

How to respond to reviewer comments – the CALM way

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Revising your manuscript doesn't have to be stressful



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More than likely, you've had one eye trained on your inbox for weeks, willing an acceptance notice to come sailing in. Your submission was brilliant – well written, novel – one could say...perfect! You went over every data point, checked every figure and poured hours into polishing the text before submission.

The revise and resubmit notice comes as a complete shock! How could the reviewers not love your brilliant data commentary? Maybe they just didn't understand it...after all, it was a totally ingenious interpretation.

This is a normal reaction for a fledgling researcher. Supervisors are often so busy that the process of submission and revision is something of a mystery when starting out. Receiving criticism and defending your research takes practice. It also requires a "CALM" approach.

Here are four simple tips to help you respond to reviewers' comments and fast track your paper for a positive decision!

C: *Comprehend* (keep your cool!)

When the decision letter arrives, read over the comments...Take time to understand the reviewers' feedback and consider what they are asking you to do. You will be given a time frame for the revisions so don't succumb to the pressure to reply immediately.

While you should be mindful to return your revisions with a timely response, allow yourself a while to process the comments before looking over them again the following day. By letting some time pass, you give yourself the opportunity to let your emotions subside, important for preventing an impulsive and heated response, which you would undoubtedly regret later.

A: Answer (amend or advocate!)

One of the functions of peer review is to encourage you - the author - to deliver stronger, more robust research. Think of the process as an opportunity to improve your manuscript, which will increase the likelihood that it will be useful to other researchers. After allowing yourself a day to process the comments, switch gears into “answer mode”! This is the time to trust your natural analytical processing skills.

Keep in mind that the editor of a journal will receive your comments and may forward them on to reviewers. Your responses should be polite and objective, balancing the line between being concise and complete. There is no space for ego in your response. Start by thanking the reviewers for identifying the weaknesses in your paper and providing you the opportunity to strengthen your research prior to publication.

The art of well-mannered rebuttal can be difficult to grasp but there is nothing inherently wrong about disagreeing on some of the reviewers’ points. Postulate your counter argument with a polite and sound response backed up with evidence to support your position.

L: List (make a list...check it twice!)

One of the best ways to ensure that you cover all the reviewers’ comments is to create a list. Reviewers shouldn’t have to re-read your whole manuscript again, combing it for your changes.

Organise your responses by listing each of the reviewers’ comments and addressing each one separately below. Resist the trap of lazy responses like “answered” or “fixed in manuscript”. Be clear about how you responded (copy and paste the updated text below the reviewers’ comments) and state where this fits into the manuscript (with a page and line number). This practice allows the editor to easily see that you have taken all the reviewers’ comments on board and evaluate your response to each of their concerns.

M: Mindful (make it easy for the editor – they will appreciate it!)

Editors are busy people, so be mindful of this! Being organised when you resubmit your manuscript allows the revision process to run smoothly and efficiently. Your resubmission should contain four things:

1. *Cover letter*

A brief and polite cover letter addressed to the editor should accompany your resubmission. Generally written by the corresponding author, your cover letter should include your manuscript details and a brief statement to note the resubmission. A sincere thanks to the editor for the opportunity to improve and resubmit your manuscript is also a nice touch.

2. *List of responses*

Include the list that you created with each of the reviewers' comments and your response. This list not only paints you as an organised, methodical researcher, but also makes it easier for the editor to reassess your manuscript.

3. *Track changes document*

Return your revised manuscript with your revisions highlighted. Use a tool like Microsoft Word's "track changes" feature (or something similar) to illustrate how and where your revised manuscript has been changed. This is the easiest way to show the editor that you have indeed made all the changes you listed!

4. *Clean version*

Submit a "clean" version of your manuscript to show your work in its final form. This file is usually uploaded as the "manuscript" file and allows the editor to read your work without the distraction of marked-up detail, ensuring that it is ready for production.

Revising your manuscript doesn't have to be stressful. If you remember to stay "CALM" and keep your cool, you will give yourself the best chance of having your work published. Good luck!

Contributors



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Catherine Carnovale is a newcomer to the Elsevier team, after joining STM publishing in 2018. Based in Amsterdam, she works as a Publisher on the computer science portfolio after stepping out of the lab from a postdoctoral position in Italy. Catherine holds a PhD in applied physics from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia for her

research in nanobiotechnology. In her spare time, she reads a lot of scientific journals (which she finds highly relaxing since leaving her own research), and enjoys cooking in her tiny apartment in Amsterdam.

[Read more from Catherine Carnovale](#)



Our nation's public research universities have an obligation to broaden access to research-grade higher education at scales with significant social impact.

Prof Michael M Crow, PhD
President
Arizona State University

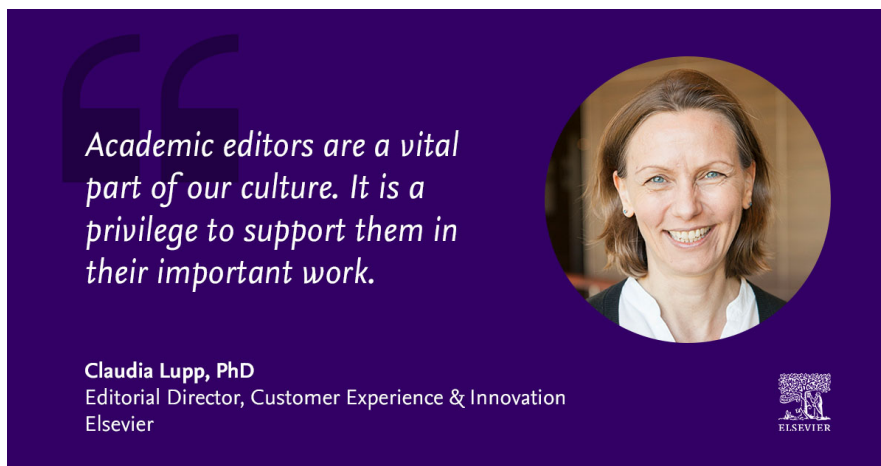


Opinion

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Michael M Crow, PhD

June 22, 2022 9 mins



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Claudia Lupp, PhD
Editorial Director, Customer Experience & Innovation
Elsevier



Opinion

Working with a team of 100,000

Claudia Lupp, PhD

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Interview

President of Brazilian Publishers Association on AI legislation and other unique challenges

Zoe Genova

May 24, 2022 A few minutes

Comments
