

Responding to reviewers

Dealing with reviewer feedback can be daunting. Here are some basic tips for responding.

Take time to reflect and consider

- Don't be in a rush to respond to the feedback – sleep on it. Your responses will be more objective if you take time to mull over the reviewers' comments.
- Look at the comments as an opportunity to improve your research and writing. [Liz Bennet \(2014\)](#) describes peer review as a 'gift'.
- Analyse the feedback objectively: pay attention to the positive as well as the negative.
- Be open to the possibility that the reviewer may not have understood your points because you did not write clearly!
- Check that you have understood the comment. If, despite trying, you still do not understand, seek clarification.
- Some reviewers appear to be posing a question, but are actually giving an instruction.

Respond to each point

You don't have to agree with all the suggestions – but you do need to consider and respond to them all.

When you agree with the suggestion ...

- Explain and/or show what you changed in response to the feedback.
Be specific: rather than simply saying 'fixed', explain the change and state where (line/page) the new text is in the revised manuscript.

For example,

I agree that the order/presentation of information in this paragraph was misleading. The paragraph has been rephrased to make it clear that [...].

Commas have been removed from all dates.

On the reviewer's recommendation, we have removed [...], and inserted [...].

When you disagree with the suggestion ...

- Explain, with evidence, why you disagree.
If you agree with the problem pointed out, but have a different solution, make it clear why you have decided on a different revision.

For example,

You have raised an important point. Although the focus of the paper is not to closely monitor [...], given the concerns raised, we have decided to reduce the emphasis on [...].

This is a good point. I have now mentioned it in the materials and methods. However, I do not believe it needs to be [...].

We agree that this needs to be carefully worded. Consequently, we have added [...] to explain [...]. We believe putting this in the Introduction provides the additional context the reader requires.

Respond respectfully

- Keep your tone professional and polite.
- Acknowledge reviewer's efforts by thanking them for their feedback.
- Thank the reviewer for pointing out obvious errors.
- If you disagree with a suggestion, do so politely and objectively.

For example,

We appreciate the feedback and valuable suggestions.

Thanks for pointing this out. I have corrected the spelling.

[...] has been added. Thanks for the suggestion.

We believe that removing this section, as suggested, would not [...], because [...].

Make life easier for the editor

- Write a simple cover letter to the editor.
- Add your response directly beside or after each comment. You could use a different colour or font to make it easier to distinguish the suggestion and response.
- For relatively brief changes, copy the new version into your response letter and note the page number /line number in the revised manuscript.
- If you have added or revised an extended section (e.g. included/revised a whole paragraph), explain in general the changes made and refer to pages/lines of the revised manuscript.

Take advantage of the move to transparent peer review

Traditionally, reviewer comments have been confidential. However, increasingly, journals are publishing the review correspondence associated with published papers (reviewer comments, author responses, editor decision letters), with the permission of reviewers and authors. *Nature*, for instance, began to trial publishing peer reviews in 2020. (See *Nature*, 578(8), <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-00309-9>)

Check to see if published reviewer comments and author responses are available in your discipline. Exploring them can help you become more confident in responding to reviewers.

More advice

Bennet, L. (2014, March 24). Learning to accept reviewer feedback as a gift. *Patter*. <https://patthomson.net/2014/03/24/learning-to-accept-reviewer-feedback-as-a-gift/>

Carnovale, C. (2019). *How to respond to reviewer comments – the CALM way*. <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/authors-update/how-to-respond-to-reviewer-comments-the-calm-way>

Thomson, P. (2017, January 12). What did that peer reviewer actually mean? *Patter*. <https://patthomson.net/2017/01/12/what-did-that-peer-reviewer-actually-mean/>

Thomson, P. (2019, March 25). Revise and resubmit. *Patter*. <https://patthomson.net/2019/03/25/revise-and-resubmit/>

Sample cover letters, reviewer comments & author responses

APA (2019). *Response to reviewers*. <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/research-publication/response-reviewers>

Neagu, C. (n.d.). *How to respond to reviewers' comments: A practical guide for authors*. <https://www.languageediting.com/how-to-respond-to-reviewers-comments-a-practical-guide-for-authors/>