



## Effective response to peer review

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Two years ago I became an editor for *Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry* (ABC). One of the most fascinating things about working in this role has been my opportunity to see the peer-review process from a different viewpoint. Like many of you, before I became an editor I had much experience in submitting papers, receiving an initial decision with reviewer comments, meeting with students to craft a strategy to revise manuscripts in response to reviews, and (at last) receiving that happy notification that a paper had been accepted. Now as an editor, I have learned about initial manuscript assessment, inviting referees, seeking additional reviewers, pestering referees to return their reviews, reading the reviews, occasionally inviting more reviewers, making manuscript decisions, assessing revised manuscripts, and eventually accepting papers. Many of these processes could merit an editorial of their own, but here I focus on the assessment of revised manuscripts, and what authors can do to help their case in submitting a revised paper.

First, I cover some background about the peer-review process. Referees provide recommendations and editors make decisions on manuscripts. The most common editor decisions are “accept,” “minor revision,” “major revision,” and “reject.” Manuscripts submitted following revision decisions require an editor’s judgment about the suitability of the response to review (i.e., I decide to accept the manuscript, request additional revisions or experiments, send the manuscript again to referees, or reject the manuscript). Three key documents are needed for a revised submission: (1) the revised paper, (2) a cover (or response) letter with a point-by-point response to all reviewer and editor comments, and (3) a marked (i.e., tracked change) version of the revised manuscript for convenience in evaluating modifications made in response

to review. Importantly, these documents should not only convince the editor that a manuscript is acceptable for publication but should also convince future readers of the published article, who should find appropriate responses to review in the published article. Note that the response to review and revised manuscript may be sent back to the same referees who evaluated the initial paper (and/or to new reviewers), so be persuasive not defensive in your revisions. Indeed, although it may seem that the editor is the key person to convince of the acceptability of a revised paper, it is far more crucial for the final published article to convince the journal’s readership of the article’s value. With that in mind, here is a list of some dos and don’ts for effective response to peer review:

### Do

- Respond to all review comments.
- Make changes in your manuscript in response to most (or all) of the comments from the referees; if an expert reviewer reading your manuscript has a question, chances are other readers will too.
- Perform additional experiments and describe them in the revised manuscript, if warranted, to respond to reviews.
- Justify all changes to the manuscript in your response letter.
- Cite literature in the revised manuscript in support of your response.
- Write clearly in your response letter; if English is not your native language, consider professional editing help.
- Be concise in your response letter and revisions.
- Ensure consistency between your response letter and revised manuscript.
- Be respectful, but persuasive, if you disagree with select reviewer comments.
- Provide detail in the response letter about where changes have been made in the revised paper.

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## Don't

- Include additional data, results, or references, or a detailed response to a referee's comment *only* in the response letter; if that information is needed to help the editor make a decision, it should be in the revised manuscript or electronic supplementary material.
- Add data, results, citations, authors, etc., without justification.
- Include peripheral information in your response or revised paper.
- Respond with “yes” or “thank you for the comment” without providing clear details of your response to the query and the changes you have made to the manuscript as a result.
- Write a response that you would not want the reviewer to read; always assume that the editor will send your responses to the previous reviewers for comments.
- Dismiss all or most of the comments from one or more reviewers; it is possible that everyone else is wrong and that you are right, but unless your last name is Einstein or Feynman, the burden of proof rests with you.
- Submit a long response that makes it appear that you have made changes, with the expectation that the editor will not really read your entire response or check for revisions to your paper.

To summarize, a key outcome of revision should be a manuscript that will be of value to the scientific community when

published. Convincing an editor and reviewers is an important step toward this end goal. The do/don't list, although not exhaustive, should guide you in avoiding common pitfalls that can delay or complicate the revision process. I hope that this information helps you (and me) as we work together in publishing your best work.

The ABC Editors look forward to receiving your new and revised manuscripts!



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**Adam T. Woolley** is Chair Editor of *Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry*, and Professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, USA. His current research focuses on 3D-printed integrated microfluidics for biomarker measurement, analytical systems for the identification of bacteria and antibiotic resistance genes in sepsis, and biotemplated fabrication of nanoelectronics.