

## TIPS FOR AUTHORS

# Conflicting Reviews of Your Manuscript: How Do You Respond?

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Reading and reacting and then responding effectively to reviewer comments about one's manuscript can be a difficult experience for the writer—and even more difficult is the situation in which a set of reviewers seem to disagree. One review suggests a few minor changes and the other calls for a major rewrite. What should the writer do? Respond to the most comfortable review and toss the other one in the waste basket? Or toss the whole bundle, manuscript included, into the trash and go to a movie? Actually, neither of the above is recommended.

The system of peer review—in which manuscripts are evaluated for potential publication by individuals who are judged to be, in some sense, the author's peers and with both author and reviewer blinded to each other's identity—is the system developed in the sciences during the past 100 years or so for filtering and evaluating the work of researchers and clinicians seeking publication. It is a crucial and valuable alternative to a system in which friendship or "connections" or the profit motive determines whose work will appear in print.

But the system does not always work as smoothly as one might wish. Here are some suggestions as to how to approach preparing your response to a set of reviews that seem to be point-

ing in different directions—for example, one reviewer calls for substantial revisions, the other suggests that only a bit of polishing is called for.

Start by addressing the most substantial or central comment. Are there changes you can make in response? If so, make them. But also, ask yourself did this reviewer fully understand what you were trying to say? Can the information in your manuscript be expressed more clearly? As you work through your sentences and paragraphs again, try to keep all the reviewer comments in mind, reshaping your prose to try to fit the requirements of those specific readers. At the same time, however, remember that among this tiny group composed of you and your reviewers, you are the one who knows the work, and it is your responsibility to communicate the facts about that work.

Finally, when you have finished the revision, write a brief description of what you have done. The purpose of this exercise is to communicate to the Section Editor both *how* you have responded to specific reviewer comments and, in those instances in which you have *not* responded, your rationale for not responding. When you have finished, wrap it up and put it back in the mail. Then go to the movie.

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