

A “do” and “don’t” list for responding to manuscript reviews

- DO read over the entire letter from the Editor and all the reviews (there will ordinarily be between two and five, usually three for most competitive journals).
- DO be sure to notice any positive comments from either the Editor or the reviewers. No matter what the Editor’s decision (reject, revise and resubmit, etc.), it will contribute to your morale and the process of revision to take a moment and focus on what the reviews identify as strengths of the manuscript.
- DO respond quickly, especially if you need to revise and resubmit the manuscript.
- DON’T try to reconcile contradictory comments from the reviewers. When you have multiple reviewers, you will have multiple suggestions. Always take the Editor’s guidance most seriously.
- DO decide for yourself which suggestions or comments best capture the spirit and substance of what you want to say and how you want to say it, and revise accordingly.
- DO use reviewers’ comments to help you identify and solve problems with your research and writing, especially the passages where you have not persuaded or even conveyed your point. Reviewers are usually smart and informed, so if they say they’re confused, or if they misread you, there’s a reason.
- DON’T be afraid to contact the Editor’s office if you have questions about time (four silent months after submission, you may inquire about the review process!) or specific choices (Reviewer A says, “Trim the introductory material” and Reviewer B says, “Beef up the theory”). But
- DON’T whine about the decision or the reviews.
- DO follow all instructions on any style sheet or guidelines for manuscript preparation the Editor sends. In fact, follow all guidelines for manuscript preparation when you first submit; tailor the manuscript.
- DO read and cite (selectively, if necessary) any works suggested by the reviewers. Remember: Editors select reviewers based on their expertise relative to your manuscript, so their suggestions generally have intellectual merit. Similarly,
- DON’T assume that specific citation demands are simply a case of the reviewer’s vanity. But,
- DON’T launch a whole seminar’s worth of new reading just to “fix” this manuscript. Reviewers – and journals – sometimes have an axe to grind, and you need to be judicious about how you use your time. It may be better to make only minor revisions and submit to a different journal rather than reframe your entire project in a whole new literature. However,
- DON’T be afraid to do extensive revisions on the basis of encouraging, thoughtful reviews. Even remain open to drastic measures (“Cut it by half, eliminate all but one of the tables, and resubmit as a research report”) if doing so will get you published promptly in the journal where you want your work to appear.
- DO send a new cover letter along with your revised manuscript. At most peer-reviewed journals, the reviewers will be sent copies of the Editor’s decision letter and the other reviewers’ comments. If the Editor taps them to review the resubmitted version, they will also receive a copy of your letter along with the revised manuscript. Therefore, in your letter,
- DO thank the Editor and reviewers for the time and effort they have spent on your manuscript. Include specific responses to the comments of each reviewer. Explain both changes you have made and places where you did not think the suggestions met the needs of your revision. Tactfully point out contradictions between reviewers if and only if doing so helps show how you have improved the manuscript. Underscore your decisions without being defensive. Show the reviewers their impact on your thinking and writing. Responsible reviewers are less interested in proving you right or wrong than in improving your reasoning, analysis, or presentation. Smart authors turn critical reviews into strong revisions. Your letter should highlight how you’ve done this.
- DON’T try to figure out the reviewers’ identities.
- DO respond with gracious thanks if a reviewer reveals her/his identity after publication, and acknowledge reviewers’ contributions in the appropriate footnote in the revised manuscript.
- DO ask for help in interpreting comments from the Editor and reviewers, making revisions, and writing the response letter. This is what your senior colleagues, mentor, and peer networks are for.
- DON’T let a rejected manuscript languish. Revise, submit to another journal, and get on with your work.

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