



# How to Respond to Reviewer Comments

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# About Me

## Mikyoung Lee, PhD

### Education

- PhD, Educational Psychology, University of Munich, Germany
- PhD, Science of Nursing, Chonnam National University
- MA, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), Sookmyung Women's University
- BA, Science of Nursing, Yonsei University

### Research & Work Experiences

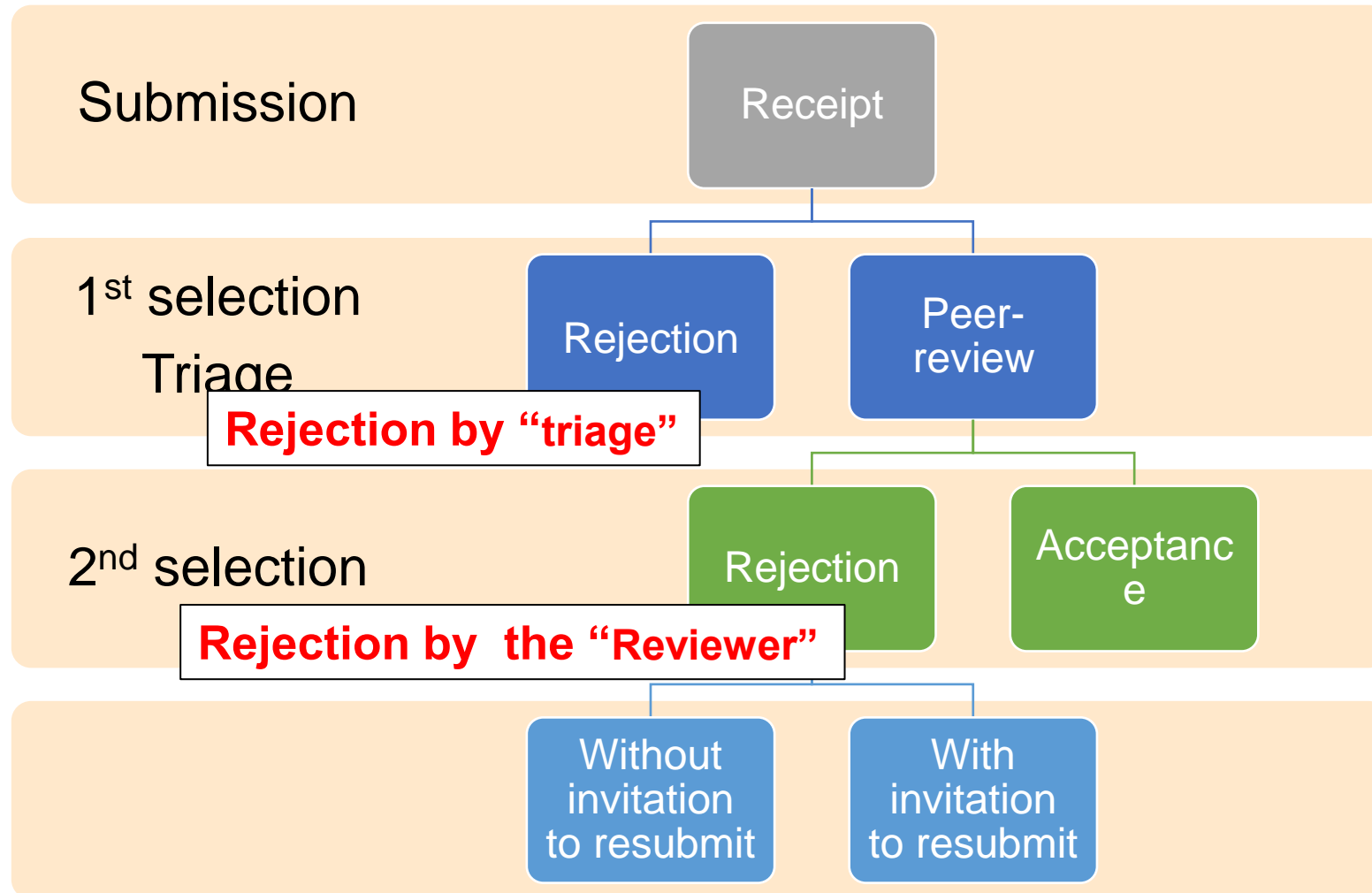
- Assistant Professor, Nursing Department, Kwangju Women's University
- Guest Researcher, Educational Psychology, University of Munich, Germany
- Research Committee Chair, Korea TESOL (대한영어교육학회)
- Editorial Board member, Journal of Korea TESOL
- Academic Trainer & Consultant, Editage
- Research Project, National Research Foundation of Korea (한국연구재단)
- Research Project, Bio-medical Research Institute, Chonnam National Univ. Hospital
- Former Visiting Scholar, Educational Psychology, University of Texas (UTSA), USA
- Published papers in international & domestic venues (SCI/E, SSCI, SCOPUS, KCI)



