example,

“The whole paper is very unclear and not interesting to the specialized audience. Try making it more specific by highlighting the novelty of the study.”

This is the hardest to answer are very general and sometimes destructive comments. Such cases would usually require a complete re-write based on suggestions made by the referees. The authors need to get over any feelings of personal attack and instead concentrate on dealing comprehensively with the referee’s comments.

This is an opportunity to re-submit and should not be taken lightly. If you are unsure about “reading between the lines” in the editor’s letter or referee’s reports, it is wise to write to the editor seeking further clarification.

Look for implications that can be remedied. For example, the referee might not have fully understood the article because you have not explained it well enough. So explain it.

Situation 4: Outright Rejection

Example,

“We investigated the same matter previously. The paper is unclearly written and cannot be recommended for publication.”

Typically, this results from the manuscript not being suitable for the journal or because of some major methodological error that renders it irredeemable. Usually the editor’s decision is final, so no appeals are permissible. The only option is to revise the manuscript based on the referee’s comments and consider re-submission elsewhere. But if the study is really intrinsically flawed, the prospects of acceptance are negligible.

It is always important to improve the manuscript based on the referee’s comments before re-

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submission. It could be that the same referee may be chosen by another major specialty journal and it is unlikely to bode well if he/she observes that the referee's previous comments have been completely ignored!

Response to Reviewer Comments

In dealing with editor's and referee's comments, it is essential that authors adhere to the following:

- Provide an itemized list of your changes in your responses, with corresponding page and line numbers.
- Respond to each and every comment specifically.
- Deal with each referee sequentially—don't jump from referee 1 to referee 2 as this might result in you missing out some important comments.
- Be humble and polite. Admit errors and acknowledge where you could have written something better.
- Agree, wherever possible, that the referee's comments are valid and make the adjustments requested.
- Where you disagree with a referee's point, give a rationale for your disagreement, including citing the work of others to justify your position.

Example,

Avoid: "We totally disagree with the referee's comments…"

Use: While the referee makes an interesting point with regard to…, we feel that…"

- If the referee missed a point, politely point it out in the text.
- Ask a colleague, unrelated to your field, to review your response.

The Cover Letter for Re-Submission

Here are some key points that should be present in the cover letter accompanying your submission:

- Sincerely thank the editor and reviewers for helping you to improve your work.
- State the major changes made to the manuscript as per the referee comments.
- If you don't agree with something the referee has stated, mention it in the cover letter. If the referee is obviously wrong and has made a mistake, you are entitled to a good argument and this is best delivered in a covering letter with facts that can be referenced.

We hope the articles in this series have better prepared you for dealing with journal revision or rejection.

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Category

1. Publishing Research
2. Submitting Manuscripts

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