

EDITORIAL

A primer: how to address peer reviews of your manuscript

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INTRODUCTION

The peer review process is a foundational element of scientific publishing, serving as a mechanism to ensure research quality and rigor. You have embarked on an exciting journey to contribute to the advancement of physiology education. However, the journey often involves a crucial step, addressing reviews of your manuscript. Peer reviews, although essential for refining your work, can be challenging to navigate. This primer is designed to help authors approach this process.

INITIAL REACTIONS AND FIRST STEPS

For many, the initial reaction when reading through the reviews is fraught with frustration and displeasure. After the initial read, it is best to step away for a day or two to let emotions subside before returning to critically evaluate the reviewers' comments (1). The critique of your manuscript should be viewed as an opportunity for improvement to produce the best product for the world to read. Once published, the manuscript will be a permanent record of your work, so make it your best. Collaborate with your coauthors to evaluate the reviewers' suggestions to determine which you will be able to incorporate into the revised manuscript. Formulate a plan to complete the necessary steps for the revisions. Revisions may include generation of additional data, reanalysis of data, or creation of new figures and tables, which can be time consuming. It is important to submit the revised manuscript and required documents by the due date specified in the editor's notification email. Required documents, at a minimum, include a red-lined version and a clean copy of your revised manuscript, your individualized response to the reviewer comments, and a cover letter to the editor.

REVISING THE MANUSCRIPT

Once you and your coauthors have agreed upon the revisions that will be made, you will need to edit your manuscript. Follow the journal's guidelines for revision as noted in the author's instructions and notification email. As a part of the process, you will create a red-lined version and a clean copy of the revised manuscript. A red-lined version displays all the edits you made in order for the editors and reviewers to more easily discern those updates. A red-lined version can be created by turning on the track changes feature in the word processing program. To create the clean copy of your manuscript, accept all tracked changes. The terms "red-lined article" or

"clean article text" should be included in the file name, as you will need to submit both versions of the manuscript.

RESPONSE TO REVIEWER COMMENTS

The quality of the response to reviewers can affect the speed of the review process and determine the fate of your manuscript (2). Thus, it is important that your response to reviewers has the appropriate tone, addresses all of the reviewers' concerns, is clear and concise, and is structured for easy review (3). It is best to copy the reviewers' comments from the notification email into a separate document. If the reviewers' comments are in paragraph form, separate each comment or suggestion, leaving space for your response addressing each individually. In your response, specify what changes were made to the manuscript to address the concern and where specifically in the manuscript the changes were made. The tone should be kind and respectful (4). Do not write your responses until your negative emotions have subsided. Otherwise, your emotions can seep into your written words. An example of a properly structured response with appropriate tone would be: "Reviewer 1, Comment 1: Include the mean age of the class. Authors' response: Our apology for the oversight. As requested, in the Results section, line 143, we specified the mean age of the class as 22.3 yr." (2)

There may be a case in which reviewers have conflicting suggestions. If you agree with one reviewer over another, you may revise the manuscript accordingly (3). When responding to each reviewer, explain the conflict and your rationale for choosing one over the other. If the conflicting suggestion is of major importance and you are unsure which way to act, you can contact the editor for advice.

You do not need to comply with every request made by the reviewers (5). If you do not agree with a reviewer or you are unable to comply with the request, politely explain your rationale. It is best to substantiate your disagreement with references.

At the start of the document, before the outlined reviewer comments and author responses, it is customary to include a few sentences thanking the reviewers for their time and valuable feedback.

COVER LETTER

The cover letter for the revised manuscript should be addressed to the editor named in the notification email. The letter should specify that you are submitting a revised

manuscript, referencing the manuscript title, type of article, and article submission number. Provide a brief background of your study, research question, results, and how the findings contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field. Again, thank the reviewers and the editor for their time spent evaluating the manuscript and providing feedback. Provide a summary of the improvements made to the manuscript. If some of the major concerns were not able to be remedied, provide an explanation of why the concern could not be corrected and why the manuscript is still worthy of publication. End with a statement that the manuscript is not being considered for publication elsewhere and your contact information.

HOW TO HANDLE REJECTION

Handling rejection of your manuscript is an inevitable part of the publishing process. It is essential to approach it with resilience and with a growth-oriented mindset. Do not take it personally; manuscript rejection is not a reflection of your worth as a researcher or educator (1). Instead, view the rejection as an opportunity for improvement. Take time to carefully consider the reviewers' comments and editor's feedback to understand the specific reasons for the rejection. Use this feedback as a roadmap for revising your work, making it stronger and more suitable for publication. Seek the support and advice of colleagues, mentors, or coauthors and consider resubmitting as a new manuscript to the same journal or to another journal that may be a better fit. Persistence and a commitment to continuous improvement are key to eventual success.

CONCLUSIONS

Navigating the peer review process is a critical journey in the realm of scientific publishing, ensuring the quality and

refinement of scholarly work. Addressing peer reviews of your manuscript can be a challenging step. This primer provides guidance for approaching this phase, steering authors through initial reactions, revision strategies, and crafting effective responses to reviewer comments. It underscores the importance of managing emotions and highlights the constructive approach to rejection, viewing it as an opportunity for improvement and growth, ultimately culminating in an enhanced manuscript ready for publication.

DISCLOSURES

A. Dirks-Naylor is an editor of *Advances in Physiology Education* and was not involved and did not have access to information regarding the peer-review process or final disposition of this article. An alternate editor oversaw the peer-review and decision-making process for this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

A.J.D. drafted manuscript; edited and revised manuscript; and approved final version of manuscript.

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