# Workshop Outline

1. Peer Review Process
2. Manuscript Revision
3. Do's & Don'ts
4. Practical Tips

# Stages of consideration



# 1. Peer Review Process

# Peer review and editorial decision making at journals

What is a **peer review** process?

→ essentially a quality control mechanism by which experts evaluate scholarly works and ensure the high quality of published science.



# Who decides the fate of your manuscript?

- Peer reviewers do not make the decision to accept or reject papers. At the most, they recommend a decision.
- At peer-reviewed journals, decision-making authority rests solely with journal editors or the journal's editorial board.



## 5 standard decisions

1. Reject outright without review
2. Reject outright following review
3. Accept, but only after major revisions
4. Accept, but only after minor revisions
5. Accept outright

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1. Reject outright without review
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**Requires writing a response**

# We've all been there

Date : 2017-10-12 (Thu) 16:55:09

Subject : eLife decision: 08-10-2017-ISRA-eLife-32613

Dear Prof. Kim,

Thank you for choosing to send your work, "Distinct Sec translocon components dynamically decode signal sequences for initiating the ER translocation in yeast", for consideration at eLife. Your initial submission has been assessed by a Senior Editor in consultation with a member of the Board of Reviewing Editors. Although the work is of interest, we regret to inform you that the findings at this stage are too preliminary for further consideration at eLife.

Specifically, the paper describes the yeast ER translocation system with a series of CPY constructs that vary in the length of their signal peptide N-domains. The authors find that longer N-domains slow the rate of translocation, and this deficiency can be rescued by

increasing the length of the N-domain to 1, or

Sec72. In addition, the relevant study results suggest that, in the context of the present, the analysis to explain the results of the study is not sufficient to support the conclusion in the manuscript.

a more detailed analysis of the results is required to support the conclusion in the manuscript.

Please note that this decision is final. This means that the manuscript will not be considered for publication in eLife. We do not have the option to resubmit the manuscript. We hope you will understand the decision.

Best wishes,

# We've all been there

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Dear Prof. Kim,

Thank you for choosing to send your work, "Distinct Sec translocon components dynamically decode signal sequences for initiating the ER translocation in yeast", for consideration at eLife. Your initial submission has been assessed by a Senior Editor in consultation

As such, the study is mostly of interest to specialists in this field, and publication in a more specialized venue is recommended.

Please note that we aim to publish articles with a single round of revision that would typically be accomplished within two months. This means that work that has potential, but in our judgment would need extensive additional work, will not be considered for in-depth review. We do not intend any criticism of the quality of the data or the rigor of the science. We wish you good luck with your work and we hope you will consider eLife for future submissions.

Best wishes,

## 2. Manuscript Revision

# Manuscript revision

1. Go through responses very carefully a couple of times
2. Classify responses into major and minor revisions
3. Think about how you will address the responses
4. Carry out the necessary experiments and make textual changes
5. Prepare a detailed response letter

# When writing the response letter

1. Copy-paste each reviewer comment
  2. Type your response below each one  
(point-by-point responses)
    - State the specific changes you made to the manuscript
    - Include page/line numbers
    - Avoid making general comments
- “Comment accepted” “Discussion changed accordingly”

# Sample: Start of the response letter

Date

Dr. Robert Smith  
Editor-in-Chief  
*XYZ Journal*

Dear Dr. Smith:

I would like to re-submit the attached manuscript entitled "**Name of the journal.**"

|

The manuscript has been carefully rechecked and appropriate changes have been made in accordance with the reviewers' suggestions. I used the Track Changes mode in Microsoft Word in the manuscript, and added some marginal "Comment" pointers as well. I am grateful for the reviewers' excellent comments and believe the manuscript is much stronger as a result.

The responses to their comments have been prepared and attached herewith.

