

## List of Essentials for Responding to Reviewers' Comments 09 December 2008

### **Mental preparation**

- Overall: Expect that you will have to revise your manuscript, so don't expect your paper to be automatically. Remember that the suggestions are meant to improve your document.
- Revision does not guarantee acceptance
- Don't take comments personally, get perspective so that your responses are not defensive and tinged with anger:
  - Take a few days to grumble before beginning to respond
  - Review process is not adversarial, everyone wants to see good scientifically sound work get published
  - Reviews typically make papers better!

### **Response strategy: What should I do with the comments?**

- Overall: Remember that this is your paper ultimately and you have to take responsibility for what you choose to submit, but the editor makes the final decision!
  - Respond in a timely manner
  - Always keep in contact with the editor, for many reasons, e.g.:
    - if you need additional time to make changes or add data accordingly
    - If reviewers seem to be biased or unprofessional and you'd like a re-evaluation
- Overall: Address every single comment, whether you make suggested changes or not
  - Make all changes suggested, unless the changes are inaccurate or inconsistent with your meaning or it is not your style
  - Have a co-author or another trusted person check that your response is appropriate, objective and professional to the comments
  - If you disagree with the suggestion, include evidence with your argument
    - Disagreeing is common and acceptable –just be professional and stand your ground.
    - “Because I prefer it that way” is not a valid explanation
    - If the change suggested was already in the paper, state that you “emphasized” what the reviewer requested
  - If reviewers conflict, choose the most valid comment and explain your decision to editor
  - If two or more reviewers have similar comments about something, you should give extra attention to this comment
- Changes in Content (methods, data, analyses.....)
  - Consider what each comment means
    - Misunderstanding of your words:
      - Re-evaluate and clarify your text
    - Suggestion for change in the paper's message:
      - Decide on feasibility of changes, and make them or defend yourself
  - Comments about methods

- If changing your methods could make the difference between an acceptable study and a noteworthy study, consider whether revising your methods will make your study more meaningful
    - If changing your methods is not an option, consider sending to another journal
  - Requests for complete re-writes
    - Consider the benefit to your study versus the convenience of submitting elsewhere
    - If the statement to re-write the whole paper is without thoughtful reasoning, consider submitting elsewhere
- Changes in formatting (style, grammar, figures, references....)
  - Knowing journal formatting guidelines and chain of command will help in responses
  - Text length issues
    - If text needs to be drastically cut, consider asking a colleague to read through and objectively slice out unneeded text
    - If splitting the paper is suggested, ask the editor about it
      - Will it be re-reviewed?
    - If text is requested to be cut AND additions are suggested, note this to the editor
- Rejection:
  - Appealing a rejection is a low-yield strategy
  - Submitting elsewhere is a possibility
    - Weigh the time and effort required to re-format, versus re-think the manuscript itself
    - Consider the comments from the rejection for the new submission
    - Consider that you might get the same reviewers

### **Response tactics: How do I show I've responded to the comments?**

- Overall: be polite and professional
  - Respond with a cover letter to the editor and a separate letter addressing the reviewers' comments
    - Compliment the reviewers (e.g., "thanks for the astute observation")
    - If reviewers are complimentary, then address them with a thank you
    - If reviewers are in error (e.g., they requested something you already did) don't point out their negligence; simply provide evidence with your argument
  - In the cover letter to the editor
    - Start with a thank you paragraph and thank each reviewer and editor
    - Include a summary of the changes made
  - In the separate letter addressing reviewer' comments write detailed notes on how you addressed each concern
    - Do not simply send a revision with the comment that you have addressed "all" problems and concerns
    - Show the changes that were made, do not just write 'changed' or 'edited'
    - Describe any additional work you did to overcome the stated problem
- Structure of letter addressing reviewers' comments:
  - Reviewer x:
    - Comment y: give verbatim copy of each comment

- Describe the rationale for your response to a comment, and the specific text added or revised that shows how you addressed the comment.
- Response (e.g. "We agree...; We support...; We acknowledge...")
- Identify the location of changes in the text
  - Notate the page and line numbers (of the original *and* revised paper) that were changed so that the editor does not have to search to find changes OR
  - Insert (verbatim) the new text from the paper so that the editor/reviewer does not have to go back to the paper to find changes
- If two reviewers have the same comments, you may say "see response to reviewer x's comment y" instead of re-writing your response

Ultimately, it is your responsibility to produce sound scientific research and what you choose to submit represents you and your work!

Created by participants<sup>1</sup> in Range Management Graduate Seminar Fall 2008, School of Natural Resources, University of Arizona "Navigating the Peer Review Process": Jennifer Davison, Joe May, Jose Raul Romo, Karen Munroe, Kerry Nicholson, Kristin Wisneski, Mitch McClaran, Tim Bayley.

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