

Writing effective response letters to reviewers: Tips and a template



After submitting a manuscript to a scholarly journal and receiving comments from the reviewers and/or journal editor, authors are often asked to revise their manuscripts to address the comments provided. While authors typically have no problem responding to the comments from a scientific or academic perspective, they can sometimes find it difficult to decide upon the most effective way to respond.

By “effective” here, we mean presenting responses in English (i) in an organized manner and (ii) in a balanced and collegial tone; or, turned on its head, presenting responses that do not waste the journal editor’s or reviewers’ time by being poorly organized, unnecessarily wordy, or inappropriately phrased.

Your goal in revising the paper is not only to maintain an accurate description of what you did and your interpretation of the findings, but also to incorporate those comments from the reviewer that help to improve your description and interpretation. As we mentioned in a previous article, [you do not have to agree to make all of the reviewers' suggested changes to your manuscript](#), but you need to be able to explain, in an appropriate way, why you have chosen not to make them. It is just as important to show which suggested changes you have decided to make.

In this article, we give some tips on how to effectively prepare your responses to peer review, editorial review, or both. You’ll also find:

- 1 Some helpful phrases to use (and some to avoid) so that you can provide collegial and balanced responses**
- 2 A “template” response letter to guide you in organizing your responses and using suitable English expressions**



Step 1: Categorize your responses to the comments

Not all reviewers provide comments in the same format, but many reviewers provide “major comments” followed by “minor comments”. These two categories of comments might be preceded by the reviewers’ summaries of the objective, methods, main results, and implications of your work.

Major comments: these usually concern the main scientific or academic content of the submitted manuscript

Minor comments: these usually concern presentational aspects, such as grammatical mistakes, inconsistencies, lack of relevant citations, and changes suggested for tables and figures

We suggest that you work through these four preparation stages for responding to the reviewers. You can skip stage 1 if the reviewer classified the comments as major and minor already.

- 1 If the reviewer did not use the major/minor comments format, categorize each of the comments into major and minor categories to help you decide the importance of each of the comments—you do not need to refer to your categorization in your written response to the reviewers.
- 2 Decide exactly which comments you agree with and will make, and which you disagree with and choose not to make.
- 3 For each comment, note down how you (and your co-authors) will respond, who will do the work required, and who will draft the revised manuscript and response letter.
- 4 Then it’s simply (or sometimes, not so simply) a case of working through each of the major and minor comments in turn and revising your manuscript accordingly.



At this point, be sure to check the deadline for returning your revised paper. Some journal editors state this in their letter to you. Otherwise, you may have to check whether a deadline is stated in the guidelines for authors. For example, a 3-month (90-day) deadline might be given. Be sure to plan the work you must do, including the drafting of the letter (and any time for editing and translation of your revised paper and response letter) within this time frame. If at any stage you think that you won’t be able to make the deadline stated for resubmission, be sure to tell the journal editor. We’re happy to help you draft an appropriate letter requesting additional time for revision, and most editors are happy to grant an extension.

Step 2: Draft an organized response letter

Here, you want to use suitable phrases to respond to the editor and reviewer, and to organize your responses in a clear and simple way.

Some journals ask authors to respond to the reviewers’ comments by following a specific format (e.g., listing all comments and the corresponding responses in a table), but many journals do not specify how the authors should respond. In the latter case, we recommend organizing your responses clearly and simply in order to make the second review as efficient and smooth as possible (i.e., to not waste the reviewers’ time, which is usually unpaid, and to not unduly delay a decision about acceptance).



- Be sure that the tone of the response letter is collegial and balanced. For example, writing “Thank you for your comments” at the beginning of your response is appropriate, or if the reviewers have made an especially thoughtful suggestion that adds substantial depth and impact to your findings.
- In contrast, writing “We are grateful for this (valuable/insightful/kind) comment” or “Thank you for this comment” at the beginning of all or many individual comments fails to respect the reviewers as peers, potentially elevating them to an uncomfortable height. Broadly, we recommend you start by thanking the reviewer, but thereafter thank the reviewer for only the specific comments that let you correct a mistake.
- When writing your response letter, especially the introduction, also take care not to use phrases that overstep your role as author, such as “Thank you for your comments, which have helped us to substantially/greatly improve the manuscript.” It is the reviewer’s job, not yours, to judge the level of your manuscript, so it might appear presumptuous to declare that the manuscript is now improved.
- If several comments suggest similar revisions, such as fixing particular grammar errors or changing key terms, you can provide a general response to all such comments. You can use phrases like “We have corrected the grammatical issues pointed out in the manuscript and accompanying figures and tables” and “The suggested key terms have been used throughout the manuscript.”



To guide you in drafting a suitably worded and well-organized response letter, we have created a response letter template and offer some general tips below.

Get the template

- Address your response letter to the editorial staff member who sent you the reviewers’ comments.
- Be sure to include a manuscript ID number if one was assigned to your manuscript.
- Address any specific major issues raised by the editorial staff, such as the need to reduce the length of your manuscript, change the submission type (e.g., from an original article to a brief communication), or clarify issues about publication ethics (e.g., authorship, conflicts of interest, or excessive text similarities to previously published work).
- When you make extensive changes to your manuscript in response to the reviewers’ comments, for the editor’s convenience, you may wish to summarize (in one short paragraph) the main changes made and whether they affect the original interpretation of your findings.
- Keep your manuscript as short and simple as possible!



In conclusion

In most fields, nearly all papers require revision before being accepted for publication. Responding to reviewer comments can be daunting, particularly if we have progressed in our research after submitting the paper. However, by following the steps and advice above and keeping in mind that the reviewers are our professional peers, the revision and response process can become more straightforward and better integrated with [our research cycle](#). Our language editors specialize in helping authors, journal editors, and reviewers throughout the publication process, so [please contact us](#) if you would like assistance with revising your paper. 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.