In addition, I added four figures in this manuscript, which should have been included in the first manuscript. In the previous manuscript, I referred to these figures in the text, but mistakenly omitted them. I am sorry for this mistake. Because I referred to these figures in the previous manuscript, they are not new content. I believe the inclusion of these figures increased the clarity and impact of the manuscript. I request these figures be added.

I thank you and the reviewers for your thoughtful suggestions and insights, which have enriched the manuscript and produced a more balanced and better account of the research. I hope that the revised manuscript is now suitable for publication in your journal.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Your name

Contact address  
Telephone number  
Email:



## ✧ Write a summary paragraph

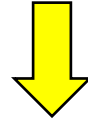
- Explain the extensive changes you have made in response to the reviewers' comments.
- Explain whether your changes affect the original interpretation of your findings.
- Address any specific major issues raised by the editorial staff.

The most substantial revision concerns the length of the manuscript. Following the reviewer's advice, I have pared down the length 25% from 65 pages to 49 pages. This was accomplished primarily by: (1) eliminating two redundant traits (leaf area and total leaf area) which shortens Tables 2 and 4 and eliminates Figures 8 and 9, (2) presenting the information in Figures 5-7 in table format, (3) cutting Table 1 and referring the reader to the companion manuscript, (4) cutting Table 4 and including the heritabilities in Table 2, and (5) moving the information of Table 5 into the text. In addition, I have rewritten parts of the paper to provide more clarity (see specifics outlined below).

# How to end a response letter

- Avoid presumptions.

"We have now made all the corrections requested by the reviewers and we expect that our manuscript will be accepted without further ado!"



"We look forward to hearing from you in due time regarding our submission and are happy to respond to any further questions and comments you may have."

# 3. Do's & Don'ts



## DO thank reviewers

- Thank reviewers for good suggestions
  - “Thank you for your comments” at the beginning of your response.
  - If the reviewers have made an especially thoughtful suggestion that adds substantial depth and impact to your findings, thank them for it.
- But sentences like “We are grateful for this (valuable/insightful/kind) comment” or “Thank you for this comment” at the beginning of all individual comments fails to respect the reviewers as peers.



## DO thank reviewers

Dear Editor:

I am pleased to resubmit for publication the revised version of MS#03-375 “Evolutionary potential of *Chamaecrista fasciculata* in relation to climate change: II. Genetic architecture of three populations reciprocally planted along an environmental gradient in the Great Plains.” I appreciated the constructive criticisms of the Associate Editor and the reviewers. I have addressed each of their concerns as outlined below.

- “I am pleased to resubmit for publication the revised version of [manuscript ID] [title]...”
- “We appreciated the constructive criticisms...”
- “We appreciate the positive feedback from the reviewer.”



## DO be positive

- Use positive wording.
  - “We agree...”
  - “This is an excellent point”
- Try to acknowledge something that can be improved.
  - “We realize that the initial text may have been unclear”
  - “We acknowledge that more detail is needed...”
  - “This suggestion is valid...”
  - “However, as suggested by the reviewer, we have reviewed carefully the entire manuscript for...”



## DO be specific

- Be *very* specific.
- For example, for the comment ‘the discussion section is not clear’
  - ✗ “We changed the discussion section.”
  - ✓ “We changed the discussion section on page 24, lines 7-23.”



## DO disagree! As long as you can explain

- Disagreement is fine, but it's important you can back it up.
- If you disagree on some point, say so honestly, but respectfully, and support your statement with a rational, scientific explanation, citing references from the literature.
- Explaining why you disagree will help the reviewer and editor understand your point of view and ultimately help them make an informed decision about your paper.





## **DO disagree! As long as you can explain**

- Make it a factual response. Keep emotions out!
- Remember that reviewers
  - do not have the same expertise as you
  - are not always right
  - may ask for changes that are not possible
- Did reviewers misunderstand something?
  - Point out politely in response
  - Be open to revising text, even slightly to address reviewer comments; the reviewer may be wrong, but check if you are right.



## **DO cut down if the editor asks**

- Word count reductions may be sometimes requested upon acceptance.
- Editors often face the problem of shortage of space.



## **Don't** forget to make the changes

- One of the biggest mistakes made by authors is to respond to all the comments, but forget to actually update the paper.
- Always include line numbers in your changes.



