

Navigating the bumps and turns of scholarly peer review

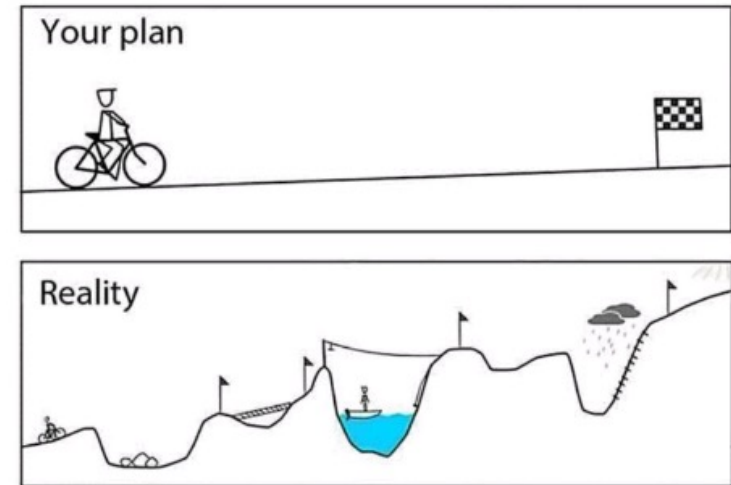
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Scholarly peer review

Bumps and turns

- Long waiting times
- Desk rejections
- Peer review rejections
- Revising, revising, revising
- Responding to comments
- Disagreeing with reviewers
- Contradicting comments
- etc.



Scholarly peer review

Peer review process

- Often not explicitly taught
- Often not observable

The unabashedly messy aspects of the research process are often hidden from published view, and are therefore not available to encourage and instruct” (Clark et al., 2007, p. 110).



What we see - the final destination



What we don't see - the whole journey

I am sorry that our consensus is that I cannot accept it for publication.

Please be assured that this is not at all a comment on the quality of your work, only on its fit with this journal.

I regret to inform you that our referees have now considered your paper but unfortunately feel it unsuitable

We are writing to let you know the status of this submission has changed to Rejected.

Your text requires very major revisions

The reviewer has recommended publication, but also suggests some minor revisions to your manuscript.



Today's schedule

Desk review (15 minutes)

Peer review outcomes (15 minutes)

Responding to reviewers (10 minutes)

Dealing with rejection (10 minutes)

