



# Writing and Publishing Scientific Papers

A Primer for the  
Non-English Speaker

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## 22. On Receipt of the Editor's Report

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One day, you will receive an editor's letter with the decision. If your manuscript is accepted, send in the final version promptly, then celebrate. You will not have many such occasions during your career.

Not infrequently, you will receive a rejection letter. When such a letter arrives, it is never the brightest of days. However, do not do anything hasty, and do *not* lash out at anyone. After feeling sorry for yourself, start thinking and acting. Firstly, remember that you are in ample company. No one really knows the precise figure, but anecdotal evidence holds that an estimated 66% of published papers are not published in the journal where they were first submitted as manuscripts. Much publishable work is rejected by journals; the rejection of your manuscript does not necessarily mean that it is unpublishable.

Secondly, do not take any criticism personally — maybe a piece of your work was not up to a required standard, but this is no judgement about yourself as a scientist, nor as a person. In fact, good reviews make this very clear.

Next, re-read the editor's and reviewers' letters carefully (insist on receiving the reviewers' reports if not included. Avoid journals that do not send them to you, even after prompting). These can contain valuable suggestions. If the reviews are not appropriately phrased, remember that the impolite reviewer was still using his/her spare time to provide comments, and s/he may well believe that s/he is being helpful. Look beyond the form and concentrate on the content.

There are different types of rejection letters. The first can be called the "never want to see it again" type. The editor's letter makes it very clear that the manuscript is not acceptable. It is rarely worth arguing, even

if you feel this judgement is incorrect. It may be possible to convince the editor that the review was unfair but, in most cases, it is simply not worth the time and effort. Send the manuscript elsewhere (after review and the necessary format modifications).

However, the rejection may not be this final. After completing any additional experiments suggested, the editor may be willing to consider the work again, but as a new submission. This may or may not be indicated in the decision letter. You have to think very carefully about whether the required work is worth it; it may still be a better option to send the manuscript elsewhere. If you believe your manuscript might be given a second chance (after revision), enquire from the editor whether she would agree to a re-submission. Some journals have a policy that a rejected manuscript cannot be resubmitted. In that case, there is no room for negotiation.

Thirdly, the letter rejects *the current version* but invites you to revise and re-submit. This is often equivalent to a major revision. The wording is important; today, many editors are unwilling to indicate that the work is basically publishable, and only write that it needs additional work.

If your work is rejected on what you believe, or can even prove, are insufficient grounds, it is, again, best not to argue. A good editor knows that her reviewers are not infallible, yet the process is very advanced, and is not easily reversible; the chances are that your paper will not be best placed in that journal, anyway.

Several of the most important journals receive a huge influx of manuscripts, and the first, quick decision is taken by the editor whether or not to send the manuscript out for peer review. Most manuscripts that are received are not sent to reviewers, but rejected after a short evaluation by a single person. This, while it increases the chances of misjudgement, seems necessary due to the sheer number of manuscripts involved. If your work is rejected via this mechanism, it is not worth arguing.