


Career Development Series 2022

Responding to Reviewer Comments: Turning Your Manuscript into a Great Publication

Presentation will begin at 12:00 PM (PT)



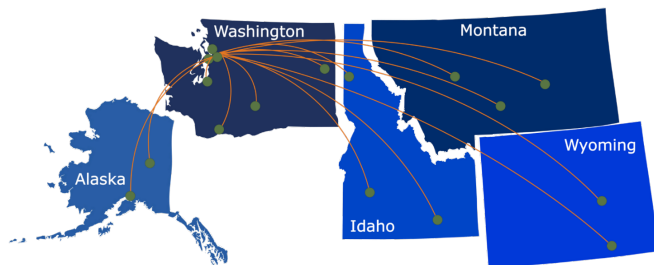
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What We Offer:

- 1 Research Support Services:** Members gain access to the different research services, resources, and tools offered by ITHS, including the ITHS Research Navigator.
- 2 Community Engagement:** Members can connect with regional and community based practice networks
- 3 Education & Training:** Members can access a variety of workforce development and mentoring programs and apply for formal training programs.
- 4 Funding:** Members can apply for local and national pilot grants and other funding opportunities. ITHS also offers letters of support for grant submissions.

Contact ITHS

Director of Research Development



- Project Consultation
- Strategic Direction
- Resources and Networking

Melissa D. Vaught, Ph.D.
ithsnav@uw.edu
206.616.3875

Scientific Success Committee

- Clinical Trials Consulting
- Guidance on Study Design, Approach and Implementation
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<https://www.iths.org/investigators/services/clinical-trials-consulting/>

Upcoming Career Development Series 2022

**Feb. 9, 2022 – Increasing Discoverability and Transparency:
ClinicalTrials.gov and Your Professional Profile**

**Feb. 16, 2022 – Establish and Navigate a Research Career:
Forging Your Own Path and Expecting the Unexpected**

March 2022 – TBC



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Feedback

At the end of the seminar, a link to the feedback survey
will be sent to the email address you used to register.

Career Development Series 2022

Responding to Reviewer Comments: Turning Your Good Manuscript into a Great Publication

William R. Phillips, MD, MPH



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Clinical Prof of Epidemiology
Clinical Prof of Health Services
University of Washington



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Learning Objectives

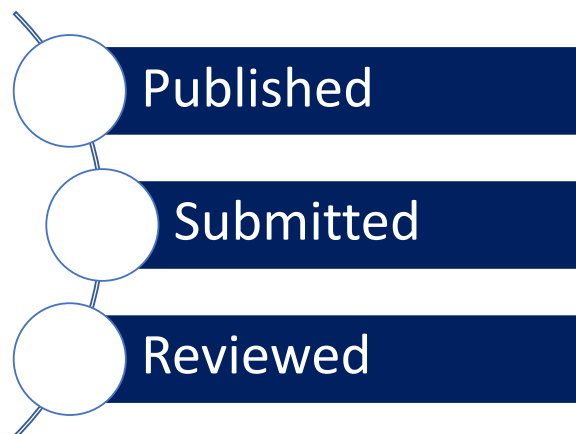
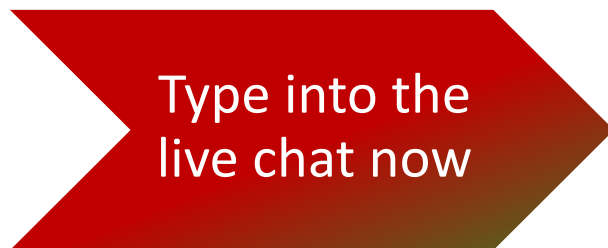
At the end of the session, participants will:

- 1 Identify key decision points in how to proceed with a rejected manuscript.
- 2 Have a template to structure responses to reviewer comments and editor concerns.
- 3 Outline strategies to solve problems posed by reviewer comments.

Disclosures

- 1 I have no competing interests connected with this presentation.
- 2 I discuss no commercial products or services.
- 3 I discuss no experimental or non-approved uses of treatments.