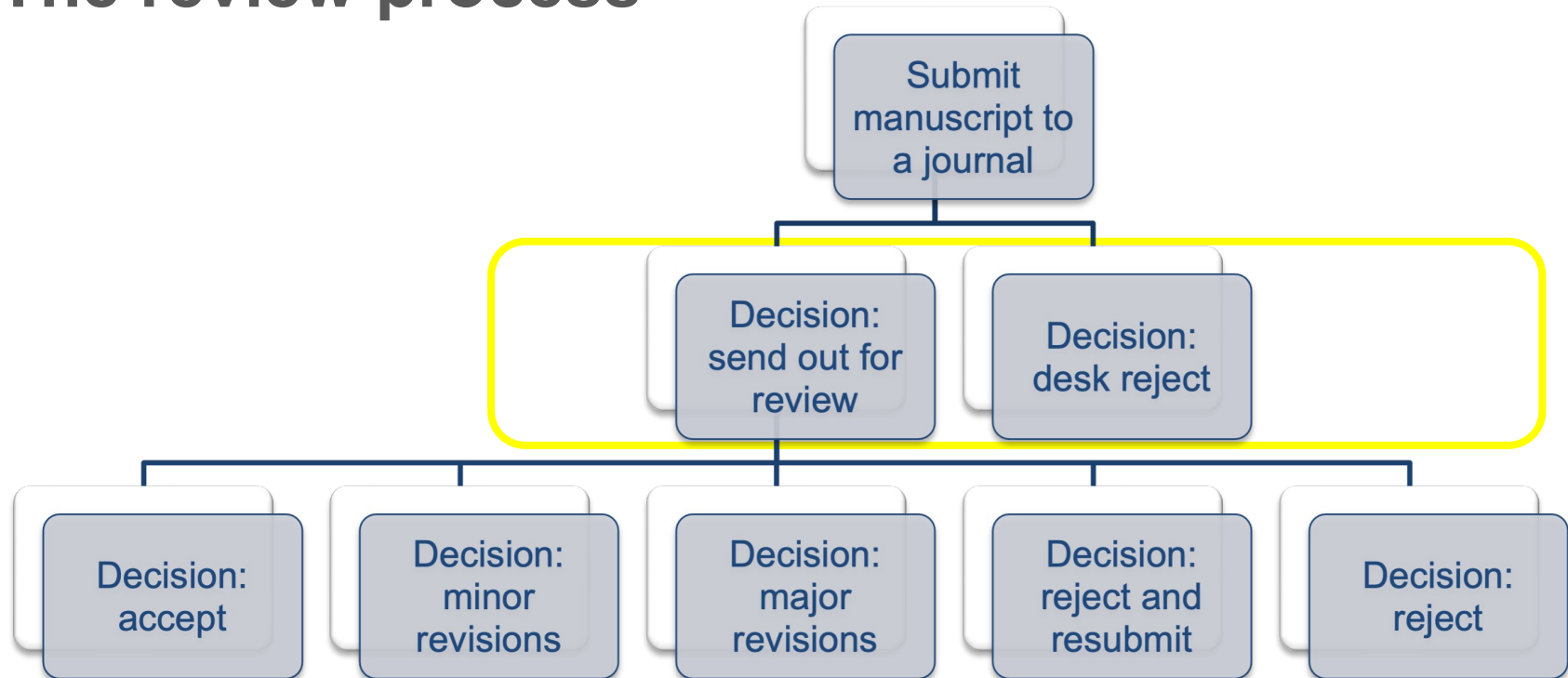


Desk review



Desk review

The review process



Desk review

What happens at desk review?

Highly dependent on each journal

- Sent to editor/s or editorial board member/s
- Reviewed by individual/s or a group
- Reviewed individually or with other papers
- Reviewed as they arrive or at intervals
- Paper, abstract, and/or cover letter reviewed



Desk review

How long does desk review take?

- Depends highly on the journal and their processes, and the individuals involved
- Some journals provide average times

4.2 weeks	8.1 weeks	2 weeks
Time to First Decision	Review Time	Publication Time



Speed/acceptance

- 87 days avg. from submission to first decision
- 109 days avg. from submission to first post-review decision
- 19 days avg. from acceptance to online publication
- 25% acceptance rate



Desk review

What happens next?

Your paper may be sent on to review

- You probably won't hear directly about this
- Status will change on any online systems

Submitted Manuscripts				
STATUS	ID	TITLE	CREATED	SUBMITTED
<div></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under Review 	<div></div>	<div></div> <p>View Submission</p>	15-Nov-2022	15-Nov-2022
✉ Contact Journal				



Desk review

What happens next?

Your paper may be rejected

- Your paper won't continue on to peer review
- You will get a notification or email
- You might (should!) get a reason why
- You probably won't get detailed feedback

Have you ever experienced a desk rejection?

 **Raise Hand**



Desk review

I am very sorry to inform you that after my initial review, I have decided that your manuscript [REDACTED] cannot be accepted for publication in [REDACTED]

I would like to thank you very much for forwarding your manuscript to us for consideration and wish you every success in finding an alternative place of publication.

With kind regards,

[REDACTED]
Editor in Chief
[REDACTED]

COMMENTS TO THE AUTHOR: In short, the manuscript is not a good fit with this particular journal. The majority of studies in [REDACTED] rely on advanced quantitative research methods to examine higher education policy issues.



Desk review

What happens next?

Your paper may be rejected

Important to know

50% of submissions to major journals are desk rejected (Sarigöl et al., 2017). (wide variation!)



Desk review

What happens next?

Your paper may be rejected

Important to know

There are two main reasons why a paper receives a desk-reject.

