

How do I...

RESPOND TO REVIEWER COMMENTS

You submit a manuscript to an academic journal. The editor of the journal decides to send your paper out for peer review – great news! Two months later, the review reports are back, and the editor wants you to revise your manuscript in light of the reviewers’ feedback. How should you proceed?

ON RECEIVING REVIEWER COMMENTS

Ideally, the review process improves the quality of your manuscript by giving you the opportunity to take into account expert advice from scholars in your field. However, in practice, receiving critical feedback on your work can be an emotionally charged experience. Here are some practical suggestions to help you respond effectively to reviewer comments.

1. UNDERSTAND THE FEEDBACK

Read all comments carefully. Take time to understand where the feedback and/or criticism is coming from, and what the reviewers are asking you to do.

You will usually be given a reasonable time frame to make your revisions, so if at this initial stage you are feeling frustrated and upset by the critical comments, give yourself a few days to process the feedback (and your emotions) before coming back to study the review reports with hopefully a bit more objectivity.

2. START A REVISION LETTER

A revision, or response, letter documents how you have revised your manuscript according to reviewer recommendations. Begin by creating a list of each of the reviewer’s comments. Make sure this list covers all recommendations.

3. ORGANISE YOUR RESPONSES CLEARLY

- Address every point raised by the reviewers
- Avoid simplistic responses like “answered” or “fixed in manuscript”
- Instead, be clear about how you have responded to the suggested changes (e.g., by copying and pasting updated text below reviewer comments or stating page and line numbers to show where a change in the text has taken place)
- Use a tool like Microsoft Word’s “track changes” function to illustrate how and where your revised manuscript has been changed.
- In your response letter, refer explicitly to the original and revised versions of your manuscript and explain how the revised changes differs from the previous submission.

tone of response

Your response letter should be polite and respectful, not defensive or confrontational. You do not have to agree with every suggestion a reviewer makes, but your capacity to respond thoughtfully shows your commitment to scholarship and to the peer review process in shaping your manuscript to the best version it can be for publication.

EXAMPLE REVISION LETTER

Dear [editor’s name],

Thank you for considering my manuscript [title]. I appreciate the comments I received and have addressed reviewer recommendations in these ways:

Reviewer 1 suggested ...

- *On page 13, I added a phrase that notes ...*
- *When addressing the limitations of this study, I added ...*

Reviewer 2 suggested ...

- *From pages 4-6, I added a new section focusing on...*
- *Given the scope of this paper, I have chosen to highlight ... rather than ... because ...*

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions about the manuscript or changes I have made.

Sincerely, [your name]

RELATED “HOW DO I...” GUIDES

- Get constructive feedback from my supervisor(s)
- Edit my paper

Dr Florence Chiew
September 2020



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