

Navigating reviewer feedback: a guide for authors

Submitting a manuscript for consideration for publication takes a lot of preparation. It can be an exciting time as you eagerly await the reviewer's feedback. However, it can be difficult to pre-empt what to expect and when you do get feedback, it can seem like a personal criticism. I'm a peer reviewer for several journals, which was a learning curve, nevertheless my rule of thumb is to ensure that my feedback to authors is balanced, just like my approach to giving feedback to students on their coursework, so including what went well and what needs improvement is important to help an author's development. For this editorial, I thought I would offer some thoughts and guidance on how to deal with reviewer comments and feedback on a manuscript

Different journals have different approaches to how many reviewers are invited to review a manuscript, often there at least three, sometimes more. Reviewers will often have different views on a manuscript so the ultimate decision lies with the editor in terms of whether it will be accepted or not. Peer-review is a crucial component of academic publishing for several reasons, for example, as a quality assurance measure, to ensure academic integrity, to detect errors, to maintain ethical standards and to support the esteem of a journal. When considering submission of a manuscript to a journal, I will always check that it is peer reviewed. Furthermore, if I receive an email inviting me to submit a manuscript for immediate publication I will always be cautious as these may be what's called 'predatory journals', which lack the necessary publishing standards of more reputable journals (Gethin, 2024).

When you do receive an email regarding reviewer feedback on your article, do read it thoroughly, this is important to ensure you understand the feedback before responding. Reviewer feedback does not necessarily follow a standard template so try to identify what are minor revisions, for example, correcting spelling or grammatical errors versus more major revisions which might require you to rewrite a section or add information in.

Do try to stay positive and professional in your responses, try not to take the comments

personally and avoid defensive language, for example:

Reviewer comment:

"The methodology section lacks clarity and detail. The authors should provide more information on the sample size calculation and the criteria for participant selection."

Defensive response (to avoid):

"We believe the methodology section is clear enough and the sample size calculation is standard practice. The criteria for participant selection were already mentioned in the introduction."

Constructive response:

"Thank you for your feedback. We appreciate the suggestion to enhance the clarity of our methodology section. We have now included a detailed explanation of the sample size calculation and have expanded on the criteria for participant selection to ensure it is more comprehensible. We hope these revisions address your concerns."

My approach to responding to reviewer feedback is to read the comments a few times before addressing them systematically with a point-by-point response. It's important to make it clear how the comments have been addressed. Using a tabular format can help to make this clearer, for example:

Reviewer's comments	Author's comments
The methodology section lacks clarity and detail. The authors should provide more information on the sample size calculation and the criteria for participant selection.	Thank you for your feedback. We appreciate the suggestion to enhance the clarity of our methodology section. We have now included a detailed explanation of the sample size calculation and have expanded on the criteria for participant selection to ensure it is more comprehensible. We hope these revisions address your concerns.

It's ok to disagree with a reviewer, in a polite and professional way. Make sure you explain your point and provide a good rationale and



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evidence to support the changes (or not). Sometimes it may not be feasible to address something like a small sample size in a study that has already been undertaken. To address this, you would ensure that this is discussed as a limitation.

Reviewers are human and they can make mistakes or misunderstand something. If you feel this is the case, then politely clarify the misinterpretation. Providing additional explanations or context where necessary can help reviewers understand your perspective. Your revisions should be detailed and should address the reviewer's feedback. Highlighting the changes in the manuscript can make it easier for the reviewers to see what's been modified. As shown in the example, do thank the reviewers for their time and effort, which is provided on an unpaid and voluntary basis. Adding a comment about how the feedback has helped to improve the manuscript can

go a long way. Do proofread the manuscript (or seek help to do this) to ensure clarity and professionalism. Take time to cross-check your response and the revised manuscript.

Don't just ignore comments, even if they seem minor. Do respect the reviewer's expertise. You can engage in communication with the Editor if you're unsure about an aspect of the feedback or feel the comments are impolite or discourteous.

PS If you are a reviewer then please read this article: Peate I, Gardner S (2024) Essential principles for peer reviewing. *Br J Nurs* 33(17): 848–50 <https://doi-org.cardiff.idm.oclc.org/10.12968/bjon.2024.0325> ●

References

Gethin G (2024) Predatory journals; a nuisance or a threat to research integrity? *J Wound Manage* 25(2): 49. doi: 10.35279/jowm2024.25.02.01