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# Rejections

You've spent months carefully researching a topic, writing up your results, and poring over each word of your manuscript. You submit it to a prestigious journal. You wait patiently for six months. Then, you get a curt email from the editor like this:

"Based on the feedback provided by our reviewers, we have decided not to publish your manuscript."

Failure. Rejection. We all face it, we all feel it, and it hurts.

But was the manuscript really not good enough? Did the editor really select the right reviewers? Did they understand what you were trying to accomplish? Were they actually qualified to provide an expert review of your work? Or did they just not like your prose or disagree with your ideas?

Who can say? There might be a hundred reasons why a manuscript is rejected, but rest assured that it happens to all of us.

Many journals have acceptance rates as low as 8%, which means that for every manuscript that is accepted, 12 or more are rejected. And sometimes even the best papers are rejected merely because they aren't a good fit for the journal or they are too innovative for some reviewers or are merely different from what a reviewer wants.

Here are a few things to know about rejections and how to develop a healthy research agenda despite them:

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First, don't take rejection personally or too hard. It's not the end of the world. Even experienced scholars face rejection regularly. Personally, I average between two and three rejections per article that I get published, which means that I get a LOT of rejection letters. When people look at my CV, they sometimes make astonished comments like "How on earth did you publish 7 articles last year?!" But what they don't see are the 20+ rejection letters that I had to read to get those articles and the self-doubt that can be coupled with each one.

But you just have to roll with the punches. No one likes to get a rejection letter, and you can be a little bummed about it. Take a break, eat a snack, and complain to your best friend ... for exactly one day. Then, on the next day, you should be resubmitting your manuscript elsewhere. Don't take time to feel sorry for yourself or to entertain self-doubt. You've already taken your work 90% of the way, so don't let a brief rejection hurdle lead you to scrap all the progress you've made. Take a moment for yourself, and then push forward.

Second, aim high in where you submit. Sometimes people are so afraid of rejection that they don't take risks, but your manuscript can just as easily be rejected by a great journal for silly reasons as it can by a mediocre journal, so why not aim for the better one? Sometimes we become so close to our work that we begin to question its value, but oftentimes fresh eyes can see genius in what has become mundane to our own. In short, you really can't predict exactly how an editor and reviewers are going to react to your manuscript until you submit, so you might as well get it underway.

An additional reason to aim high is that often you will receive

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better feedback from more prestigious journals. Many prestigious journals only allow tenured, highly-productive scholars to review for them, whereas less prestigious journals often rely upon early career faculty and graduate students for reviews. Similarly, leaders in the field, like those famous names you cite in your paper, become increasingly selective of which journals they review for as their careers progress. This means that you typically have a better chance of getting true experts as reviewers the higher you aim. This means that the feedback you get will often be higher quality if you first aim for a top journal, and then, even if it's rejected, you can use that feedback to improve the paper to make it more likely to be accepted elsewhere.

And third, learn from your mistakes. It's true that sometimes reviewer feedback is nonsense, but even the most antagonistic, unreasonable reviewer can help you improve your work. Maybe the reviewer didn't understand or value your methods; so, maybe you should provide some more explanation for why your methods were valid and meaningful. Maybe the reviewer disagreed with some of the basic assumptions you were making; so, maybe you should provide better evidence for those assumptions. Though you shouldn't let reviewer feedback on a rejection cripple you from moving quickly on resubmitting your work elsewhere, you should at least attempt to be charitable to your reviewers and recognize that there might be some validity to their points of view. So, quickly try to learn from them and move on.

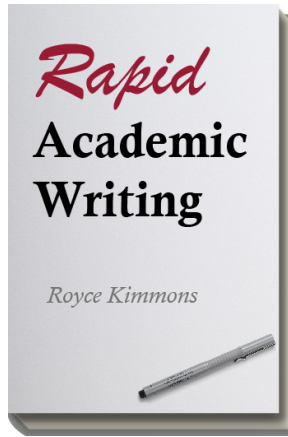
### Revisions

You've finally got feedback on your manuscript, and the editor says that the reviewers would like to see a revision. Hooray! Rejoice!

This does not mean that the paper is accepted or that it will necessarily be accepted even if you do everything the reviewers say. But it does mean that the editor and reviewers are at least willing to work with you to try to make the paper work in that venue. So, that's a good sign!

knowing what to change, what to defend, and what to ignore  
sometimes you have to eject

### Acceptances



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