How to Deal with Rejection and Resubmission

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Outline

- Every researcher gets rejected. This lecture covers rewriting and resubmitting a rejected paper.
- Learn four ways reviewers know a paper was previously rejected.
- Learn how to hide signs of rejection from previous journals.
- Learn how to modify your paper based on reviewers comments.
- Where should you submit next?
The Publication Challenge

- Consider the following statistic:
- “The chance that a typical paper of average quality will get a favorable recommendation from both referees is about 11% (= 1/9).”

- 1993 APS OBSERVER newsletter, a publication of the American Psychological Society.
Keep Trying

George Akerlof and eight other Nobel Prize winners were frequently rejected for their fundamental research.
Everyone Gets Rejected

- One study showed that 62% of published papers had been rejected at least once.
- In most studies, at least 50% of rejected manuscripts were published within 2 years.


Wager E. *Getting research published*. Oxon, UK: Radcliffe Publishing Ltd, 2005
Do Not Waste Time on Dead or Dying Topics

If your most recent references are ten years old, it is a dead issue.

- If the most recent references closely related to your paper are 5 years old, it is a dying issue.

- It is difficult for the editor to find suitable referees for outdated topics.

- Your inability to find enough references indicates:
  - You have not read the literature.
  - Others are not interested in the topic, so, it is unlikely to be published.
How to Identify “Hot Topics”

- Read the literature, particularly top-tier journals, to identify “hot” areas and “new problems”.
- Read letters to the editor to see conversations in your field.
- Look for controversies and unexplained findings.
- Look for “cross-overs” from other fields of research; for example, new methods that might be connected to old problems.
- Do keyword database searches to see volume and impact of recent research in an area.
- Attend international conferences.
Send the Paper Back out

- Submit the paper to another journal within one month.
- You do not have to revise a paper every time it is rejected. But if a paper is rejected 4 times, there is a serious flaw in the paper. Find and fix the problem.
- Some initially address four envelopes to different journals
- Why? The same referee might get it again.
  - Williams HC. How to reply to referees’ comments when submitting manuscripts for publication. *J Am Acad Dermatol* 2004; 51:79–83
  - http://chestjournal.chestpubs.org/content/135/2/573.full.html
Eliminate Any Trace of Prior Rejections

Do not show when the paper was first written or how many times the paper has been revised.

- Document property check
- New references
- New page-one references
Delete or Hide References to Undesirable or Rejecting Referees

- You can guess the identity of the reviewers from the reviewers’ comments because of references and writing style.

- Editors select reviewers from your references. If some reviewers always recommend rejection of your papers, drop their papers from your references (the first time you submit). You can add them later (after the paper is accepted). You can also put them into the body of the paper where they are harder to find.

- This may require rewriting the introduction from a different perspective.
Waiting for the Journal’s Decision

Causes of quick rejection:

- Backlog
- Previous paper on subject
- Editor doesn’t like topic or style

When Should You Start Contacting the Editor?

- After three months, once a month
- Four months, twice a month
- Six months, every day!
- The longer the review takes, the less chance you have of getting published (reviewers may be negative)
- Could indicate internal fighting in journal
- You may want to consider withdrawing to another journal
- Editor’s feedback is key in making this decision
Reminder Email to Editor

- “I’m just emailing to inquire about the status of my article titled [article title], which I submitted to your journal on [date].”

- Don’t get angrier over time, just keep sending the same e-mail more often.

- Sometimes editors appreciate the reminder.
Emotions on Rejected Paper

1) Depression
2) Anger at editor
3) Anger at system
4) Considering changing job
5) Reviewing manuscripts and deciding the reviewers had valid points
Types of Journal Decision

