

## Responding to a Critical Review: What Do You Do When You Disagree with the Reviewer?

Nellie Kremenak, PhD  
 Manuscript Editor

The reviewer who decides that your manuscript should be returned to you with suggestions for revision is telling you that your work can likely be made publishable if some changes are made. How does this process work? What are your options if you believe the reviewer is wrong on some point?

As we have discussed in a recent Tips (Peer review: What is it and where did it come from?), the blinded review of manuscripts by others in the author's specialty is the crucial element that sets the literature of the health sciences apart from more casual publications intended to entertain or sell advertising or promote a particular political position. Peer reviewed literature sets a higher standard. Granted—it is not always fun for the author or authors whose work is being reviewed. But it is a manageable and orderly process. An important element in this process is the fact that the identities of the author and the reviewer are concealed from each other.

As you examine the critique of your manuscript, it is important to remember that the peer review system is flexible. The system recognizes the fact that the reviewers are not infallible. This means that it is acceptable to disagree with some of the reviewer's comments, but you must communicate your justification for those disagreements to the editors. If you simply ignore the comments you don't agree with, the re-review of your submission will stall out and the manuscript will be rejected.

Remember that it is crucial for the efficient reconsideration of the manuscript to follow the instructions for responding to a review. The editors must be alerted to your views. The *JP* receives hundreds of manuscripts annually. It is a complex business to manage the flow of those manuscripts through the Managing Editor and the Editor-in-Chief, out to the appropriate Section Editor, then to a reviewer, then back to the author for revision, then back through the process again. When you resubmit your revised work, time will have elapsed, and the editors' recollection of your manuscript and the points at issue will inevitably have faded. For the resubmission process to work efficiently, the author must help the editors and the reviewer to quickly re-evaluate the manuscript. The author does this by carefully following the "Instructions for Submitting a Revision," a document that will be sent to the author along

with the reviewer comments. Following these instructions is important. In particular, you must respond to every reviewer comment whether or not you decide to act on it. If you simply ignore reviewer comments that you believe to be unfounded, your manuscript may fall out of the publication process altogether.

The second page of the "Instructions" illustrates the method for responding to a review. Here is an example that shows how to respond to a reviewer comment that the author disagrees with:

### *Reviewer's comment:*

(1) The magnification shown for H&E staining does not reveal any cellularity. This picture may be better presented at higher magnification to support author's conclusion of no cell death and changed cell density in three aggregates.

*Response:* We thank the reviewer for the comment. The H&E stain was done as a control to show limited vacuolization across the aggregate. It was not done to address apoptosis or cell death. We feel that the 20× magnification better demonstrates the entire aggregate and shows more of the area we are interested in studying with respect to the expression of mineral and calcium.

*Text Change:* None.

Note that this example has three parts: the reviewer's comment, the author's response, and a description of the resulting change, if any. In this instance, the author politely justifies making no change in the original text.

To summarize: when you resubmit, you will be uploading two documents: (1) your revised manuscript and (2) a separate statement that includes reviewer comments and describes your response to each of those comments.

Responding to all points in the review is absolutely necessary, even those you disagree with. Following these instructions is critically important for the re-evaluation of your work. If the Editor-in-Chief or the Section Editor is unable to quickly determine whether and how you have responded to the reviewer's comments, your manuscript may unnecessarily reach a dead end.

Copyright of Journal of Prosthodontics is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

Copyright of Journal of Prosthodontics is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.