

Responding to Reviewers

San Francisco Edit

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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. If that is the case, you need to assess the reviewers' comments to determine whether your manuscript might be accepted if you made certain revisions. In the majority of cases, the editor and reviewers will be trying to help you produce a high quality manuscript.

Do not take the reviewers' comments personally. In some instances it might be bad timing. The journal might have just accepted or published a similar study. You can always submit your manuscript to another journal. 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, others might do the same. 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 have no choice but to submit your manuscript to another journal.

If your manuscript has been provisionally accepted, you now need to plan a strategy for revising your paper and gaining full acceptance. This will include resubmitting a revised manuscript and responses to the reviewers' comments.

The following 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 the comments from the editor and reviewers can be used to improve your manuscript, by all means, make those changes.
4. If your manuscript was rejected and you still feel that your work deserves publication, send it quickly to another journal. Some data can become less relevant if too much time passes.

5. If your manuscript has been provisionally accepted, it is a good idea to respond promptly. As soon as possible, begin drafting a polite, thoughtful, clear, and detailed response.
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. Respond completely to each comment in an orderly, itemized manner, and, if necessary, copy and paste into the letter any substantive changes made to the manuscript. There is no limit on the length of your response. Most editors are willing to read a long and complete response.
8. Change and modify your manuscript where it makes sense. You are not required to make every suggested change, but you do need to address all of the comments. If you reject a suggestion, the editor will want a good reason with evidence supported by references. Just because you prefer it your way is not a good enough reason.
9. 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 letter to the editor that you received conflicting advice and made what you think is the best choice.
10. If the reviewer is obviously wrong and has made a mistake, you are entitled to provide an argument and provide facts that can be referenced.
11. Sometimes you are asked to reduce considerably the length of the manuscript. You must not feel too attached to your words and should shorten the manuscript.
12. Ensure that what you say you have done to the manuscript, has in fact been done, and do make sure you follow the journal's guidelines. Editors become irritated when they find that comments made in the response letter do not match what is in the manuscript.

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.

If you are interested in reading some of our other newsletters you can visit our website at <http://www.sfcedit.net>