- The paper is not a good fit for the journal
- The manuscript is unlikely to be ultimately accepted in its current form



Desk review

How can I increase my chances of acceptance?

Make sure you are submitting your best work

- Don't rush to submit
- Take time to review again with a critical eye
- Ask a colleague for critical feedback
- Ask someone outside your field (or study) to check for clarity



Desk review

How can I increase my chances of acceptance?

When your paper is the best it can be ...

1. Choose your journal carefully
2. Prepare your paper for the journal
3. Create and customise a cover letter



Desk review

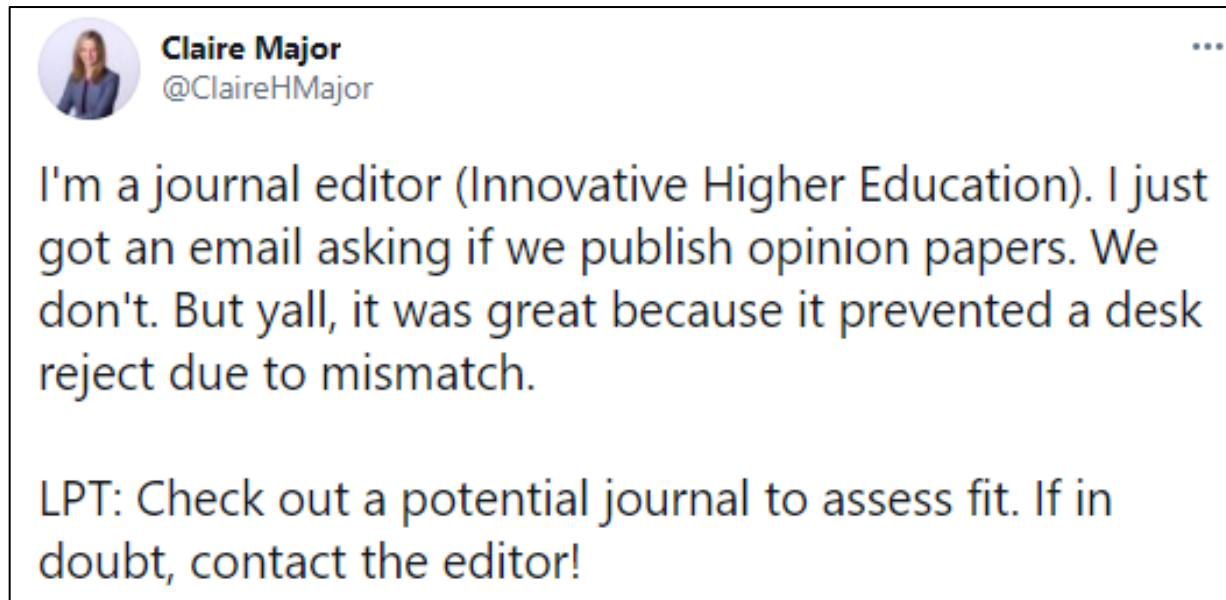
Choose your journal carefully

Is it the right fit for your paper?

- Check the journal description and scope
- Consider both explicit and implicit criteria
- Keyword search the journal for similar papers (topic, context, methodology, year)
- Email the editor if unsure



Desk review



Desk review

Choose your journal carefully

Is it the right fit for your professional needs?

- Open access or subscription
- Publishing fees
- Average review times
- Acceptance rates
- Publication volume and timing
- Metrics valued in your institution



Desk review

Choose your journal carefully

When to make the decision?

- Before, during, or after writing your paper?
- My advice:
Decide once you get a 'feel' for your paper
Have a few journals in mind
- When reviewing literature, take note of journals
- Your reference list will give you ideas!



Desk review

Prepare your paper for the journal

- Ensure your paper 'speaks' to the audience.
- ↑ Reflect this particularly in your abstract.
- Follow the submission guidelines!
- ↑ If you feel it necessary to 'break the rules', explain this in your cover letter.