Your Experience with Journals?



Experience



Experience

Editor - *Annals of Family Medicine*

Editorial Boards

Current

BMJ – North America
J Royal Society of Medicine

Past

American Family Physician
Annals of Family Medicine
Family Practice Management
Journal of Family Practice

Regular Reviewer

Annals of Family Medicine
Annals of Internal Medicine
Am J Public Health
Am J Preventive Medicine
Australian J Primary Health
Canadian Family Physician
J Am Board of Family Medicine
JAMA, JAMA-Open
J General Internal Medicine
Journal of Family Practice
The Lancet
Medical Care
MedEdPORTAL
NEJM
Patient Education & Counseling
Spine

Quick Poll 1 - Discipline

Which best describes your field of study?

- Behavioral or social sciences
- Biomedical sciences
- Clinical research
- Public health sciences
- Health services, organization, systems
- Other

Quick Poll 2 – Research Role

Which most closely reflects your role/title?

- Administrator or Manager
- Faculty Member or Instructor
- Graduate or Professional Student
- Postdoctoral or Clinical Fellow
- Research Scientist
- Other

Session Outline

- Rejection prevention
- Framing rejection as an opportunity
- Choosing response to the editor decision letter
- Revising your manuscript
- Responding to editor guidance
- Responding to reviewer comments
- Resubmission process and letter
- Meeting special challenges

Rejection Prevention

Previous
Work
shops

- Know your audience
- Target journal
- Author team
- Report writing



What is Your Goal?

- Accept in current form
- Accept with minor revisions
- Cannot accept in current form but would consider a revised form of this manuscript.
- Reject

Quick Poll 3 – Acceptance

➤ Have you had a research report **accepted without revision** by your initial target journal?

- Yes
- No
- Not yet submitted

What is Your Goal?

Get peer reviews back on your ms

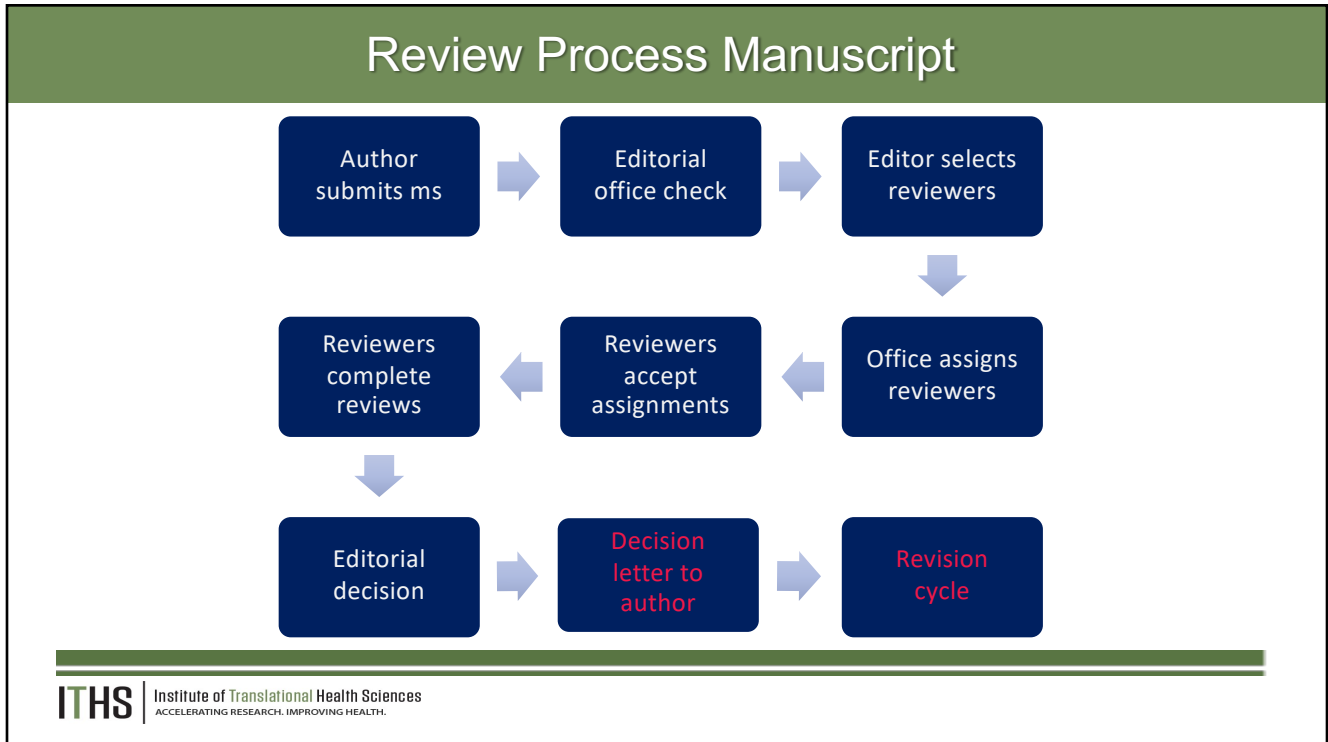
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What is Your Goal?

