

Tip on responding to reviewers

After submitting your manuscript, you will receive a letter from the journal's editor containing comments from the different reviewers, whose identities are normally kept confidential. The letter will either reject or provisionally accept your manuscript.

If the editor has rejected your manuscript, there will usually be reasons given for the decision. Do not take the editor's decision to reject your paper personally. In some instances it might be bad timing. The journal might have just accepted or published a similar study. If the editor believes that the subject of your paper falls outside the scope of the journal, there is no point in challenging this.

You can always submit your manuscript to another journal if you still feel that your work deserves publication. If you do, it is usually best to take the reviewers' comments into consideration. Even if you feel that the reviewers have misunderstood something in your paper, other reviewers might do the same. Make the suggested changes and send it quickly to another journal. Some data can become less relevant if too much time passes.

If your manuscript has been provisionally accepted, you now need to plan a strategy for revising your paper and gaining full acceptance. In the majority of cases, the editor and reviewers will be trying to help you produce a high-quality manuscript. You will need to resubmit a revised manuscript and develop responses to the reviewers' comments.

The following suggestions will assist you in responding to the reviewers' comments and resubmitting your manuscript:

1. Read all of the comments from reviewers and the editor.
2. Never respond immediately. Allow yourself a few days to reflect on the comments.
3. If you agree with the comments from the editor and reviewers have made to improve your manuscript, make those changes.
5. Following the time frame given by the editor, begin drafting a polite, thoughtful, clear, and detailed response with these documents:
 - Prepare cover letter(s) for revised paper...one for each peer review
 - Prepare the track change version of the revised paper
 - Prepare a clean version of the revised paper
6. Be polite. Avoid a defensive or confrontational tone in your response. The goal is to extract helpful information from the comments, adopt any useful suggestions to improve your manuscript, and calmly explain your point of view when you disagree.
7. Reviewers do not always agree with each other, in which case you must make a choice. Decide which recommendations seem more valid, and note in your response cover letter to the editor that you received conflicting advice and made what you think is the best choice.
8. Sometimes you are asked to considerably reduce the length of the manuscript. You must not feel too attached to your words and should shorten the manuscript.

9. Ensure that what you say you have done to the manuscript in the cover letter, has in fact been done in track changes that is reflected in the clean copy. Editors become irritated when they find that comments made in the response letter do not match what is in the manuscript.

Specific instructions for the cover letter for revised paper

- Copy each reviewer's comment word for word
- To answer, start with polite response... "Thank you for your comment highlighting the omission of the sample size in the paper."
- Include the exact change made in paper... "We have now included the following text: xxxxxxxxxx"
- Provide page and line numbers where the change was made
- If there is a disagreement with reviewer, provide a polite rebuttal. You MUST explain WHY the suggested changes were NOT made
- Share the cover letter with all of your co-authors to have agreement on changes
- Make the cover letter as easy as possible to see your changes... sometimes the cover letter is all reviewers/EIC look at

Specific instructions for the track changed version of revised paper

- Make it easy to see changes to increase readability
- Add line numbering to your manuscript
- Highlight the changes by font or colour

Specific instructions for the clean version of revised paper

- Proof read carefully
- Make sure clean version matches exactly what is noted on cover letter

The process of getting a paper published in a scientific peer-reviewed journal is a challenging but rewarding one, once all your hard work finally pays off and the reprints arrive.

Adapted in part from San Francisco Edit at <http://www.sfededit.net/newsletters.htm>