Desk review

Create and customise a cover letter

- How important is a cover letter?
Again, depends on the journal/editors
- Take your time to do this well (I know you just want to get it done!)
- Your chance to 'sell' the paper, and show how it would contribute to the journal
- Explain and justify any deviations from the submission guidelines



Your questions about desk review

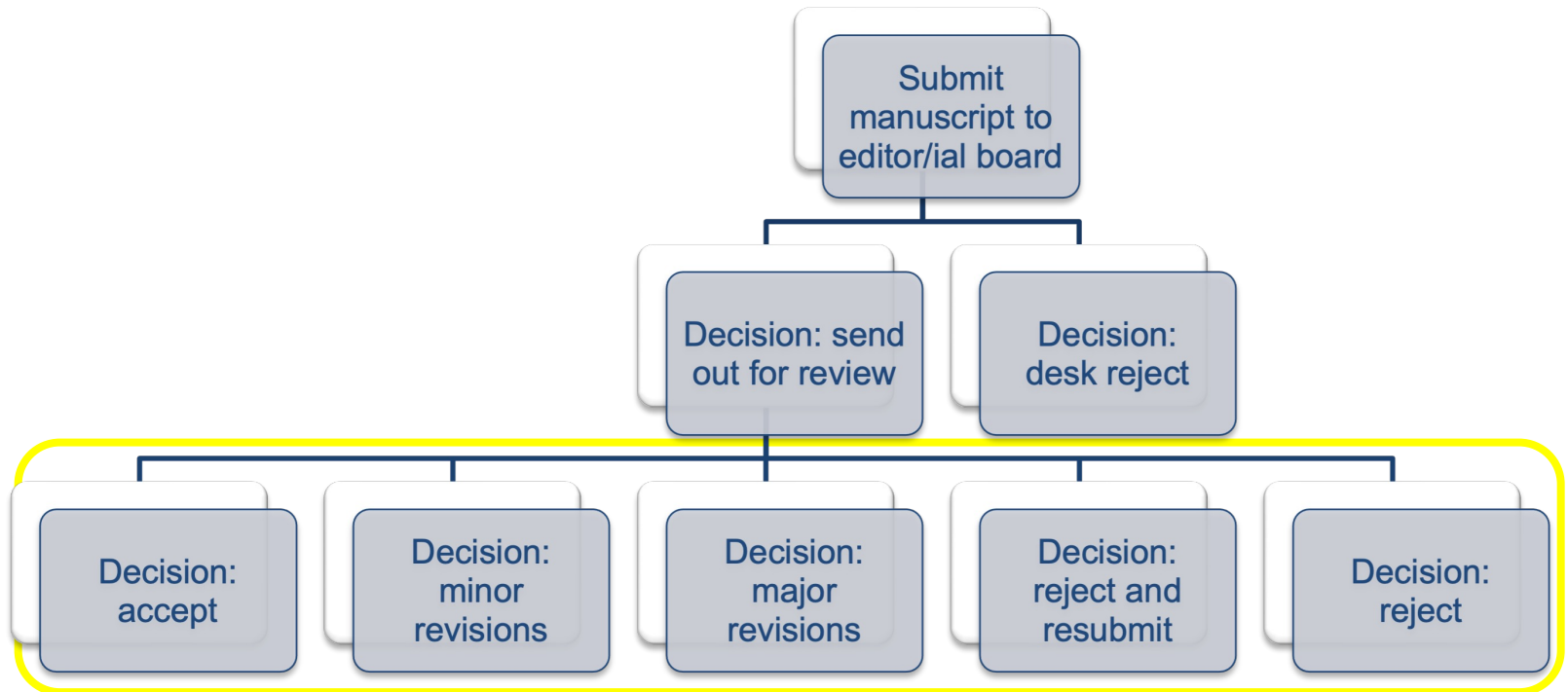


Peer review outcomes



Peer review outcomes

The review process



Peer review outcomes

What happens after your paper goes to review?

Highly dependent on each journal

- Handling editors will send out invitations to potential reviewers
- If a reviewer accepts, they may be given 30 days to complete the review
- They may have specific criteria to respond to
- The editors collate all the reviews (usually 2-3) and makes an editorial decision



Peer review outcomes

How long does peer review take?