“We cannot accept your manuscript in its current form but would consider a revised form of this manuscript.”

SHOT ON GOAL!

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Relationship with the editor

Reviewers recommend.

Editors decide.

Editor wants to meet the needs
of journal readers.

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Editors' Criteria

Three Key Questions

Is it new?

Is it true?

Is it useful?

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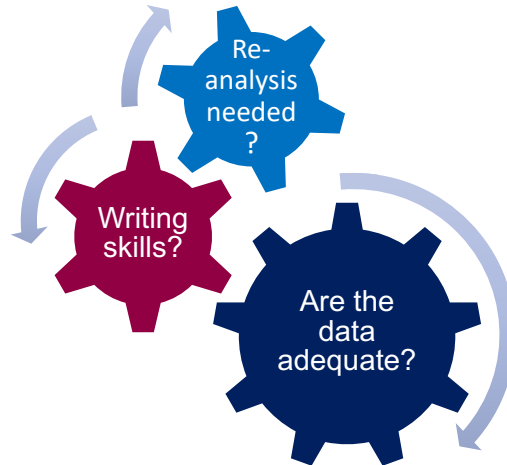
Editors' Judgement

Can this report make it over our bar?
Height of the bar can change over time.

Can these authors carry it over the bar?
Do these authors have the study design, data, and communication skills to craft a final paper that will serve our readers?

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Editor's Decision - Revise or Reject?



Editors Decisions

Accept in current form

Accept with minor revisions

Cannot accept in current form but
would consider a revised ms.

Reject

Editor Choices

Forward to a “daughter journal.”

Send us a different paper.

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Author Choices

Revise & resubmit – same journal.

Revise & resubmit – different journal.

Use reviewer and editor suggestions.

Decision of your author team.

