

EDITORIAL

Effective manuscript revision responses: Best practices for turning feedback into publication success



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Scientific publishing functions as a complex ecosystem where journal editors, reviewers, and authors play interdependent and often challenging roles [1]. Editors act as gatekeepers, relying heavily on reviewers' dedicated and honest assessment to make informed decisions, while balancing diverse factors including manuscript quality, journal scope, and ethical considerations. This reliance on reviewers' feedback is a well-established norm in academic publishing. Reviewers are highly valued, as they volunteer their time and expertise without material compensation and their feedback is crucial to uphold academic rigor [2]. Many publishers, however, offer reviewers limited free access to journal contents [3, 4] and sometimes provide discounted article processing charges [4, 5] if their own manuscript is accepted within a specific timeframe after completing a review. Authors, especially new authors navigating this triad for the first of few times, may find the process daunting.

Securing reviewers is highly challenging; obtaining high-quality comments is even rarer. Variations among reviewers are common. Authors' responses to these comments require skill, especially for beginners or young authors. Many become upset when faced with dozens of comments from reviewers and editors. Thus, successful navigation of this dynamic requires strategy, patience, professionalism, and an understanding that the peer review process is a collaborative dialogue rather than an adversarial game. Here are some points to consider when authors receive comments from reviewers via the editor:

Stay calm and process feedback carefully

Take time to read the comments and don't plan anything immediately. Read multiple times for

thorough understanding. Be appreciative that someone has made time to review your work so that you have received comments. Many submissions are rejected outright without reaching the review stage, known as a "Desk rejection". If the rejection happens after going through the peer review phase, the comments you received will be helpful for improving the manuscript for further submission elsewhere.

Don't rush the response

Make sure to be polite and convey appreciation of the reviewers' efforts, even if you disagree. If you agree with a comment, simply affirm it. Never leave a comment unaddressed.

Organise responses systematically

List all comments under each reviewer. Discuss with your co-authors to draft the best responses. Prepare a point-by-point reply, preferably using a table. Always include page and line numbers; referencing line numbers given continuously is sufficient. Some journals prefer a Q&A format without a table; this applies to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Journal too.

Disagree respectfully and with evidence

Be concise, insightful, and polite when expressing disagreement. Provide a clear, well-reasoned explanation supported by evidence or references. Avoid emotional or dismissive language. Remember, reviewers are helping improve your draft and assisting the editor's decision-making. Clarify any misunderstandings and revise language as needed to avoid misinterpretation.

Seek assistance for unclear comments

If some points are unclear or you don't understand them, acknowledge this. Clarification might be

Key messages

Scientific journal editors rely on reviewers' assessments to make decisions. Reviewers volunteer their time and expertise to uphold scientific rigour. Authors' responses to comments require skill. Authors should write a professional and polite response addressing each point raised by the reviewers and editor, using a point-by-point format to incorporate their suggestions in track-change mode, or politely explain why a change wasn't made.

provided in the next review if the editor deems the issue significant; minor points may be disregarded.

Strengthen manuscript incorporating additional changes

Feel free to add points from your side to make the revised manuscript more comprehensive and informative after addressing the reviewers' comments.

Make changes visible

Highlight the changes for easy identification and review. Follow the journal's instruction regarding highlighting the changes. You may use track-changes mode for this purpose. You can submit both a tracked changes file and a clean version. After accepting the changes, review the document again to correct any remaining formatting, paragraph structure, punctuation, and other issues.

Update visuals and materials, where necessary

This is also the stage to replace any poor-quality images or graphs with high-resolution versions, while maintaining the same number and size. Inform the editor of any such replacements.

Review your responses thoroughly

Review and revise your point-by-point response carefully. Have it checked by co-authors before submitting alongside the cover letter and the revised manuscript.

Disclose conflicts of interest

Have all co-authors review the revised manuscript and the point-by-point response. Always disclose any relevant conflicts of interest transparently to the editors.

Adhere to the authorship criteria

Once submitted, the author list and authorship order should not be changed without informing the editor. Every journal has an official procedure for these types of changes. Seek the editor's advice on the process if such changes are necessary.

Meet deadlines or request extensions early

Be prompt; adhere to the deadline given by the editor. If you need an extension, ask for it early, as the editor will consider your request. Take the deadline seriously.

Be prepared for multiple revision rounds

Keep in mind that editorial decisions may be influenced by journal priorities or scope; prepare mentally for iterative revision rounds and factor this into workflows. Approach the process as a dialogue, not a competition.

Handling conflicting reviews

When reviewers make opposing recommendations, explain your choice and back it up with data or literature; describe any compromise solutions you implemented. If the conflict is fundamental, politely ask the editor for guidance.

Requests for new experiments or analyses

If reviewers request additional experiments that are not feasible within the revision timeline, explain constraints concisely (e.g. time, cost, IRB, etc.). Offer alternative analyses or propose the work as future research, clarifying why the current data suffice for the manuscript's conclusions.

Appeals and editorial queries

Formal appeals should be used only for procedural errors or demonstrable factual mistakes. Follow the journal's policy for appeals; present facts calmly and professionally.

In conclusion, effectively handling journal reviewers and editors requires politeness and professionalism. Address every point systematically within the given timeline. Finally, manage communication with the production team diligently, as this is the last chance to check for production errors or your own mistakes. Remember, no major changes are permitted once the proof is finalised.

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