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What to do with a Rejected Manuscript

Raeda AbuALRub, Patricia S. Yoder-Wise

Almost every author has had the experience of having a rejected manuscript. It is hard to read that letter from the editor that rejects your submission. No matter where are you in your career journey, you experience frustration, especially if several months have elapsed since submission. However, it is not the end of the world and certainly not the end for that potential article.

Authors should always remember that there is no perfect manuscript, and every one could be improved in some way or another. The important thing is to acknowledge that sometimes rejection of a manuscript is part of the process of publication. Once you acknowledge this, you should think of this letter of rejection as a way for improving the manuscript for possible publication elsewhere.

Sometimes no feedback is provided; other times specific points are offered that could help shape a new submission. The letter of rejection should be read critically, and every comment of the editor and reviewers should be listed and reviewed. Sometimes the immediate defensive feeling might lead you to submit the manuscript to another journal without even wanting to read the comments.

However, a piece of advice is to delay your action on the letter for a day or two until thinking, rather than emotion, drives your response.

Systematic Plan

Having a systematic plan in mind is beneficial. For example, begin with the comments with which you agree, and edit the manuscript accordingly. These comments likely will strengthen the next submission. One way to look at this is that experts in the field provided consultation about your work. Sometimes your manuscript might be sent to the same reviewer even when you sent it to another journal. Some reviewers serve as reviewers for several journals; thus you do not want your manuscript to be sent to the same reviewer who would think that his/her comments were ignored.

Next, tackle the more challenging comments, those with which you do not agree. Ask questions such as: was this the best way to present data, were the conclusions stated beyond the bounds of the study, did I address the issue I said I would address and present it in a way that others would find readable, and so forth.

If comments related to readability, find an editor service and use it. The clarity and the readability of the manuscript is an important issue for reviewers and readers. It is probable that an article could be denied publication due to poor language. If comments related to concerns about the study itself, review what you wrote to be sure you presented a complete picture of how you approached the study. If the comments related to presenting only one side of an argument, consider what additions could be made to present the opposing views.

Once all the comments are addressed and the manuscript is ready to be submitted again, first determine if the current journal would be willing to review a reworked manuscript. This is often only possible if the manuscript is almost a new one based on the amount of editing done. Assuming that is not an appropriate strategy, consider what other journal is appropriate. Once that decision is

made, look at the author guidelines and style required by that publication and adjust your manuscript accordingly. While this step can be tedious, you do not want to limit your manuscript's potential because the wrong format was used. While some journal editors might review a manuscript in a different format, others might not. Sometimes, a different format suggests that the manuscript was rejected by another journal editor. The Box, Systematic Plan Elements, can serve as a checklist.

Box. Systematic Plan Elements

1. List comments and review them
2. Select comments with which you agree and edit the manuscript accordingly
3. Review the challenging comments: ask yourself questions about those comments
 - a. Readability: secure an editor service
 - b. Concerns about content: determine how to improve/clarify
4. Select another journal
5. Match style and author guidelines of the journal

Special Issues

On the other hand, if you think that the comments of the reviewers and editor are due to a misunderstanding of the methodology, use of terms, or method of analysis, or if you received mixed reviews (some supportive of points that another reviewer raised as concerns), you can send a letter to the editor to appeal the decision. Remember, however, you have to make a compelling case. One of the clearest ways to make that case is to respond to the comments you question by citing each and responding to each one. A two-column response format showing the reviewer/editor comment in one column and your response in the other would help the editor understand your viewpoint (see Box, Sample Two-column Response Format).

Box. Sample Two-column Response Format

Reviewer/Editor Comment	Author Comment
1.	1.
2.	2.

Less experienced, international authors might experience a rejected manuscript outcome. Academic environments worldwide have put increasing pressure on faculty to publish in well-cited journals. Thus, international authors, especially from developing countries, compete for the same limited space in the prestigious journals with those from developed countries. This situation is often more pronounced if the manuscript is research-focused. Because nurses in the Western world typically have more resources and the profession is more established, their research may be more sophisticated. Authors can help the editor of a journal appreciate this distinction by making the point about the international difference in a cover letter or in the manuscript itself. For example, using phrases such as: this is the first time this concept has been explored in (country) or Given the limited resources in this emerging healthcare system, we were able to (X). If the comments included reference to the manuscript not contributing something new to the literature, authors may want to edit the manuscript to say something about the fact that this is well-established in some cultures, but is just emerging in the (culture).

It is also wise to ask a colleague or a supervisor to read the manuscript and to provide comments

and feedback before submitting it again for publication. It is important for authors to learn that the process of publishing needs patience and persistence, and that rejection of an article could be looked at as a part of the process of research publication.

Authors

Raeda AbuALRub, PhD, RN, is a Professor, Faculty of Nursing, at Jordon University of Science and Technology. Her email is raeda71@yahoo.com.

Patricia S. Yoder-Wise, EdD, RN, NEA-BC, ANEF, FAAN, is President, The Wise Group, and Professor and Dean Emerita at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing, Lubbock, Texas, USA. She also is the Editor-in-Chief of The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing and Nursing Forum. Her email is PSYWRN@aol.com.

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