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# How to write a rebuttal letter

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A well written rebuttal letter is critical in any resubmission.

Once the initial reaction, be that joy, anger or frustration, to receiving feedback from editors and reviewers about one's work has subsided, it's time for our authors to make one of two decisions: continue to go after a Nature Method paper or take their work to another journal.

A realistic look at how the reviewers' requests can be met will go a long way in helping to determine whether a revision is likely successful and to avoid a futile resubmission.

If authors want to resubmit in cases where the editorial decision was negative, and referees were critical and asked for a lot of additional information, the first step, before embarking on any revision, should be an appeal (see the post on "How to write an appeal letter" for more details) and rebuttal letter to the editor to discuss whether a proposed list of additional information is likely to address the referees concerns.

Authors who receive a positive editorial decision and who are confident that they can address the reviewers' points nevertheless have to submit a rebuttal letter with their revision.

The rebuttal letter is an author's chance to directly reply to the reviewers, announce plans to improve the work, clear up misunderstandings or defend aspects of the work. How it is written can make a big difference in whether or not an appeal is granted and how the reviewers judge the revision.

The DOs:

Do acknowledge that the reviewers spent a substantial amount of time looking over the paper – rebuttal letters that thank the referees for their time and comments set a positive tone and ensure that the exchange takes place on a productive footing. Do acknowledge that a misunderstanding may be due to poor presentation on your part, not lack of expertise on the reviewers', and phrase your reply accordingly, taking the opportunity to clarify. Do copy the full text of each reviewer's comments in your rebuttal and reply to every concern raised by each reviewer immediately after each point in a concise manner that clearly states how you plan to address it (experimentally or editorially) or point to data that already addresses it which the reviewer appears to have missed. If you cannot address a point at all, explain why not. Do number the comments or at least break them into paragraphs, and use different fonts or text colors to distinguish the reviewer comments and your reply, rather than write a single reply to an entire review in summary form. Do include relevant citations with full references or DOIs so they can be easily looked up, rather than just cite by

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First Author et al. Do include pertinent new data as embedded figures, tables, or attachments, indicate where in the manuscript you added the information; give page numbers, figure panels, Supplementary material etc., so editors and reviewers don't have to go on a search for the new data. If any of this information will not be included in the revised paper explain why not. Do be succinct and to the point and avoid epic discourses. In the case where more than one referee has raised the same concern, it's best to cite "see response to point 2 from Reviewer #1", for example. Do remember that each reviewer sees all comments and your replies so be equally respectful to all.

The DON'Ts:

Don't vent or accuse the reviewers of bias or incompetence. We have read countless times that "ref 2 is lacking expertise and completely misses the point" etc. and one wonders what the goal of such blanket statements is. They serve no productive purpose and instead potentially bias all referees, even the positive ones, against the work. Don't plead that for personal or monetary reasons critically important experiments can't be performed. While we hear the plight of underfunded labs we don't make exceptions for these reasons. Don't ignore specific requests by referees without comment and selectively only answer a few queries. Don't rephrase a referees' point to give it a slightly different meaning that you can more easily address.

Don't miss parts 1 and 3 of this series of posts covering cover letters and appeal letters. We encourage questions, comments and feedback below. The editors will do their best to answer any questions you have.

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