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Dealing with Rejection Disappointment

Dealing with the Disappointment of the “Reject” or “Revise” Letter

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“My article was rejected and I have not looked at it since.”

“The Editor said I need to make major revisions to my manuscript, and I just gave up.”

These are real responses to the outcome of letters from the editor about your manuscript—a work that you thought was a truly wonderful product when you sent it in! When I hear these responses, I am bewildered. Then I remember how many misconceptions are floating around about the publishing process, and the fact is that nurses who are seeking publication cannot possibly be expected to come to this already knowing what it takes to be successful.

The “I have never looked at it again” response reflects the very real fact that producing a manuscript requires an investment of the self. You have a certain amount of investment in a submitted manuscript, and to have it rejected, whether flat-out rejected or rejected with major revisions, can feel like a personal attack.

But there are many reasons for rejection and for requests for revision, none of which suggest that you never look at it again. You have indeed put in a lot of effort, time, and thought producing your manuscript, and there are good reasons to get back into it and move forward. Here are some of the most common reasons your manuscript might be rejected, or that the Editor might ask for revision, followed by hints as to what to do next.

COMMON REASONS FOR REJECTION OR REQUESTS FOR REVISION

- ***Your manuscript is not a good fit for the journal.*** This is the most common reason for rejections of manuscripts in the journal I edit, *Advances in Nursing Science*. Your work might be important, timely, and well written. But if it just does not fit in the journal, it will be rejected. Typically the Editor will state this as the reason, or one of the reasons for rejecting your manuscript; sometimes they also tell you if your manuscript is also worthy of publishing in another journal. But often they send this rejection letter without much of a review, since from the outset it is clear that it does not fit.
- ***Your manuscript is not sufficiently developed, or the content is not developed in a way that readers of this journal expect.*** Your topic is appropriate for the journal, and again, it may be well-written. But you may have provided content that for the readers of this journal will seem superficial; the editor knows that readers are probably already familiar with what you have written. You may have left out important details that readers expect, or by contrast, you may have given detail and background about the topic that is already known. If the reviewers and the editor see potential in what you have written, and the topic of your

manuscript is one that they know will be of interest, they may request a revision and provide some detail about what direction to take in making the revisions. But if your manuscript is simply not developed appropriately, you will receive a letter of rejection, typically with feedback from the review process.

- ***Your manuscript is poorly written.*** If your use of English language is beyond repair as presented, you are likely to receive a letter of rejection since editors and publishers are not in the business of helping authors with writing at this level.

More commonly, reviewers identify a recurring problem such as lack of flow of ideas that leaves the reader unclear about what your meaning, long or confusing sentences, sometimes even problems with grammar and punctuation. If the reviewers and editors believe that the writing problems can be addressed, they will request a revision and give you some idea of what kinds of writing flaws to worry about.

- ***Reviewers have identified problems in the content of your manuscript.*** If there are flaws in your content that the reviewers believe there is little hope of addressing adequately, the editor will probably reject your manuscript. More often, one or more of the reviewers identify a specific aspect of your content that they believe you can address, and with revision that addresses these issues, your manuscript could be considered again. You might have overlooked important resources in the field, or your explanations or conclusions fall short or are misguided, or that your explanations of some aspect of your content is insufficient or omitted. You might not have explained your method sufficiently, or your discussion is too sketchy. Reviewers might indicate that they disagree with something stated in your manuscript, but they usually provide a basis for this disagreement that they believe should be addressed in your manuscript.

SO NOW – TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE MANUSCRIPT!

Rather than placing the manuscript in a virtual drawer (or worse yet in a virtual trash bin) take whatever kind of rejection or revision letter you received and consider the implications for what to do next. I imagine that there might be an occasion when you do take another look and decide that this is not really where you want to continue to place your energies. However, if you have started down the path of writing for publication, there is never a manuscript that should end up in the trash. It goes into the recycle bin, but you are the “recycler”—it is up to you to move it forward to the next step. Every single published author has experienced both rejection and revision letters, and here are the common things they do to finally get that “acceptance” letter.

- If you have a rejection letter, return to your journal due diligence (Nicoll & Chinn, 2015). You can avoid rejections due to a “poor fit” if you determine in advance which journals are the best suited for your topic, and among those journals, what type of articles they publish. If you realize, after you get the rejection letter, that you missed the boat in selecting this journal, then your next step is to re-assess appropriate journals for your manuscript. You will probably need to still make revisions in the manuscript to make sure that your work fits the new journal in all respects—the style of writing, the style and format of the citations and references, the manuscript length—all of these details differ between and among journals, and your submission needs to conform to these requirements for each journal. So find a journal that would be appropriate for your topic, for the type of manuscript you are preparing, and that has an audience you want to reach.
- If the review indicates that there are problems with your writing, then dig in and address those problems. This is one of the major benefits that comes from being a successful writer — they have become “experienced” because they have been asked to revise their work many times, and each time have learned how to improve their writing. Go through your manuscript carefully, several times,

looking for those writing problems that tend to recur and learn how to “fix” them.

If this challenge is just too daunting to do on your own, seek writing advice and assistance. Even if you take time to just read some good sources on writing for publication, you will quickly learn to pinpoint where your writing can be improved and will develop habits that give you better results—not because you always write better the first time, but because you become more skilled at revising your work. In addition to signing up for *Nurse Author and Editor*, [check out the writing resources listed at this publication website](#). They have all been vetted and I can vouch for their excellence.

- If your letter asks for revision, then take a minute to celebrate! You are well on your way, and even though there is never a guarantee that this journal will accept your manuscript if you revise it, the chances are much improved. So dig in and get to work. Take each and every reviewer comment or editorial request and consider how you can address each one. As you make the changes, prepare a “response to the review” document explaining what you have done to revise your work. If the reviewer comment indicates a serious misunderstanding or disagreement with your work, do not simply disregard this as the “reviewer is wrong,” but consider what changes you can make in the text to “speak to” any reader who might end up with this response to your work. Offer a better explanation or clarify what you wrote to avoid this kind of misunderstanding. If you need to completely revamp a section to better explain or to add detail, dig in and do it. If you need to delete content that would best go somewhere else, delete it but make sure your text still has a logical flow. Once you complete your revision, set it aside for just a couple of days, then go back and re-read your revised manuscript, make final changes you notice are needed, refine your “response” document, and send it back to the journal. Do this as soon as you possibly can. If the journal gives you a deadline, of course you want to meet that, but there is nothing wrong with being early—you won’t be penalized for that, although re-submitting late may have negative consequences.

Fundamentally, persistence is the key to publishing success. You might go through two or three (even more) re-submissions of a work you start out with before you are successful. But if you persist, seek assistance when you need it, and stay focused on improving your writing, you will succeed!

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