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## Responding to a Manuscript Reviewer: Respectful, Pointed, and Complete

This is the third installment of a series of editorials describing best practices for writing a manuscript (June 2024 issue), reviewing a manuscript (September 2024 issue), and now responding to journal reviewer comments of a manuscript.

As discussed in the September 2024 editorial, the purpose of peer review is to make the manuscript better and to guide the editor on which papers are worthy of publication for a given journal. Because of this mandate, a reviewer (particularly those who are meticulous) may provide suggestions related to writing and analyses. Some may give lengthy reviews, and some of what is provided may not seem logical or even correct. This can be frustrating for the authors of the manuscript. However, it will be these reviewers whom you must convince that your manuscript is worthy of publication. Here are some tips on how to write an effective reviewer response.

### BE RESPECTFUL

Do not take reviewers' comments personally. It can be tempting to think that the reviewer does not understand or that they lack adequate knowledge of the topic (that is, they are not an "expert"). Although there may be some truth to those assumptions, this will not change the fact that they have provided comments to which you will need to respond. Avoid temptations to tell them that they are wrong or a non-expert. Disagreement is allowed, but it must be presented politely and factually. It is unlikely that any reviewer would provide critical comments out of spite. Every reviewer comment is an opportunity to improve your manuscript. If you do not understand a reviewer's comment, then it is possible they did not understand that section in your manuscript, and you should consider rewriting it.

### BE POINTED

Although it is acceptable to thank a reviewer for a comment, the focus of your response should be directed to the specific comment, and your response should be complete and thorough. Being concise is important as a longer response containing superfluous information may not be understood in the next review.

As an example, if a question is about considering a different statistical approach, you should either (1) perform the

suggested statistical approach and provide a response about why you will or will not use it in your paper or (2) provide an informative response about why you analyzed your data as you did and why you do not believe the suggested approach is appropriate. Also, if you do not understand a comment or question, it is okay to state so in your response.

Make it easy for the reviewer to understand how you addressed their comment. This might include copying the newly edited text within the reviewer responses. This can be tedious. At a minimum, try to find a middle ground with the reviewer. This might mean adopting text/wording proposed by the reviewer. However, not agreeing with a reviewer is acceptable, but you should justify your position in a constructive and crisp manner.

### BE COMPLETE

When replying to the reviewers' comments, be as complete and clear as possible. Not all reviewer comments require changes to the manuscript, but you need to provide a response to the reviewer. This might mean providing new data to the reviewer that you do not feel adds to the paper. Why you will not add these data must be explained.

Ensure that you understand the journal's review response process. Some journals request a separate response document with each reviewer's comments/questions provided and followed by your response. They will also expect a revised manuscript. Some will request that you provide your revised manuscript with and without "track changes." After once again reading your manuscript in the context of the reviewers comments, you may decide that some additional edits are required that were not suggested by the reviewer. This is acceptable but must be thoroughly described in your response to the reviewers.

The process of developing a manuscript and having it accepted for publication can be one of the most rewarding experiences of one's professional career. For me, it has been the exuberant feeling that I have contributed to the field of clinical exercise physiology that may impact patient care. But this process can also be one of the most frustrating processes to have a manuscript rejected. My hope is that this information can be helpful to you when developing your response to a review.