- Depends on availability of reviewers
- **Recently review times have increased ↑↑
- Some journals provide average times

4.2 weeks

Time to First Decision

8.1 weeks

Review Time

2 weeks

Publication Time



Speed/acceptance

- 87 days avg. from submission to first decision
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- 25% acceptance rate



Peer review outcomes

What outcomes are possible?

Accept

Your paper is accepted without requiring any changes, or very small corrections

Have you ever experienced an accept outcome?

 **Raise Hand**



Peer review outcomes



Shannon Mason (Shan) @Shan_Mason · 22 Aug 2020
First journal, first round of review, both reviewers accept with only minor revisions requested. I didn't think such an experience was possible.



GIF

7

36



Marek Kwiek @Marek_Kwiek · 22 Aug 2020
Fantastic! It happened to me just once! Enjoy the moment, so rare it is.




Peer review outcomes

Initial accept outcome

- Extremely rare!
- Acceptance usually (should) comes after one or more rounds of review
- Review = summative & formative
- Don't receive (much) feedback from reviewers, so little opportunity to improve your paper
- Is it really an ideal outcome?



Peer review outcomes

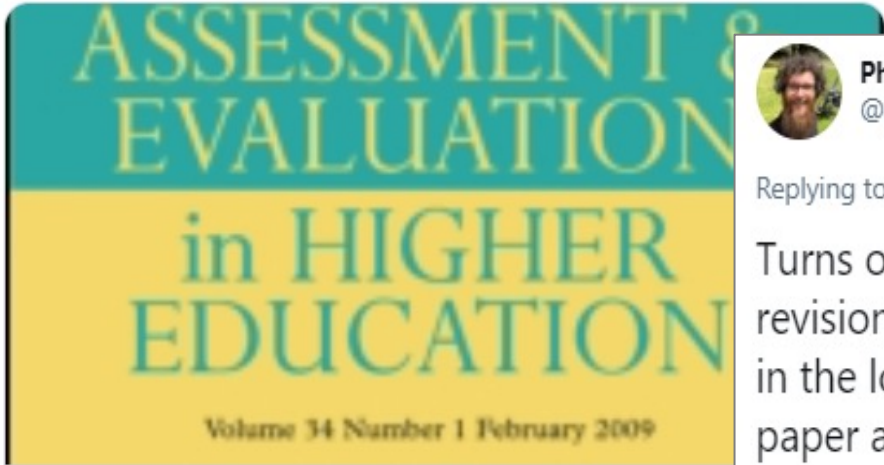


Phillip Dawson
@phillipdawson

...


Replying to @Shan_Mason and @Marek_Kwiek

Can I share one too? I had this paper srhe.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.108... accepted without revisions, first try. Only time it has ever happened to me. After it was published I had a colleague ask why I hadn't cited an important review study that would have improved my paper



ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION
in HIGHER EDUCATION
Volume 34 Number 1 February 2009

Assessment rubrics: towards clearer and more replicable design, rese



Phillip Dawson
@phillipdawson

...

Replying to @phillipdawson, @Shan_Mason and @Marek_Kwiek

Turns out I hadn't read it. In this case 'accept with no revisions' was a great short-term outcome for me, but in the long term if the reviewers had known of that paper and suggested I read/cite it, my paper would have been better in the end.



Peer review outcomes

What outcomes are possible?

Minor revisions

The reviewers recommend you revise your paper and attend to some minor issues

Have you ever received minor revisions?

 **Raise Hand**



Peer review outcomes

Thank you for your submission. Your manuscript, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
which you submitted to [REDACTED] has been reviewed. The manuscript will be reconsidered for publication if you address the minor revisions suggested by the reviewers. The reviewers' comments are included at the end of this email.



Peer review outcomes

Minor revisions

Minor revisions may include

- Providing additional information
- Adding a deeper discussion
- Deleting redundant material
- Reformatting the manuscript
- Editing the language for clarity and accuracy (Mun, 2018, p. 99).