## **Don't just submit the original version somewhere else**

- Some authors submit their paper to another journal without making any changes.
- Other journals may give a similar verdict.
- The new editor may send your paper to the same reviewers.
- Always address issues before resubmission!



## **Never** use responses against each other

- Sometimes reviewer comments may disagree with each other (conflict opinions).
- Which do you go with? Up to the author's discretion.
- But be clear in your response, provide a well-reasoned argument, and include references to changes you have made as supporting material.
- Alternatively, you could request the editor to give you a third opinion (It is the journal editor who will make the decision on how to handle the conflict).

## 4. Practical Tips

# Tip 1: Take a break!

- Initial irritation is only natural. Take time off and then read the comments again carefully and objectively to ensure that you have clearly understood the reviewer's concerns.
- Stay calm: Don't panic if you receive a few critical comments or many suggestions for revisions.

## Tip 2: Use manuscript line numbers

- Unless the journal tells you otherwise, you should use line numbers on your manuscript, so that you can refer specifically to the lines to explain where changes have been made.



## Tip 3: Give point-by-point responses

- Number the reviewers' points and respond to them sequentially. Use headings such as "Reviewer 1" then "Comment 1." This makes it easier for the editor/reviewers to follow what you have done.
- It is essential to address each and every point that the peer reviewer or the journal editor may have raised.

## Tip 4: Restate the reviewer's comments

- Reviewers will not recall the order in which the comments were written or the wording they used.
- Even if a reviewer has numbered his or her comments, do not simply write down “Comment 1” followed by a response. Restate the reviewer's comment.
- If the reviewers had similar comments, do not ask one reviewer to “see response to Reviewer 2,” or simply write “Comment 1: See response to comment 7 from Reviewer 1.”

## Tip 5: Pay attention to detail



- Details are important when explaining how you have addressed each concern.
- For example, if a reviewer has said that you need to include/re-interpret data, you can describe the tests you performed and the results you got and mention where you have added this information.
- You may be considerate and even paste the exact sentences that you have added or modified in the manuscript when following a reviewer's suggestion, since this can save the editor/reviewer the trouble of switching between files.

## Tip 6: Appreciate the reviewers' work

- Peer reviewers invest their own time in reviewing your manuscript, without pay. For the most part, their intention is to help authors improve their study.
- Take advantage of their advice. In fact, a long list of detailed comments from a reviewer usually means that the reviewer has spent time evaluating your study and providing constructive feedback. Be sure to thank the reviewer for their consideration and effort.

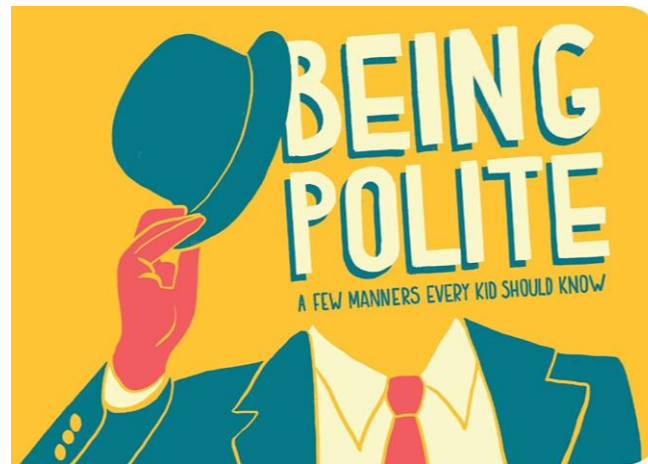
## Tip 7: Maintain the right tone in responses

- Don't respond to the reviewers' comments emotionally. This will reflect in the tone of your responses.
- Remember that the reviewers are critiquing your work, not you. So don't let your responses reflect any bitterness.
- Maintain a polite tone throughout, even if you disagree with the reviewers.

## Tip 8: Seek an opinion

- Consult your co-authors or a colleague who is familiar with your work and discuss the reviewers' comments with them.
- Brainstorming with your co-authors often gives you a different perspective on dealing with complex reviewer comments.

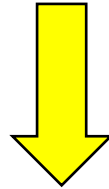
## ※ Ways to say 'NO' in a polite way



# Example sentences

## Scenario 1

The reviewer simply misunderstood or did not understand what we were trying to say.