- Pure accept: almost never happens.
- Revise minor problems and resubmit: signs of this are the editor mentioning a certain date for publication, adding references, developing conclusion, or defining terms.
- Revise major problems and resubmit: chance of acceptance 50%. Sometimes will go back to reviewers, sometimes to editor.
- Rejected but can resubmit
- Rejected
- Rejected by editor
“Enclosed please find the reviewers’ report on your paper. One reviewer has minor recommendations for revision, the other has fairly substantial recommendations. Although their reports are very positive about your paper, they also include helpful suggestions for improving the paper, especially regarding______. Because of the reviewers concerns, I cannot accept the paper in its present form. I can offer, however, to send a revised version of the paper back to the second reviewer, should you wish to rework your argument substantially in line with these reports and resubmit the paper to us. I am sorry to have to convey what I know will be disappointing news, but I do feel strongly that with careful revision this essay could be accepted for publication in our journal.”
I am sorry to have to return your manuscript because it falls outside our guidelines. However, we would like to invite you to resubmit your article. In order to conform to our guidelines, you would need to be formulate your article to clarify your thesis and re-situate the piece within a more scholarly background. Thank you for considering our journal and we look forward to hearing from you.
Enclosed please find the reviewers reports on your paper. They agree that you have a very promising idea, but that serious revision is necessary. In particular, they would like to see_______. Given their concerns, I cannot accept the paper for publication in its current form. Should you feel able to address our concerns and submit a substantially revised version of the paper, I would be glad to ask the reviewers to read the paper again.
Rejected but can Resubmit

- Comes with reviewer comments
- Editor may say it will be treated as a new submission
- Editor’s letter can be difficult to decode
- Editors don’t really expect to see your paper again
- Maybe they are just being polite
- If reviewer comments are helpful, you may consider resubmission
Editor Language in a “Conditional Rejection”

- “Unacceptable in its current form”
- “Will require major revisions”
- “Would be more suitable as a brief report”
- “This paper, while of interest, needs to be completely restructured”
- “The reviewers have raised serious concerns that need to be addressed”
- “Manuscript would need to be revised to comply with the requirements of our journal”
Rejected but can Resubmit

“Given the reviewers’ reports, we cannot accept your paper for publication. Should you choose to revise the paper thoroughly according to the reviewers’ substantial recommendations and submit it again to us, we will send it to new reviewers.”
Rejected but can Resubmit

“Although the reviewers thought the article was strong, they have noted some serious flaws that must be addressed before the article is publishable. Please see the attached for the reviewers’ suggestions.”
I regret to inform you that our reviewers have considered your paper but, unfortunately, feel it is unsuitable for publication in the Journal of _______. For your information, I attached the reviewer comments at the bottom of this email. I hope you will find them to be constructive and helpful. You are, of course, now free to submit the paper elsewhere should you choose to do so. You can also resubmit your manuscript to this journal after major revisions. If you decide to do so, please clearly identify the revisions in your cover letter.

Thank you for considering Journal of ______. I hope the outcome of this specific submission will not discourage you from submitting future manuscripts.
Editor Language for a Rejection

- “Submit to another journal”
- “Unsuitable for our readership”
- “Insufficient priority at this time”
- “Relevant to a more specialized audience”
- “Although of interest to our readers, fundamental flaws in the study design preclude publication”
- “We do not accept unsolicited review articles”
Editor Language for a Rejection

- “Is not publishable”
- “Is not ready for publication”
- “Cannot be published at this time”
- “Does not meet our standards for publication”
- “Is not right for us”

Initial positive language is not a sign of a second chance
Reject

“I’m sorry to return your article, but our submission guidelines require that articles reveal something new and demonstrate a thorough grasp of previous criticism on the topic. Your submission lacks this dimension and, therefore, we cannot consider it further at this time.”
“Thank you for offering us your manuscript. We have read it with interest but regret that we cannot accept it for publication. We hope that the attached reader report provides helpful advice as you revise your paper for publication in another journal.”
Rejected by Editor

- “Good luck” or “Best of luck”
- No peer review
- Very fast
- Reasons: backlog, too many articles on topic, reviewers report too hostile
- Don’t ask for report, just move on to plan B.
Everyone Gets Rejected

Your options:

- Abandon the article.
- Send the article with no changes to another journal.
- Revise the article and send it to another journal.
- Protest the decision and try to resubmit the article to the rejecting journal.
Avoid Journals that Consistently Reject Your Papers

Temporarily avoid journals that always reject you. The editor remembers bad comments about your papers.

Wait until a new editor is appointed.

If you think there is prejudice on the basis of sex, race, or nationality, you may use initials instead of spelling out your first and middle names.

First and middle names, as well as last name, often reveal the sex, race, or nationality of the authors.

You may write your full name after the paper is accepted.