Peer review outcomes

Minor revisions

- Not a guarantee of acceptance, unless explicitly stated (but very positive!)
- Minor does not mean unimportant, take them seriously
- Your resubmitted paper may go back to the reviewers or just to editors (journal policy, nature of comments, clarity of response)



Peer review outcomes

What outcomes are possible?

Major revisions

The reviewers recommend you revise your paper and attend to some major issues

Have you ever received major revisions?

 **Raise Hand**



Peer review outcomes

Major revisions

- ‘Major revisions’ means the reviewers and editors see potential in your manuscript
- But they also think that it can improved
- Not a guarantee of acceptance (but you’re still in the game!)
- Paper will be sent to reviewers again (often to the same reviewers)
- Revisions will take time and effort



Peer review outcomes

How do researchers feel about major revisions?



Peer review outcomes

What outcomes are possible?

Reject and resubmit

The paper is not accepted at this time, but the journal extends an offer for you to re-submit later

Have you ever received reject and resubmit?

 **Raise Hand**



Peer review outcomes

Reject and resubmit

- How is it different to major revisions?
- Journal sees potential in your submission
- But, revisions needed are extensive, beyond what can be done through the review process
- No deadline for resubmission
- No obligation to resubmit
- If you resubmit, let them know (foot in door)
- Related to journal review time metrics (?)



Peer review outcomes

Reject and resubmit

- To resubmit or not? A difficult choice.
- You might consider ...
 - Tone of the comments
 - Nature of the comments
 - The journal itself (suitability, impact)
 - The review process (level of support, length)
- If you resubmit, it will be a new submission, so you may not get the same reviewers



Your questions about peer review outcomes



Responding to reviewers



Responding to reviewers

The 3 'golden rules'

1. Respond completely
2. Respond politely
3. Respond with evidence
(Williams, 2004)

4. Respond openly and honestly



Responding to reviewers

Respond completely

- You don't need to accept all suggestions
- But be sure to respond to all comments
- A point-by-point approach is common

Reviewer 1	
Comment	Response
Comment copy and pasted directly from the reviewer report	Your response added here. I like to add the text in a different colour, and then change only when it's completed in the document.
Comment copy and pasted directly from the reviewer	Your response added here.



Responding to reviewers

Respond politely

- Reviewers have given their time and expertise to review your paper
- Be professional, but no need to pander

*Rude or personal comments should be ignored (editors shouldn't be passing on toxic reviews, but unfortunately it does happen!)



Responding to reviewers

Respond with evidence

If taking on board a suggestion

- Explain what you've done, and where the changes can be found
- Make it as easy as possible for editors/reviewers

Comment	Response
Some of the methodological taken from social sciences may not be as familiar to readers as the author seems to assume. I would therefore suggest adding a couple of lines to explain succinctly what SPSS22 and MAXQDA are, also to make some formula look less obscure to non-specialists.	Thank-you for the advice. We do wish for this paper to be accessible to a wider audience of supporters of Italian language education, and so are happy to provide these extra details. The following sections have been added: add here with page numbers, and highlighted in manuscript



Responding to reviewers

Respond with evidence

If not taking on board a suggestion

- First, think carefully about why the suggestion is being made, is there any merit?
- Explain your choice, and support it with reasons, examples, citations.
- Be diplomatic
- For conflicting reviews, don't use reviewers against each other. Respond to each one separately.



Responding to reviewers

Respond with evidence

Comment	Response
The table 1 needs to be revised for clarity and simplicity using means (see APA manual for examples)	We feel that in this qualitative study the use of means would serve to mask the various characteristics among the participants. For example, the mean age of our participants is 53, although our range crosses a spectrum from 30s to 70s. While we would prefer to give more specific information about each participant (i.e. exact ages, specific countries of birth, etc. for each case), we note that the target population of is small and conspicuous, and we want to avoid any chance of deductive disclosure.