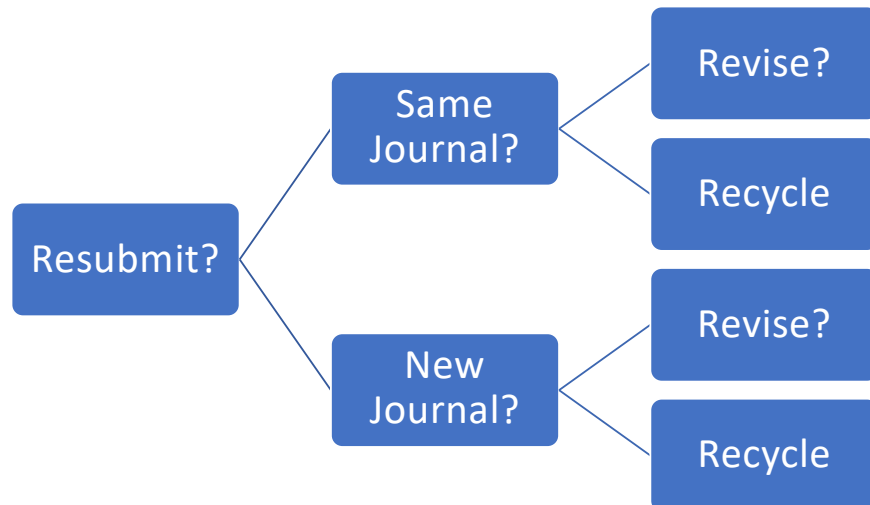
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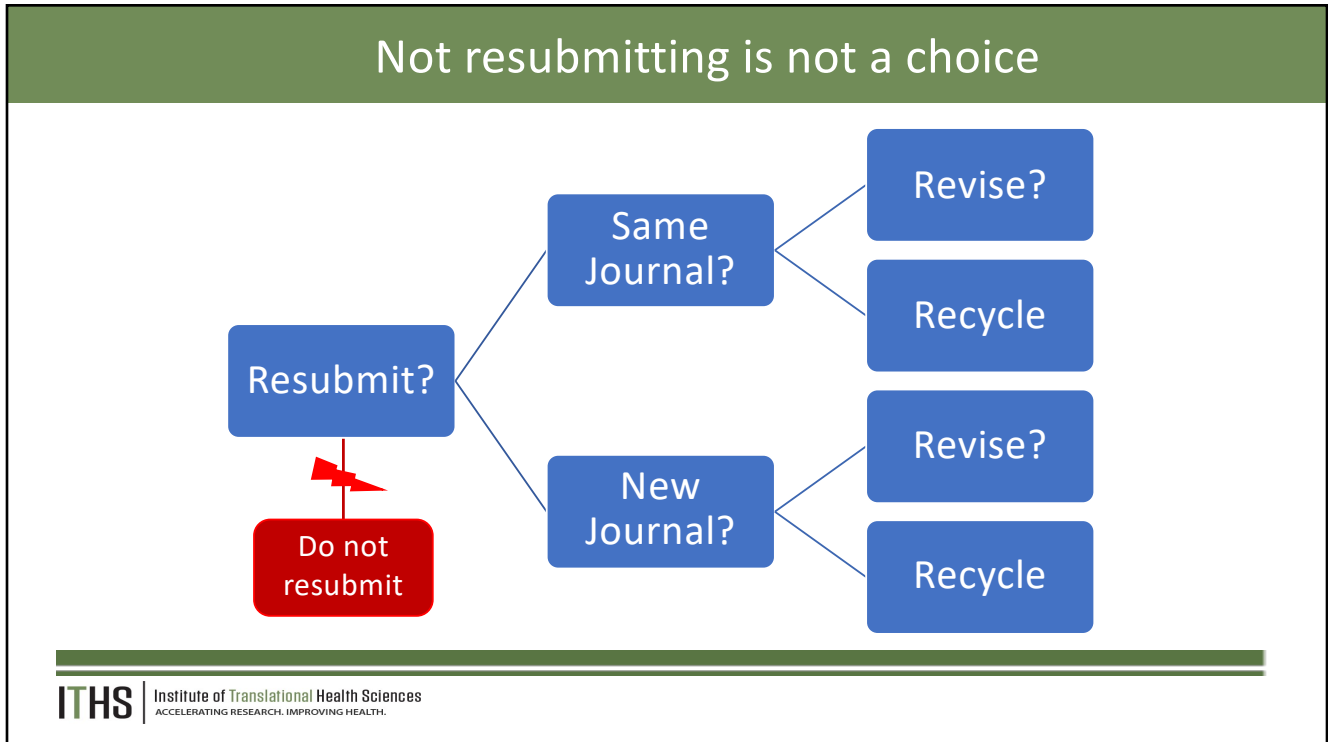
Quick Poll 4 – Rejection

➤ Have you had a research report **rejected** from your initial target journal?

