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3 HOURS AGO    EDIT

## Revising It Right

# Revising it Right: Five Steps to Help You Get Your Work Published

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**NURSE AUTHOR & EDITOR, 2020, 30(1), 3**

Peer review in nursing journals involves the evaluation of scholarly work by experts who are familiar with the manuscript topic area. Peer reviewers evaluate work by giving feedback about manuscript content relevance, applicability, accuracy, and appropriateness; flow and organization; importance to nursing; and fit within the submitted journal.<sup>3</sup> Though peer reviewers may or may not directly recommend whether a paper should be accepted, editors use the feedback peer reviewers provide to help them make a final decision about whether a manuscript is suitable for publication. Ultimately, peer review helps ensure high-quality works that are important to nursing are published.

Using peer reviewers' feedback, editors respond to authors to guide them through the next steps in the publication process. The typical responses are: *accepted*; *accepted pending revision*; *revise and resubmit*; and *rejection*.<sup>5</sup> It is rare for a manuscript to be accepted without needing revisions. More commonly, authors will need to complete some revisions for their work to be accepted for publication.<sup>3,5</sup> In other words, *accepted pending revision* or *revise and resubmit* are the common responses that authors receive. Although either of these responses may frustrate or overwhelm you, the good news is that the editor is interested in publishing your article. Despite this interest, many authors, both inexperienced and experienced, may feel discouraged, frustrated, or overwhelmed by the prospect of completing revisions. They may decide not to complete the revisions satisfactorily, or they may even decline to revise their work altogether. When this happens, both the author and the nursing discipline lose out on valuable contributions.

## REVISING IT RIGHT

Seeing the words: *accepted pending revision* or *revise and resubmit* can be disappointing and frustrating to inexperienced or experienced authors alike. It can be overwhelming to complete a manuscript revision, especially for inexperienced authors. Authors may also struggle when there are many significant changes requested, peer review feedback is delivered inappropriately, reviewers have conflicting opinions, or comments are unclear or vague.<sup>2</sup> Following the five steps: (1) feel then deal with your emotional response; (2) soak it in; (3) recruit some help; (4) carefully craft your response; and (5) clearly communicate, can help make completing revisions more manageable and may help get valuable, high-quality scholarly works published.

### ***Step 1. Feel then deal with your emotional response***

Authors spend a lot of time and effort writing and revising their manuscript before submission, so it is understandable that receiving requests to further revise their work can be upsetting. Many emotions, such as anger or frustration, may be felt.<sup>1,2</sup> These feelings may be intensified if feedback received is extensive or critical. It is okay to feel these emotional responses. Vent to colleagues, family, or friends. Allow yourself to feel upset for a day or two, or more if needed. Take some time to set the work and the response aside, physically and mentally. Do not be tempted to immediately respond since sometimes these quick responses may be argumentative and unproductive.<sup>1</sup>

Once you have taken time to feel your emotional response, it is time to deal with it. Try to frame your mind with positive thoughts. Remember that the editor is interested in your work otherwise they would have rejected it!<sup>4,5</sup> Think of your revision as an opportunity to improve your manuscript to make it even better. Be persistent; do not give up. Do not let your important work go unpublished.

### ***Step 2. Soak it in***

Once you have felt and dealt with your emotional response, it is time to revisit the reviews with a “clear and calm head.”<sup>2, p. 2077</sup> Try to see your writing objectively and from the peer reviewers’ perspectives. You may want to read your work out loud to hear how it sounds.<sup>4</sup> Try to grasp the big picture of your manuscript and then look at the specific details of the provided feedback. In terms of the big picture, ask yourself questions such as: *Was my work too broad or too specific?; Was it repetitive?; Did I clearly explain my ideas?; and Did I have issues with organization and flow?* Editing and proofreading details are also important because poor writing, inappropriate grammar, or an inaccurate or out-of-date fact, figure, or reference can distract from the quality of your work. Reflect carefully, trying not to be overprotective or too closely aligned to your work.

Take time to keep an open mind as you move forward. Try to remember that even if you feel a reviewer is wrong, this does not mean you are right. Instead, the writing may be unclear and may be the source of the confusion. For example, perhaps you forgot to include something, or you didn't emphasize something important.<sup>1</sup> Carefully review the work and the feedback and develop a plan for tackling your revisions.

### ***Step 3. Recruit some help***

If in completing steps one and two you feel unsure of how to respond, it is time to recruit some help. Share your ideas with a colleague or perhaps someone else you trust. If you need additional clarification or need to talk the revisions through, consider reaching out to the editor. You may want to request a call versus sending a lengthy email. If you do schedule a call, adequately prepare for this discussion. Think through how you plan to improve your work and identify specific questions you have. Thank the editor for their time. Other helpful resources include: consulting professional editorial and proofreading services through your organization or independent contractors or reaching out to an experienced colleague with writing expertise.

