

Editorial: the revise & resubmit (R&R) process

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In our last editorial (2018, v. 2) we addressed the desk review (DR) process, the first challenge for a prospective article along the evaluation process for publication. As we pointed out, if the manuscript is not rejected during the DR phase, we can assume that the article has a good potential to be included in the journal. As the great majority of DR decisions are for rejection (in a good journal, this can reach 85 or 90 per cent of the submissions), passing on to the double-blind review process is good news, indeed.

If your manuscript has not been rejected by DR (congratulations, by the way!), you should wait for the first round of revisions. You are going to face what is called the revise and resubmit (R&R) process, i.e. “revising a paper and preparing a response document for the action editor and the reviewers who have invited these actions” (Ireland, 2008, p. 1049).

R&R is a regular part of the publication process, together with “in process”, “in review”, “accepted with revisions” and “in press” (Rocco, 2011). It presents itself in many ways and should be faced as an ordinary part of the researcher’s life. It can either end in the article’s publication or not; it can either be quick or it can take several rounds of revisions. There is no guarantee of success, after all.

At the 2017 Academy of Management Conference, Foss (2017) of Bocconi University addressed the R&R process in one of the sessions. We try to summarise his presentation here.

According to his view, this process has seven steps:

- (1) Understand the editorial letter or decision letter.

Your revision will depend on what kind of R&R you have received, from among several possible types. Between initial rejection (covered in our last editorial) and immediate acceptance (extremely rare!), there are several levels of response – minor revisions, conditional acceptance, major revisions and others – that will lead the authors towards different types of revision, depending on what has been requested. Logically, the level of the response correlates to the potential chance of publication, and this is what the editors are signaling to you. This is the time to decide whether to keep going (“the revision is worth doing”) or to quit and seek out another outlet for your work:

- (2) Understand the main critical points.

You should focus on what is important and concentrate on the most important recommendations. Most of the time, editors are trying to help you – while, of course, doing their job. Try to avoid asking the editor any questions you have (this can be misinterpreted as a weakness). Of course, there will be situations that require this contact; one common scenario is when the reviews are non-convergent (i.e. the reviewers think differently). Use your good judgment.



(3) Set up your response documents.

A very important step, this is how you will communicate to your reviewers. The recommendation is to copy and paste all the reviewers' comments in a numbered sequence, with your response following each one. Doing this before beginning the revision process itself will help you to better see the revision as a whole. To work together with co-authors, use a spreadsheet (first in Excel format, later in a ".doc" format for submission), with columns labeled "Reviewer, Suggestions, Response, Done?" This procedure will allow you (and the co-authors) to easily reach agreement on revisions:

(4) Diplomacy, tact and confidence.

You may not like what reviewers have written about your paper: this is a natural reaction. But try to understand their recommendations and remember that they have dedicated time and effort to reading your work. Keep in mind that your goal is to get all the reviewers to like your manuscript. So, tell the reviewers you are grateful for the work they did (but do not be snarky or over-the-top, for example, by starting every response with "thanks for this great comment" or similar). You can thank them at the beginning and end of the full response to each reviewer. If you choose to not do everything the reviewers ask, simply answer each point and justify your position, politely explaining why you had chosen a different way to address that specific issue. "You are not a slave to the reviewers."

(5) Comprehensiveness.

Although some comments are more important than others, you must respond to all of them. Explain the changes you made. Good response documents are usually long, often up to half the length of the initial manuscript.

(6) Timing and planning.

You will usually have a deadline for your resubmission. Planning the process is important to avoid ending up an unsuccessful revision (especially for papers with several authors). One tip is to begin the revisions on the same day that you receive your R&R response. Avoid asking for an extension.

(7) Take the necessary care.

Some procedures are necessary. First, double-check both your response document and the revised manuscript; each comment must be addressed. Second, do a final read-over to make sure that the logic, flow, arguments and appeal of your article have not changed after having made the revisions. "Imagine a reader who is unaware of your original article or of the letter from the reviewers, as that reader is now your intended audience".

Despite being good news for an author, starting an R&R process is not a guarantee of your paper being published. Rejection of the article can happen even after some rounds of revision. You are going to pass through what Brookfield (2011) called "The Emotional Cycle of Responding to Feedback." It is important that authors be resilient in the face of negative and sometimes frustrating responses, so they can tackle the R&R in the most effective way. We hope the tips presented here can help you to go through this challenge.

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