

UC Santa Cruz

Publishing Tips Series Season 1

Title

Season 1, Week 4 - How do I respond to peer reviewers' comments?

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1cf55856>

Author

Stuit, Martha

Publication Date

2024-11-14

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Publishing Tips Series – Season 1, Week 4

November 14, 2024

This is the fourth week of the Publishing Tips Series, Season 1, running from October 24 to December 5, 2024. This series addresses frequently asked questions on publishing from graduate students. This week's installment covers "**How do I respond to peer reviewers' comments?**" Here are this week's takeaways:

- Weigh your response options to reviewers' comments, and
- Track your notes about revisions to share with the editor.

Spotify link to listen

[Season 1, Week 4 podcast episode](#) (same content as the following text-based version, only in audio format)

How do I respond to peer reviewers' comments?

When we covered the decision points in the publishing process last week, we discussed peer review feedback and the subsequent revisions requested by the journal editor with the following details:

"Sometimes reviewers' feedback offers suggestions that would require more research or extend the scope of your paper beyond what you intended or have the bandwidth for. Sometimes the feedback is reasonable, and other times it does not make sense, and the author may discern which is true for their paper."

This week, we will talk more about what the reviewers' feedback may cover and how to respond to it as an author during the revisions stage.

Before we discuss peer review feedback, it is worth noting that peer review norms vary across the disciplines. The publishing tips this week provide cross-disciplinary, general information

about responding to peer review. You may consult your advisor, committee members, and peers to hear what their experiences in your field are, too.

Applying feedback to your manuscript

The journal will send the peer review reports, and/or in-line comments and edits from peer reviewers, back to you, often with a request for revisions (it is pretty rare for an article to be accepted with zero changes requested by the journal from the author!). The editor may also send their own comments and/or requested edits for you, and the editor may specify which edits to prioritize (such as the editor's comments or reviewer 3, for example). It is up to you as the author, along with your co-authors if you have them, to review and apply the changes. Some changes may be straightforward and quick (such as rewording or punctuation). Other changes may require more effort and be time-intensive (such as editing your introduction, adding a topic to your literature review, reorganizing sections, expanding your data analysis, etc.).

Corresponding with the editor about the feedback and your revisions

As you work on your revisions, you may disagree with the feedback. The feedback may or may not be in scope for your research, and you may or may not have the data, time, bandwidth, or interest to pursue some of the requested changes. The good news is that you do not have to accept every edit from the reviewers. The reviewers and/or editor may say which suggestions are optional, too. You may decline a particular revision as long as you explain to the editor why you are not taking that feedback. The author(s) may, with diplomacy, communicate which changes they did not make during revisions, and why, when sending back the revised manuscript to the editor. This step of sharing *why* a particular piece of feedback or edit does not make sense for your manuscript is key so that the editor may understand your choices, instead of being concerned that an author did not make the revisions. Including these details of your decisions from revising your manuscript in your message to the editor, along with your manuscript containing your revisions, opens up a dialogue and shows the editor that you are considering all of the reviewer and editorial feedback even if you disagree. The method by which you send your message about revisions and revised manuscript to the editor may vary by journal depending on their platform and process, but the idea is the same whether corresponding by email or author portal.

What happens once I turn in my revised manuscript?

The editor will review your revisions so that they can make a decision on whether the article will receive another round of review or see if they are ready to accept or decline it. The journal will let you know if your manuscript will undergo review again, if they need you to make any further changes, and/or if your manuscript is accepted or declined.

Tips on responding to peer review feedback

- Put in the effort to address reviewer comments and communicate effectively with the editor to minimize the number of rounds of review, which also saves time to publication.
- The review comments are often to the point and can feel harsh, but it is best not to take them too personally. You know your research the best, and the general purpose of peer review and revisions are to help make your manuscript the best it can be.
- You may not agree with a reviewer's comments or an editor's feedback, but if the reviewer or editor misunderstands something, it is likely that the reader will, too. In that case, consider how to make the text more clear while still communicating what you need to convey about your research.
- Keep a draft of your message to the editor about your revisions in doc for revision notes to the editor and add notes there as you come up with questions or comments about changes that you have made or are choosing not to make. Writing these questions and comments down as you go along will save you time when you finish your revisions and are ready to send this message to the editor with the revised manuscript attached (or upload it to the journal's author portal or submission system).
- Follow the journal's instructions on how to track your changes, or develop a clear system yourself if the journal does not specify, so that the editor can easily see what revisions have been made to the manuscript. Editors are juggling multiple articles at a time, so making your revisions distinct in the manuscript provides clarity and saves them time and questions for you.
- If the journal sends the article to only one peer reviewer and gives you a decision based on that one reviewer's feedback, you as the author may consider requesting another reviewer if you feel that another opinion is warranted because peer review usually includes at least two reviewers.

Putting it into practice

1. Chat with your peers, advisor, and/or committee members about article revisions that they have made. You might ask, What was their reviewers' feedback like? How involved were the requested revisions? Was there a time when they chose not to make a revision? Why and what happened next?
2. Curious about being a reviewer as well? In their [document on ethical guidelines for peer reviewers](#), the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) shares considerations for being a reviewer, conducting a review, preparing your report, and what to consider after a review. Read over these sections to learn more about doing peer reviews or to understand the perspective of being a peer reviewer.

More questions? Contact the Library at research@library.ucsc.edu or [sign up](#) for a one-on-one Zoom meeting about publishing.

Talk with you next week about publishing costs for open access and funding support from UCSC!

Martha Stuit

Scholarly Communication Librarian, [Author Services](#), UCSC University Library