- Yes
- No
- Not yet submitted

Author Choices





Where Research Goes to Die

Bottom drawer of the desk
=
Black Hole of research

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Viewpoint | [Published: 03 January 2022](#)

Publicatus Interruptus: An Endemic Syndrome Disabling Research and Researchers

[William R. Phillips MD, MPH](#)

[Journal of General Internal Medicine](#) (2022) | [Cite this article](#)

Phillips, W.R. Publicatus Interruptus: An Endemic Syndrome Disabling Research and
Researchers. *J GEN INTERN MED*. 03 January 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-021-07291-6>

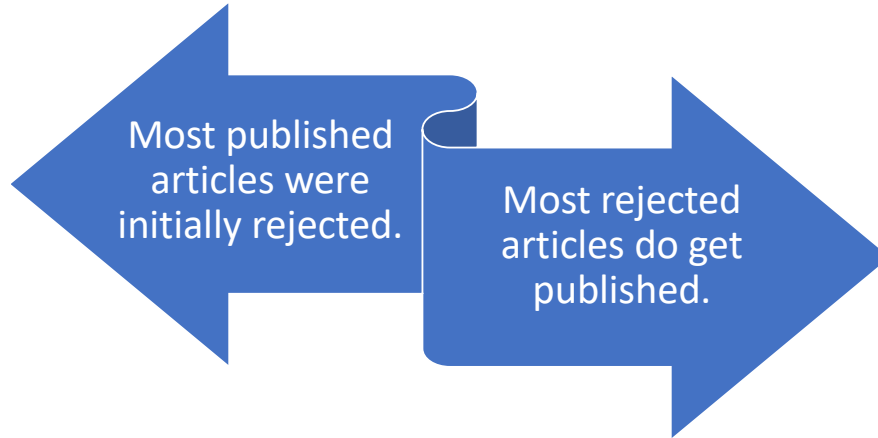


Only reasons to “retire” a manuscript

- Publication does not meet your team goals.
- Findings and conclusions are no longer valid.
- Data are too long out of date.
- Multiple reasonable target journals have rejected it for good reasons.



All Investigators Face Rejection



Same Journal vs. New Journal?

- Consider alternative target journals.
- Match your findings to journal audience.
- Amount of work required for revision.
 - Is stat consultation and/or reanalysis needed?
 - Can the requested analysis be done with the data you have?
 - Theoretical reframing?

Would the revised piece be
close enough to your goals?

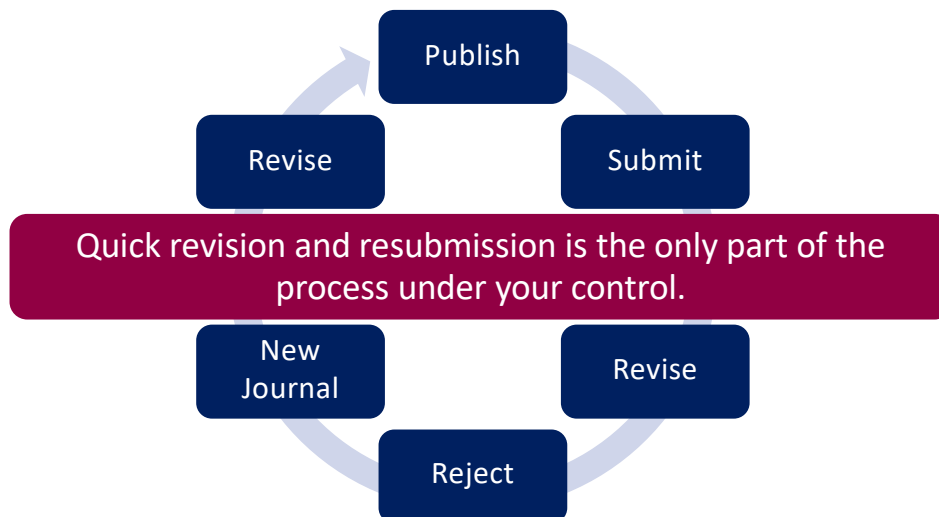
Rejection with Opportunity to Resubmit



The desired outcome.

- Is **not** a rejection.
- Is required for almost all manuscripts that are eventually accepted and published.
- Deserves serious thought.
If one journal rejected it, there are likely issues that would be apparent to another journal.