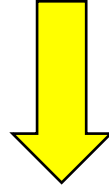
Several statements that we made were more ambiguous than intended, and we have adjusted the text to be clearer.



# Example sentences

## Scenario 2

The reviewer is a very picky editor and wants every single grammatical and formatting error be corrected.

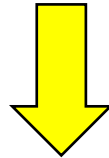


We apologize for this error, and we have corrected the text as suggested.

# Example sentences

## Scenario 3

The reviewer asks us a question that has never been asked.



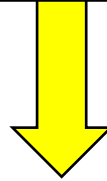
This is a valid question, and we are actively pursuing the answer in our lab.

This is a valid and important question, and we are curious what the results would be. However, we are unaware of any studies that provide the answer.

# Example sentences

## Scenario 4

The reviewer says our statement is ungrounded.



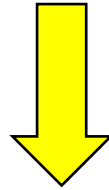
We agree that this explanation is speculative at this time, and we have edited the text to state that our conclusion is only suggested by our results.

*Note: you will need to make some changes to the text to further emphasize that you were stating a hypothesis.*

# Example sentences

## **Scenario 5**

The reviewer suggests an experiment that would take another 9 months.

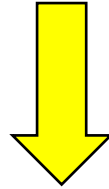


The suggested experiment is interesting and would provide additional information about..., but we feel that it falls outside the scope of this study.

# Example sentences

## Scenario 6

The reviewer seems not have commented without reading my manuscript thoroughly.



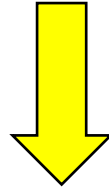
We did not intend to indicate [insert mistaken assertion by reviewer here], and we have therefore altered the text to specify that [insert correct conclusion here].

*Note: As before, you'll have to change some wording.*

# Example sentences

## Scenario 7

The reviewer criticizes the quality of the English of the manuscript.



Our manuscript has been reviewed by a colleague and revised to improve readability.

*Note: As before, you'll have to change some wording.*

# Example sentences

## Scenario 8

The reviewer suggests that there is more appropriate method that the authors should have used.

The reviewer has commented that we have used the wrong method to test for ABC. Although we agree with the reviewer that method X was the accepted method in the past, since method Y was introduced by White et al. (ref) this has become the standard, and so is now mentioned in research reports without further justification (as in the references cited in our paper). We have already included a citation to the original paper by White et al. If you require further discussion of this method, we will be happy to add a supporting paragraph to the paper.

# More examples

## Reviewer Comment

It is unclear why six items were retained for each subscale, given that some remained items did NOT provide acceptable infit and outfit statistics (ES5, ES10 and C4). Although the authors have tried to address why these unfit items were included, the reason given 'the totality of these indices seems appropriate' (p.18) is not convincing at all.

## Response

We thank the reviewer for this insightful comment. In response, the text of the manuscript was modified in the following manner (page 18, line 16): In this abbreviated version, although three items (E5, E10, and C4) showed large outfit statistics ( $>1.90$ ), overall, these ES and C subscales seem appropriate when other indices of these items, such as infit statistics or item-total correlations, are considered.



# More examples

## **Reviewer Comment**

The language in the introduction could stand to be tightened throughout, although the introduction is not overly long and this is a minor suggestion.

## **Response**

The entire manuscript has been carefully edited. As a result, the clarity and readability of the manuscript have been improved.

# More examples

## Response to Reviewers' Comments

### *Reviewer 1:*

#### *Literature review section*

*1. This section could be improved by first synthesizing the literature on achievement goals of Korean students learning foreign languages such as English (see list of suggested references) because currently there is lack of discussion of these studies although several studies have been conducted on this topic.*

We agree that this section needed more clarifications and needed to be expanded. We would like to thank Reviewer 1 for providing references. We have now added literature on achievement goals of Korean students in learning foreign languages, and the corresponding new section in the manuscript reads as follows (see p. 6 of the revised manuscript):

“In Korean high school context, Bong (2001, 2004, 2005) found that students adopted higher mastery-approach goals and performance-approach goals than performance-avoidance goals in learning English. Although these studies did not produce consistent results regarding goal adoption in English classes, they imply that achievement goals are related to English learning and ultimately academic achievement, and that it is meaningful to explore goals in foreign language learning”.

# Conclusion



- Be positive, polite, and concise.
- There is nothing to lose by taking reviewer comments seriously.
- Only way is up—to a better paper.

# Thank you for your attention!

## Q & A

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