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Gender Equity Project Sponsorship Program Workshop Successful Publishing and Handling Rejection

Handling Journal Articles That Receive a Revise-and-Resubmit or Rejection Decision

The facts

- **Rejection happens to everyone (senior authors are no exception).**
- Very few articles are accepted without requests for revision.
- Most articles are eventually published somewhere. There are relatively few articles that are so fundamentally flawed that they can't be published anywhere.
- Each submission – decision cycle can take from 3 – 6 months.
- The major reason papers are rejected is that they have not been submitted to the appropriate journal.
- Although your first try should be the journal with the highest impact factor that is also appropriate for your article, do not try to publish only in top tier journals. Getting the article published is also important.

Tips on submitting your article

- Reduce the likelihood of rejection by selecting an appropriate journal at the outset. Seek the advice of senior and knowledgeable colleagues to find a journal that is most appropriate for your article.
- Each professional journal has its own mission. Look at the most recent issues in considering topical appropriateness.
- Submit only to journals that are refereed.
- Read the instructions to authors carefully. Use exactly the reference format requested, if the journal uses paper copies submit exactly the number of copies requested, honor the requests to remove identification for blind review, and so on.
- Before submitting, give your article both to someone familiar with your research area and to someone who is not. The former can provide technical advice, while the latter can determine whether your ideas are being communicated clearly.

Handling feedback from the editor and reviewers

- Read and fully understand the feedback given by the reviewers.
 - Ask a trusted colleague to review the reviews with you. You want to figure out how to deal with the comments and whether resubmission to the same journal is feasible.
 - Write your own summary of the reviews, categorizing the comments.

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- For example, divide comments into those that are *minor and (relatively) easy to fix* (such as requests for more details about methods or analyses) and those that are *major* (such as flaws that undermine the conclusion or theoretical limitations).
- Determine how much additional work you will have to do to satisfy the reviewers. If it is a great deal of work, think about aiming for a lower-impact journal.

Types of responses

- **Acceptance**

- Acceptance on the first round with only minor requests for revision is exceptionally rare.
- A provisional acceptance pending minor changes is also rare on the first round. Make sure you understand the changes wanted by the editor. If the changes are not clear, ask the editor for clarification.

- **Revise and resubmit**

- If you have chosen the journal wisely and if your work is methodologically sound, this is the most likely response.
- Review the comments with your co-authors or with trusted colleagues, or both.
- Do resubmit your paper. You can't get published if you don't resubmit.
- Address all substantive comments made by reviewers.
- The revision should be accompanied by a letter indicating where the changes have or have not occurred.
 - This letter is very important. You must set the stage by thanking the reviewers and editor for their constructive and helpful suggestions. Err on the side of obsequiousness.
 - Your tone must be friendly and assured.
 - Do not impugn the knowledge or ability of the reviewers, unless their performance has been egregious.
- If you have not followed every suggestion, detail your reasons.
- Think of strategies to deal with seemingly intractable problems. Sometimes large problems can be finessed. For example, you can acknowledge the limitations of your study or research. Use recently published papers as a guide. As another example, you can restrict the scope of your claims or put them forward as a conjecture or hypothesis.
- Do not assume that your paper, with all the suggested modifications, will be published upon resubmission. Sometimes reviewers see additional problems that were not visible the first time around.
- Be prepared to receive another revise-and-resubmit response.

- **Rejection**

- It is very difficult to read a rejection letter objectively when it is first received. Wait at least 24 hours before reading the letter.

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- Review the comments with your co-authors or with trusted colleagues, or both.
- Read the rejection letter very carefully to see whether the paper has been definitively rejected or whether there is a chance of resubmission after revisions
- Submit the paper to a different journal, which will usually be a lower-tier journal.
- Address the suggestions made by reviewers even if you are submitting the rejected article to another journal. If you feel that bad reviews are given because of the bias of a reviewer (who may be a rival), you can ask in the cover letter to the editor for specific people not to be asked to review the paper. But be careful with this.
- Comments are sometimes hostile and sometimes they pass beyond the realm of genuine constructive criticism. The best thing to do after reading them is to put the manuscript aside for the next day in order to release your anger.

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