

Declining to make changes suggested by reviewers: Some common phrases and strategies



Four reasons why you might decline to make a change suggested by a reviewer

Peer reviewers are essential participants in the academic publication process, and their comments and suggestions are aimed at making our work more scientifically robust and clearly understood. Toward this end, they often work without pay to review manuscripts and uphold the quality of the published literature. Responding to the suggestions made by reviewers is, therefore, an important part of the peer review process. However, sometimes we might disagree with some of the suggestions made.

In this article, we provide some phrases and strategies to use if you decide not to make a suggested change to your research paper. We have classified these phrases according to 4 common reasons that authors tend to disagree with a comment or suggestion received.

It's important to state that it's not always necessary to make all of the changes suggested by the reviewers. Not only do reviewers give different levels of importance to the changes that they suggest, but also it is ultimately the journal editor, not the reviewers themselves, who decides

whether to accept or reject your paper after taking into account the reviewers' comments. However, before you decide not to make a change to your paper, we suggest that you check your answers to the following questions:

- 1 Does the reviewer's comment suggest you did not explain your work clearly enough?**
- 2 Does the comment concern an important point or perspective you hadn't thought about previously?**
- 3 Does addressing the comment in order to get it through peer review require only a relatively minor change that wouldn't hurt your paper or your reputation to make?**

If you answer "yes" to these questions, then consider making a change to your paper.

But if you answer "no," then how can you decline to address the comment?

The basic structure is simple and based on respect:

1 Acknowledge the reviewer’s suggestion

2 Then state why you’re not going to make the suggested change

There are several types of phrases that are useful in declining to meet a specific suggestion, depending on the reason that you’re not doing so. Here are some appropriately worded responses to those suggestions that authors commonly disagree with. You can also mix-and-match some of the answers to fit a number of different situations where you might decide not to change your paper.

Reason 1: The suggested change would require you to conduct new research

Example reviewer’s comment: “Your results are interesting, but I’d like to know what would happen if you had studied the effect on adolescents, in addition to adults.”

Phrases you can use: “follow-up study,” “future research/consideration,” “new direction,” “outside the scope of the study this time,” “our data does not reveal this”

Example response 1	We would also be interested in the effect on adolescents. The data that we have cannot reveal this, but our protocols could be modified for a follow-up study.
Example response 2	We agree that the effect on adolescents is an important line of study. We have now acknowledged this and suggested it as a topic for further research in the Discussion section of the revised manuscript (page 12, lines 24–29).
Example response 3	We agree that the effect on adolescents would be interesting to know. Our study was designed to focus specifically on adults this time and we’d like to keep the focus intact, but we have included your point as a consideration for future study (page 15, lines 9–12). Thank you for the suggestion.

Reason 2: You disagree with the reviewer’s understanding of your work

Example reviewer’s comment: “State that the results apply to all computers.”

Phrases you can use: “clarify”, “ambiguity”, “could be understood in this way,” “Thank you for pointing out the potential for misunderstanding”

Example response 1	Thank you for pointing out that our statement could be understood in this way. We did not mean that the results apply to all computers but only to single-core computers. We have clarified the explanation in Section 2 to highlight why our results are limited to single-core computers.
Example response 2	Our data do not support the statement that our results apply to all computers at this stage. To avoid potential misunderstanding, we have reworded our hypothesis statement to focus on single-core computers only.
Example response 3	We have reworded the text to state the scope of our research was focused on single-core computers, rather than all computers. Thank you for pointing out the ambiguity of our statement.

Reason 3: The suggested change would distract from the main point of your paper

Example reviewer's comment: "In this paper [on plant genetics], I think you should explain more about the niche that *C. japonicum* fills in the Shirakami-Sanchi forest."

Phrases you can use: "We agree ..., but," "prefer to focus on," "moves the main point away from", "You raised an interesting point, but..."

Example response 1	We agree that <i>C. japonicum</i> fills an interesting niche, but in this paper we prefer to focus on the genetic aspects, and so we will leave the ecological aspects to other research.
Example response 2	Thank you for the suggestion. While we agree that <i>C. japonicum</i> fills an interesting niche, because we needed to add new material to address other comments specifically about the genetics, which is the focus of this study, we have not been able to mention the niche in the revised manuscript.
Example response 3	We have added a brief explanation about the niche that <i>C. japonicum</i> fills, while keeping the focus on the genetic aspects. This explanation has been added to page 4, lines 4-6. (Note that here you decided to compromise by adding a brief explanation to satisfy the reviewer while at the same time avoiding making a larger change.)

Reason 4: The suggested change is already mentioned in the paper, but the reviewer missed it

Example reviewer's comment: "What was total number of samples tested in this paper - 40?"

Phrases you can use: "have now mentioned this explicitly," "was mentioned in..., but has now also been added to...", "was added to avoid any potential confusion"

Note: In the following examples, you can choose to compromise and meet the reviewer's request by simply repeating the information in another section of the manuscript or providing it in a different format.

Example response 1	We mentioned there were 45 samples in total in the Methods (page 6, line 4), but we have now also added the following to the start of the Results section to avoid any potential confusion: 'Of the 45 samples tested, 9...' (page 8, lines 19-20).
Example response 2	There were 15 samples in each of the 3 groups (Methods, page 3, line 20). We have reworded the text to state the total of 45 samples explicitly.
Example response 3	The total sample number was 45, as mentioned in Table 1. We have now added this to the main text for clarity (Procedure, page 3, line 7).

In conclusion

If you'd like help in crafting a response to reviewers, [please let us know](#). Journal editors work hard to find papers suitable for publication and have them reviewed, but this doesn't make your role as an author any less important. Nearly always, it's better to publish the paper that best explains your research, so don't be afraid to say you won't make a change if that change won't clearly improve the paper—as long as you explain clearly and respectfully why you disagree with the reviewer's suggestion.

Finally, if you disagree with a reviewer's entire review, our experienced editors are able to help you write a full rebuttal to the comments received.