Responding to Feedback: Making Clear the Changes Made
Patricia Yoder-Wise

Most journals provide some guidance for authors on how to manage feedback from reviewers. While some authors are concerned about comments, the point is that the feedback needs to be addressed if the manuscript is to convert to an article in a publication. While multiple options exist, from highlighting through a totally new submission, a simple guide can help authors communicate to the editor and reviewers the changes that were made.

The Feedback
Editors frequently use a common strategy, especially in today’s electronic environment, of attaching the actual comments the reviewers provided to the letter sent to the author. These comments indicate that further work is necessary. Although not always in agreement with each other, the comments from reviewers form the basis for what the authors need to address and the content to insert in a changes log to guide the editor and reviewers through the manuscript revisions. The feedback may appear as narrative or bullet points. Some manuscript submission systems allow for a pdf form of feedback where comments are incorporated into the manuscript itself. Irrespective of the form in which the reviewers’ comments are transmitted, the point is that each comment needs a response so that the editor and reviewers know the complete feedback was addressed.

Authors’ Personal Response
Authors are delighted when they open an email from an editor and find that their work has been accepted. More commonly, authors open an email and find the editor inviting them to address comments from the reviewers and to resubmit a revised manuscript. When authors see the request for changes, especially when multiple suggestions for improvement are offered, they may become frustrated and delay addressing the comments. This delayed response consumes some of the time that the editor indicated was allotted for the response. In some systems, the manuscript is removed after the targeted deadline. Thus, a delay in responding can have serious consequences. Addressing the comments in a systematic manner is the most effective strategy for moving the manuscript along in the publication process.

Steps in Addressing Feedback
No one right way exists to “fix” a manuscript. Yet, using a systematic approach is highly beneficial. Assuming that the feedback didn’t suggest a total rewriting of the manuscript, the easiest approach to take is found in Table 1, Steps in Addressing Feedback. By following these steps, authors can assure themselves that they have addressed each comment and that they are not disrupting the revision page numbers or paragraph sequence so that they can track each change as it is made. Unless the changes are extensive, authors don’t even need to print their manuscript to track the corrections they make.

Format for Submitting the Feedback Response
Some publications may specify how revisions are to be noted in a resubmission process. If specific directions are provided, they should be followed. If no directions are provided, or if a statement is vague about the nature of how to submit revisions made to the editor and reviewers, using a Changes Log is often helpful. Basically this log is designed to assure the editor and reviewers that each comment has been considered and that some action has been taken. The Changes Log in Table 2 illustrates the common kinds of feedback provided to authors and how authors could note that they have attended to the feedback. Even compliments should be acknowledged so that editor and reviewers know those comments were seen. If pages or paragraph numbers have changed, they can be noted with a statement such as “now page X, paragraph Y” so that editors/reviewers are clear their original concerns were addressed even if the correction is now found in a different place. This kind of notation is especially helpful if some content was moved to a different location within the manuscript.

Another approach is to use that offered by Oermann and Hays (2011). They suggest a two column approach to presenting the authors’ responses to the feedback. Those two columns represent the revisions recommended by the editor and reviewers and the authors’ indication of the revisions actually made. As those authors suggest, providing a cover letter that acknowledges overall what steps the submitting authors took in preparing their revision is helpful.

**Conclusion**

Few journals prescribe how feedback is to be addressed. Obviously, the manuscript itself must be edited and wise authors follow the suggestions of the editor and reviewers. Helping the editor and reviewers find the changes facilitates their second (or third) review of the manuscript so that it is moved along in the publication process. The clearer authors can be in responding to each point, the easier it is for reviewers to see that their issues were addressed. Even responding to compliments assures reviewers that the authors have attended to the details of the feedback.

**References**


**Table 1 Steps in Addressing the Feedback**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Print the comments from the editor/reviewers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Determine if the changes involve anything beyond copyediting corrections (e.g., periods, spellings).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Make a duplicate of the manuscript and label it as a revision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Correct the items that are copyediting type corrections first. (If this is the only feedback, save the document, prepare the changes log, and then resubmit. If this isn’t the only feedback, this type of editing will not alter page numbers or paragraphs substantially, so finding the rest of the editing suggestions will follow the original flow.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Start at the end of the document and make any substantive changes. (This will not disrupt the page references in the editor/reviewer feedback.) OR: Print the revised document from step 4 and mark the manuscript for each change needed. (Making notes about the nature of the change or correlating the change with the reviewer comment will assure a match between the feedback and the final editing.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Create a Changes Log that reflects a response for each comment offered. (An example appears in Table 2, Changes Log.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Proof the entire revised manuscript and changes log. Resubmit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer</td>
<td>Reviewer Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Identify as 1, 2, etc. to match feedback and 1,2, etc. to match sequence]</td>
<td>[Quote comments here]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLE**

1.1 Break up long paragraphs

Agree

Paragraphs shortened throughout.

Throughout

1.2 Great use of concepts.

Thank You

No action

1.3 Reference your table in text

Agree

Reference added in Findings section.

page 4

1.4 Use of “your” on page 5 is incorrect.

I used Strunk and White (2007, p.6) as the guide.

Original content retained.

page 5

1.5 Paragraph 2 page 6 is confusing. To whom are you referring? How was this done?

Concur this needs to be clearer. The manner in which this is done is described later in the ms.

Clarified the point related to the CNO. Referenced the latter paragraph to address questions readers might have about the manner in which this was done.

Moved paragraph 2, page 6 to precede the current section. See paragraph 4, page 4.

2.1 Page 6 is especially strong. Thanks.

Please note reviewer 1 comments re: page 6

Edited page 6

See changes in item 5 above

page 6

2.2 A statement re: IRB approval is missing.

Found IRB approval on page 5, paragraph 3.

No change made

Now page 6, paragraph 1

2.3 Several outdated references included. Limit to last 3-5 years

Concur.

Manuscript edited to omit old findings and thus edited references to include only last 3 years. Two classics were retained and noted as such.

Throughout manuscript; see references on pages 9-10

2.4 Numerous errors in APA

Found 10 such errors.

Ten references reformatted.

pages 9-10
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