Every Cycle Makes Your Report Stronger

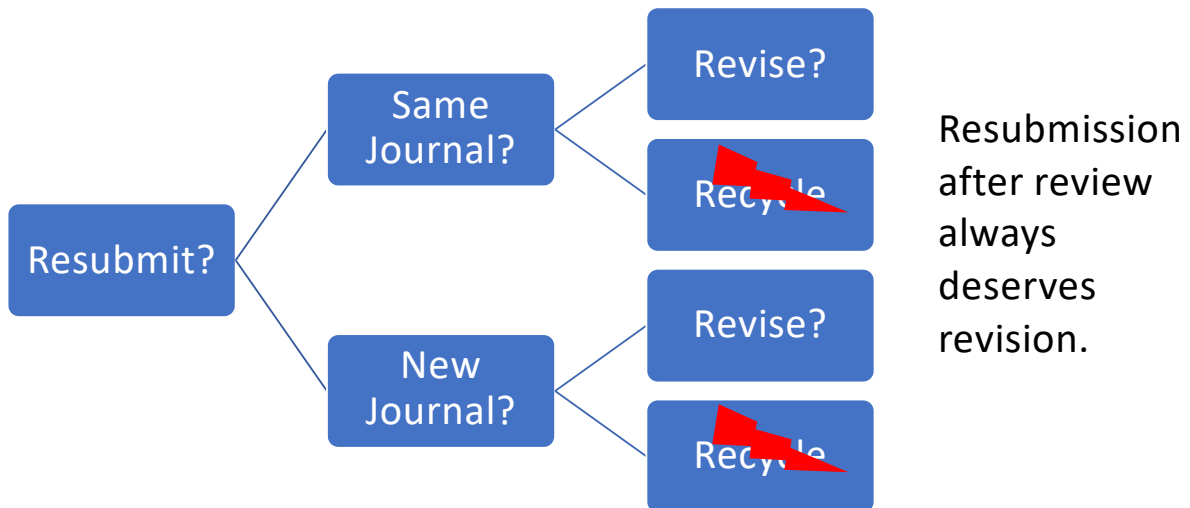


Revise and Resubmit

- Is a learning journey.
- Should be a team effort.
- Is an opportunity to make your paper a more effective report of your research.

You are now working with the editors to make your paper the best it can be.

Author Choices



Interpret the Editor's Decision Letter

Read editors' decision letter for:

- Degree of interest in your work
- Guide to what to focus on in reviews
- Editors' specific instructions

If you are confused about the requested changes, ask the editor by e-mail.

Use the editor's letter
as a guide to your revision.

Case 1

You submit your original research report to your target journal near the limit of 2,800 words. The editor gets generally positive reviews but rejects your manuscript. She invites you to resubmit it as a brief report 800 with with max. 1 table. Reviewers offer several specific suggestions for revision.

➤ **What next?**

Case 1

You submit your original research report to your target journal near the limit of 2,800 words. The editor gets generally positive reviews but rejects your manuscript. She invites you to resubmit it as a brief report 800 with with max. 1 table. Reviewers offer several specific suggestions for revision.

1. **Decide:** This journal in short form or try another journal.
2. **Factors:** Your goals, key message, best alternative journals?
3. Can you cleave off a second report?
4. Consider reviewer suggestions in any event.

Responding to Reviewer Comments

- Attend to every comment from every reviewer.
- Organize it so editor is confident you have done the work.
- Present your changes and locate them in revised text.
- Explain your reasoning at every step.
- Be courteous and thankful.