### ***Step 4. Carefully craft your response***

When you are ready to craft your response, carefully review the guidelines for revisions. Pay attention to specific formatting or deadline requirements. It is advisable to adhere to deadlines or even submit your work earlier so that the manuscript is fresh in the editor's mind.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of formatting your resubmission, it can be helpful and is sometimes required that you organize your responses into a *response table*. Table 1 provides an example.

In addition to your revised manuscript, a response table allows you to respond to each reviewer comment point-by-point. Create the table shell first so you can then fill in your table columns as you make your revisions. Some response table tips include:

- Create the table in a Word document with three columns: (1) *reviewer number*; (2) *reviewer comment*; and (3) *author response*. Use the *repeat header row* function in Word to ensure column headings appear on each page. Each row in your table will represent a separate peer reviewer comment. Also, in your author response column, discuss the in-text revisions completed so that reviewers know what you did with their in-line edits and additions;
- Number each page;
- For ease of reading don't allow rows to break across pages. Use the *table properties* to keep information together;
- In the *author response* column, begin by first thanking the reviewers for their feedback. Then clearly identify where in the manuscript changes were made; for example, provide the page, line, and/or paragraph number where a revision was made;
- Be polite, concise, and factual.

When completing your revision, start by completing easy fixes such as simple editing and then delve into the more complex revisions such as developing detailed explanations. For example, fix reference inaccuracies before reorganizing or cutting your manuscript. Be prepared to eliminate information from your manuscript as needed. You do not have to make all the changes requested, in fact changing everything may result in inaccuracies or other issues, but you do need to pick your revision battles wisely.<sup>1,2,3,5</sup> If it is an easy fix, fix it. If a requested revision doesn't change the meaning of your manuscript, do your best to make the

revision. Some battles worth fighting include: requests for changes that are not supported in the literature; those that ask for information beyond the scope of the manuscript; or those that would result in inaccuracies if changes were made. In cases such as these, simply and respectfully state why the revision was not made, citing any references if possible or if appropriate.<sup>1-5</sup> Remember that ultimately the reviewer is a consultant, and you are the author.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes reviewers disagree with one another and their comments conflict. So, how do you address these conflicting comments? First, reread the comments to ensure that they really do conflict. Perhaps the comments deal with the same issue but suggestions made to address the issue differ. If they truly do conflict, carefully consider the issue, decide on the best course of action, and justify your response politely, concisely, and factually.<sup>3</sup> Do not “pit one reviewer against another.”<sup>1, p. 552</sup>

**Table 1.** *Sample Response Table*

<b>Reviewer No.</b>	<b>Reviewer Comment</b>	<b>Author Response</b>
1	The manuscript could be considerably shortened. I saw many redundancies in all sections.	Thank you for your careful review. I have reviewed the entire document and worked to remove redundancies. The paper is now three pages shorter (pages 2-7).
1	The review of the literature focuses only on nursing and there is not much literature available within nursing. I recommend broadening this search to include information from other disciplines.	Thank you for your thoughts. I agree that it would be interesting to consider this topic outside of nursing. However, this is outside the scope of this paper. It is also important to highlight what evidence we do not have within nursing (page 2).

1	Table 2 is simply a long list. I don't think the reader is going to know what to do with it and it will confuse them.	Thank you for your feedback. Table 2 was revised to include detailed descriptions for each criterion (page 4).
2	This is not a method we typically use in nursing. Remove this.	Thank you for your thought. There is recent evidence that we use this method in nursing (Johnson, 2015; Smith, 2018)*. (page 5). Methods section unchanged.
2	Can you provide more explanation? This concept seems incomplete.	Thank you for your comment. I added more explanation of the concept (page 4).
2	In-line edits and additions throughout the document.	Thank you for your edits and additions. Most were accepted as is and some were accepted with slight revisions (pages 2-7).

*\*Note.* References are fictitious and for illustration purposes only.

As a final consideration, ensure you carefully review the revision guidelines before submitting. This last check will help confirm you have all necessary documents for your revision.

### ***Step 5. Clearly communicate***

Positive working relationships in the publication process are essential so make sure you communicate appropriately. If you are having trouble completing the revisions, including difficulty meeting resubmission deadlines, let the editor know. If you need other clarification or additional help, include this request in your response to reviewers or reach out to the editor directly. Or, if for some reason,

you have decided you cannot complete the revisions, let the editor know right away.<sup>4</sup>

After you submit your revisions, your manuscript will either re-enter the peer review process or it will return to the editor for a final decision.<sup>3,5</sup> Be patient with the process as it may take time for your revision to be reviewed again. If your manuscript is accepted, it will still undergo editing to fit the journal tone and style.<sup>5</sup> You will receive a proof of this edited copy. When reviewing this final version, answer any author queries politely, concisely, factually, and promptly. Do not request any major changes unless there is a true clinical error.<sup>5</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Most manuscripts need revision before they are ready for publication. Completing revisions can be overwhelming for inexperienced and experienced authors alike. Authors should approach revisions, however, as an opportunity to improve and share their important work. Taking time to feel and deal with their emotions, soaking in feedback, recruiting help, carefully crafting their responses, and communicating effectively helps authors adeptly revise their work and can help increase their chances of publication.

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