Responding to reviewers

Respond openly and honestly

- The review process is a 'dialogue', explain any limitations in your responses
- Ask for clarification from the editor if a comment is unclear - don't just guess or skip

<p>Please ensure that your manuscript adheres to MHRA style.</p>	<p>We have edited the article so that it conforms to MHRA style. Please note that while we have examined the online guidelines carefully, this is the first time applying this particular style, and so if there are any errors please let us know and we'll be happy to fix them.</p>
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Responding to reviewers

A general response may also be suitable

We would like to thank the original three reviewers for their insightful and thorough comments on the original version of the paper. We have spent some time considering all of the comments, and have now submitted a revised version of the paper. Because many of the specific comments are no longer relevant to the new submission, we note the following major changes that address the main concerns raised in the reviewer comments.

We believe that the new submission presents

- ◆ A paper that is more focused, with clearly stated research questions
- ◆ A clear positioning of the paper in theoretical framework
- ◆ A drawing out of the original contribution of the participant data
- ◆ A clearer distinction when reporting different types of [REDACTED]
- ◆ A more nuanced discussion of the role of languages in [REDACTED]
- ◆ A more in-depth reporting of the methods, particularly sampling and analysis



Your questions about responding to reviewers



Dealing with rejection



Dealing with rejection

When might I experience rejection?

- At desk review
- After the first of peer review
- After multiple rounds of peer review
- After major revisions
- After minor revisions*

Have you ever received a rejection outcome?



Raise Hand



Dealing with rejection

The reality

- Rejection is extremely common
- Everyone experiences rejection
- It doesn't get less common
- It still stings!




Dealing with rejection

Reframing rejection

- Rejection is an important and inevitable part of the peer-review process.
- No-one wants to get a rejection, but if we reframe it, we may be able to deal with it better.
- These days, some researchers are being more open about their experiences of rejection.

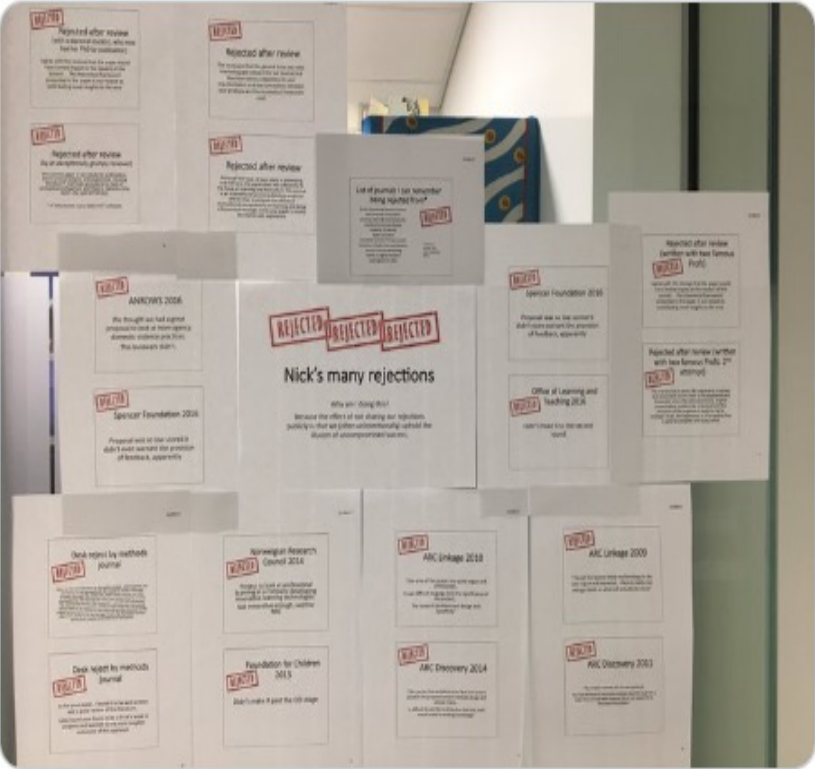


Dealing with rejection



Nick Hopwood
@NHopUTS

My new display of rejections for all visitors to my office to enjoy! #phdchat #ecrchat #academia #peerreview





Caitlin K. Kirby, PhD
@kirbycai

Successfully defended my PhD dissertation today! In the spirit of acknowledging & normalizing failure in the process, I defended in a skirt made of rejection letters from the course of my PhD. #AcademicTwitter #AcademicChatter #PhDone
THANK YOU to everyone involved in my journey



Dealing with rejection



Today my first PhD paper was rejected. I thought I would be heartbroken but honestly, the reviewers' comments are helpful and positive... it feels like a B with the opportunity to go home, turn it into an A and try again.

