



TIPS FOR AUTHORS

Responding to a Critical Review of Your Manuscript: Six Steps to a Successful Revision
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The research report or techniques description that you labored over for weeks and submitted to the *JP* has been returned to you—with lots of comments and criticisms from a couple of anonymous reviewers, and maybe even from the Editor himself. Reading the Editor's letter and scanning the comments can be a trying experience. What should your next step be? For authors with limited experience in submissions, there may be a strong inclination to fling the paper into a drawer, try to forget about those critical comments, and move on to something else. Experienced researchers recognize, however, that reviewers' responses are not equivalent to rejection and, in fact, represent an important opportunity for advancing your own aspirations to publication. Adhering to the following list of steps in the revision process will help move your report closer to publication.

- 1. Recognize that receiving and responding to peer review comments are crucial steps in the publication process.** As you know, in the health sciences, publishing in a peer-reviewed journal is recognized as a worthy achievement, and rightly so. Remember that these reviewers are your peers and colleagues, and that their assistance in fine-tuning your manuscript can help to ultimately validate your project and get your report published. Reviewers' comments and criticisms reflect the fact that they think your report has publication potential if revised appropriately. While certainly not a guarantee of publication, a detailed review is definitely an encouragement to continue. So, sharpen your pencils and get to work.
- 2. Identify those comments that primarily reflect imperfect sentences or paragraphs, writing that is less than good.** Are there deficiencies in the writing, i.e., an unclear or incomplete description, so that the reviewer did not fully understand some element of the project? Possibly, some sentences were less clear than they could have been, or important details were omitted, or the literature review was incomplete (or, alternatively, too detailed or wide-ranging). After doing your own rewrite in response to such comments, finding a colleague with good English language skills or a manuscript editor with some knowledge of the field, to read and edit your manuscript in light of the reviewers' comments can help to resolve the communication problems those comments reflect. This can be particularly useful for authors whose first language is other than English.
- 3. Next, carefully consider the reviewers' critique of the research itself.** Does the critique pinpoint what the reviewer sees as omissions from your literature review or problems with your methodology? If methodology is the issue, consider whether this defect can be repaired without completely redoing the work. For example, you may be able to carry out an additional type of statistical analysis or an additional measurement rather quickly, and add sentences to the original manuscript, reporting those additional findings without doing a major revision.
- 4. Clearly identify the revisions you make to the manuscript.** This is crucial in moving the review process along efficiently. Changes must be made and identified in two places: in the manuscript itself, and then in a description of the changes added to the separate document containing the reviewers' comments.
 - **In the manuscript itself, call attention to your new sentences** in some way, for example, by using a different colored font for the new sentences or underlining them or, if the changes are not extensive, using your word processor's "track changes" function. Keep in mind that if your changes ARE extensive, then using the "track changes" function may make the manuscript unreadable.
 - **Secondly, insert descriptions of your responses to each comment in the review document under the reviewer's original comment.** For example, under the reviewer's comment "The author failed to include important previous studies in the literature review," you might report "The literature review has been expanded to include . . ."
- 5. If you disagree with a particular reviewer's comment, insert your argument for disagreeing** in the review document under the comment in question. Reviewers are not infallible. Disagreeing with a point in a review is acceptable and does not necessarily reduce the chances of your report being accepted for publication.
- 6. Do not delay.** A revision submitted after 90 days may be classified as a new manuscript, further delaying the potential date of publication. Turning your resubmission around within a few weeks, while the transaction is relatively fresh in the minds of writer and reviewers, is crucial.

The peer review process separates journals that are an integral part of a discipline from those publications intended primarily as vehicles for advertising. Your participation in the process helps strengthen your profession as well as your own career.

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