**Constructive review comments
deserve thankful author responses.**

Construct a Review Response Table

Rev No Com No	Reviewer Comment	Author Response
Editorial Staff	... we recommend introducing this concept in a more narrative format.	I have recast the entire piece as a Special Article, moving away from the IMRAD research format to a more narrative format with different structure, headings and tone.
Rev 1 Com 1	The strength of this report is its description of key questions to ask one's protégé, and the transcript of one interview, illustrating the path from general interest to a narrower question.	I kept the tables summarizing the interview questions, example interview and research themes elicited by the P3 interview method.
Rev 1 Com 2	I recommend moving paragraph 1 of the evaluation section to the top of the Methods section. Subtitle this paragraph as "Subjects" or "Participants".	Done. I changed the subheadings from METHODS to P3 MENTORING PROCESS and from RESULTS to P3 MENTORING EXPERIENCE, and moved this paragraph to an earlier position under P3 MENTORING EXPERIENCE.
Rev 1 Com 3	Given the author's long-term relationship with these protégés, I anticipated that "success" of this process would be defined by the successful completion of a research project	I added a new section <u>MENTORING OUTCOMES</u> , where I discuss outcomes by a variety of measure for both mentors and mentees.
Rev 1 Com 4	This paper is written in the traditional IMRAD format, but it would also work as an essay.	I have recast the entire piece as a Special Article, moving away from the IMRAD research format to a more narrative format as requested by Editors and reviewers 1 and 2.

Interpreting Reviewer Comments

- Consider how to use each comment to improve your report.
- Even wrong comments point to reader confusion.
- Some reviewers want a different study and report.
- Not all reviews are equal or even helpful.
- You and the editor choose which suggestions you follow.

It is still *your* paper.

Author Response Options

1. We agree and revised our text/table as suggested. See:
2. We considered this suggestion but decided not make any change.
3. We believe the reviewer misinterpreted the point and we have revised the paper for clarification.

You do not need to make every change,
but you *do* need to respond to every comment.

More Response Options

1. We understand the reviewer concern and addressed it by making the following changes.
2. This is similar to the point raised by reviewer #1 and we have already addressed both by changes noted above. See xyz.
3. Following other suggestions, we have removed/recast this section of the report. This concern no longer applies.



If You Decide to Make No Change

You need to explain your rationale.

- Change would not improve the paper.
- Change is not feasible. (Discuss in limitations.)
- We checked that out and it doesn't make a difference.
- Good idea but beyond the scope of this paper.

The bottom line is helping the readers.

Challenge: When Reviewers Disagree

- Look to the editors' letter as a guide.
- Do what makes the paper work better for the reader.
- Point out the conflict in your resubmittal letter.
- Tell the editors why you made the choices you did.

Challenge: Make it Shorter – Why

- The shorter the report, the greater the impact.
- Tighter text is brighter text.
- Editing forces authors to -
 - focus the message.
 - tighten the logic.

Challenge: Make it Shorter – How

- Trim wordiness one sentence at a time.
- You can't cut 100's of words without removing sections of text.
- Cut out words, phrases and information which don't advance the central thrust of the paper.
- Have outsiders read the paper with a red pen and an eye toward excision.
- "You have to be willing to kill your darlings."
- Consider a professional editor.

Immersiopia

matched control group. Significant improvement for the experimental group was noted for time needed to learn words on a printed page, timed reading scores, length of time for sustained reading, and span of recall, as well as other perceptual tasks. Additionally, seven of the 23 experimental group was employed by the end of the semester.

In contrast, Winters (1957) was unable to find differences in his study. Winters gave 15 elementary school children four minutes to locate and circle 66 examples of the letter 'b' on three pages, each page of which contained 660 random letters in 20 lines of

Challenge: Add and Shorten

Add content without adding net words to the text.

- Tighten the text.
- Move some text to tables.
- Add electronic appendixes.
- Split some content into a separate report.

Focus the report on your **main** message.
Your goal is not to tell the story of your research.

Resubmittal Letter - Content

- Make your letter a roadmap that connects the reviewer comments to your revised version.
- List or summarize each editor and reviewer concern.
- Tell the editor how you responded to each.
- Respond to positive as well as critical comments.
- If you made major changes, comment on the overall effect on the paper.

Make it easy for the editors
to see what you did and why.

Resubmittal Letter - Form

- Watch your tone carefully, to both editors and reviewers.
Be courteous, respectful and firm.
- Thank editors and reviewers for their insightful comments.
Explain how they helped you improve the paper for the journal's readers.
- Offer to make more changes if the editor sees room for more improvement.
- Consider getting a review of your letter.