Thank you to the kind reviewers of the world!!!

[#phdchat](#)



Kayla Huber
@realKaylaHuber

actually kinda thankful that my paper was rejected a couple times because the version that i just submitted is primo content 🍷 100



Dealing with rejection

NATURE | NEWS

Rejection improves eventual impact of manuscripts

A study of papers' histories from submission to publication unearths unexpected patterns.

Philip Ball

Just had your paper rejected? Don't worry — that might boost its ultimate citation tally. An excavation of scientific papers' usually hidden prepublication trajectories from journal to journal has found that papers published after having first been rejected elsewhere receive significantly more citations on average than ones accepted on first submission.



Dealing with rejection

Dealing with rejection (on an emotional level)

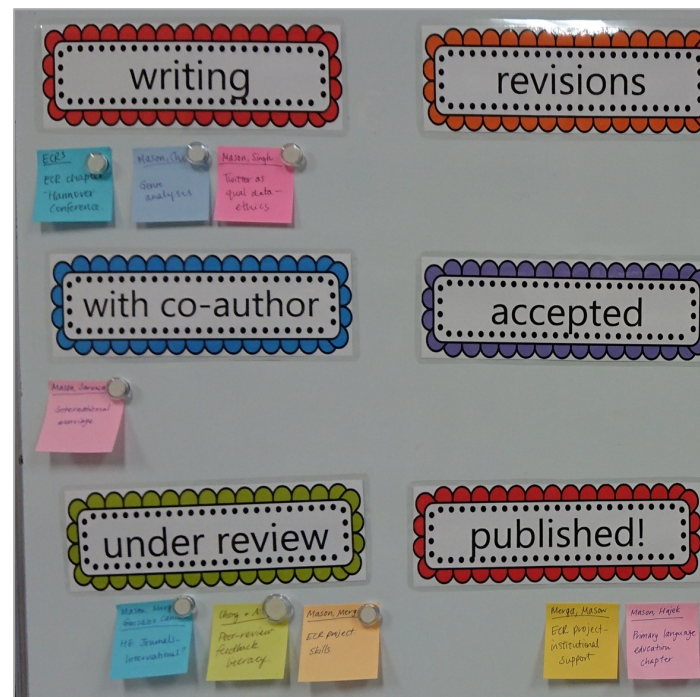
- Take some time out
- Read through the comments once you've processed the outcome
- It might help to share/vent with others
- Try to remember the role and prevalence of rejection, but also that peer review is not perfect



Dealing with rejection

‘Preparing’ for rejection

- Have more than one journal in mind from the beginning
- Work rejection in as part of the pipeline
- A detour not a dead-end



Dealing with rejection

Getting back on the road

- Eventually, we need to move on
- Decide on your next journal
- Spend time adapting your paper to its audience
- Reformat the paper if required
- Update your cover letter!



Dealing with rejection

Getting back on the road

What do I do with the previous comments?

- Of course, you don't need to respond
- But, in light of your new journal, what comments could be incorporated to strengthen the paper
- Don't ignore the comments! It's a small world - you may get the same reviewer at a new journal



Your questions about ~~dealing with rejection~~ moving forward



Further support

Get more support for the peer review process

Scholarly Peer Review

www.scholarlypeers.com

Twitter

@Scholarly_Peers

@sinwangchong

@shan__mason



References

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Williams, H.C. (2004). How to reply to referees' comments when submitting manuscripts for publication. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, 51(1), 79-83

