



# Writing an effective response to reviewers: the goal is to improve the study and get it published!

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## PRACTICAL SCENARIO

We are very excited because a group of students from the Latin-American Methods in Epidemiologic, Clinical, and Operations Research (MECOR) program submitted a manuscript to an international journal and received a response stating that the manuscript is of interest but, based on the reviewers' comments, "major revisions are required". The students have contacted us because this is their first manuscript and they want to make sure that they respond to the reviewers effectively.

## HOW TO STRATEGICALLY RESPOND TO REVIEWERS

As directors of the Latin-American MECOR program, we instill in our students to approach clinical research using sound methods from idea to publication. We provide many resources and guidelines related to research methodology, writing protocols, manuals of procedures, and original manuscripts. Here we provide a summary of recommendations, based on published literature<sup>1,2</sup> and our own experience, for responding to reviewer comments when a journal invites authors to resubmit.

First, we recommend that authors carefully read all of the comments made by the reviewers and distinguish between those that are positive and those in which the reviewers are criticizing or requesting revisions. It is very important to determine whether the comments can be adequately addressed and meet the expectations of the reviewers. Second, we strongly emphasize the need to quickly overcome feelings of frustration, sadness, and even a sense of unfairness. Remember that the article has not

been rejected and the editor is giving you the opportunity to revise and resubmit; therefore, you need to get organized and respond to each comment carefully and politely, even when you do not agree with the reviewer (Table 1). Try to approach this effort with a positive attitude and use the comments made by the reviewers to your advantage. It is essential to prioritize the comments and make sure that the most important ones (those in which the reviewers request major changes) are addressed appropriately. For those who are new to this process, we highly recommend working with someone who has experience in responding to reviewers to help in this prioritization process. Third, when you resubmit your revised manuscript to the journal, the goal is to show the editor and reviewers that you have taken this process seriously by addressing every comment in detail and making all necessary changes. It is crucial that you communicate these revisions effectively through clear, simple, and straightforward language. If the authors are not native speakers of the language in which the journal is published (e.g., English), it is imperative that the final version of the response to reviewers be evaluated by an expert translator or editor.

In summary, an important goal of clinical researchers is to publish their work in peer-reviewed journals as a means of improving human health. That involves going through the peer review process and responding to the reviewer comments in an effective manner. We encourage all researchers who are starting to engage in publishing their work to develop a systematic approach when responding to reviewers. The process can be frustrating and tedious, but, in the end . . . the goal is to improve your manuscript and get it published!

**Table 1.** Process to successfully respond effectively to peer reviewer comments.

Task	Action 1	Action 2	Goals
Create a Word document into which you copy and paste each reviewer comment separately. Number the comments and label them according to the reviewer (e.g., Rev. 1 Comment 1).	Discuss each comment with your team and come to consensus on how to respond. You may agree or disagree with a given reviewer's comment, but you will need to politely respond to all comments.	Answer each comment separately, place them directly below the reviewer's comment (make sure there are no grammatical mistakes or misspellings), and make the corresponding changes in the revised manuscript.	This process shows the editor and the reviewers that you are dedicated and have taken the review seriously; and that you have made it easy for them to re-evaluate your manuscript.

Final products: 1. A letter to the editor in which the authors thank the editor for the opportunity to revise the paper and a list of all reviewer comments with the authors' responses; 2. A revised manuscript including all of the changes that have been made, which should be identified through the use of a different font, a different color, or *italicization*.

## REFERENCES

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