Resubmittal Letter - DOs

DO

- Exhibit respect, thanks, open-mindedness.
- Explain your decisions in terms of what will help most readers.
- Use positive, not negative language.
- Sound active, not passive.

Resubmittal Letter – DON'Ts

DO NOT

- Sound angry, annoyed, or superior.
- Be short or dismissive.
- Criticize the reviewer.
- Ignore or dodge major concerns.

Resubmittal Letter – Consider

CONSIDER

- Offer a choice to the editor.
- Show data in your response.
- Cite literature in your response.

Resubmittal Letter – Wording

“We considered that approach and concluded that....”

“We now address that issue in....”

“That insightful question is important but addressing it would be beyond the scope of this study.”

“We have followed the suggestion of Reviewer 1, which conflicts with this suggestion, as we believe.... (See above 1.4.)”

**Your resubmittal letter might be longer
than the manuscript itself.**

Resubmittal Letter – Thankful Wording

Thanks for your careful reading of our paper.

Positive Adjective	Reviewer Contribution
careful	reading
thoughtful	review
helpful	suggestion
insightful	question

Resubmittal Letter – Active Wording

We considered your X and added Y.

Responsive Verb	Revision Action
considered	added
responded	changed
balanced	edited
elected	expanded

Challenge: Appeal the Editorial Decision

- Appeals are accepted but reversal is rare.
- If you feel your paper was misunderstood, respectfully present your case.
- Editors do not necessarily agree with or base their decision on all the reviewer comments.
- Recognize the decision may reflect:
 - confidential reviewer comments.
 - other considerations: space, fit, variety, novelty, etc.

Resubmit Your Manuscript

- Re-check IFA – Information for Authors.
- Re-read the whole thing again.
- Get outsiders to read and critique it.
- Ask for honest feedback and follow it.
- Update content, refs, counts.
- Appreciate how your revised paper is a better paper.

Case 2

You resubmit your manuscript after multiple revisions. The editor sends it back again and asks for even more extensive revisions that would require a lot more work. Reviewer comments are not clear and the editor did not specify which changes are needed.

➤ What next?

Case 2

You resubmit your manuscript after multiple revisions. The editor sends it back again and asks for even more extensive revisions that would require a lot more work. Reviewer comments are not clear and editor did not specify which changes are needed.

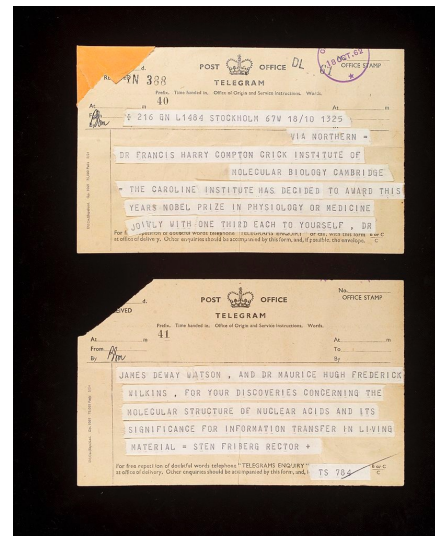
1. Decide: Invest more work or cut losses and send to another journal.
2. Thank the editor and reviewer for their extra consideration.
3. Email the editor to understand what she wants to see.
4. Clarify to the editor the message and purpose of your report and explain how the requested changes would take it off track or beyond the scope.

What is Your Final Goal?

“We are happy to accept your manuscript for publication.”

SCORE!

Building Academic Skills



YOUR QUESTIONS?

Who are the most difficult reviewers?



Type into the
live chat now

Questions - Discussion

How do you handle your emotional response to rejection?

In your experience, who are the most difficult reviewers?

How has revising a ms helped you be a better reviewer?

How has revising a ms helped you be a better researcher?

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Thank You!

William R. Phillips, MD, MPH
wphllps@uw.edu

Feedback Survey

A link to the feedback survey has been sent to the email address you used to register.

Please get out your device, find that email, and spend a few moments completing that survey before you leave today.

Tip: If on a mobile device, shift view to landscape view (sideways) for better user experience.