

Editorial: How to respond to reviewers' comments

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In my first 100 days of editing the *South African Journal of Animal Science*, I have found that most authors are having difficulties in addressing and responding to reviewers'/editors' comments. Some authors have not been submitting response notes which clearly indicate how reviewers'/editors' suggestions would have been addressed. In addition to disappointing reviewers, any failure to clearly articulate how reviewer suggestions were addressed in a revised submission further delays the processing of submissions.

Once a manuscript is submitted to a journal it is most likely that an editor and several reviewers will recommend some changes with a view to improve the submitted article. This is a normal pathway to the publication of the article. It is very unusual for a scientific paper to be accepted without the need for a revision of any kind. So, if an author's submission makes it through the first review cycle, it will again require some amendments that will need to be verified by the editors and reviewers. This is done to ensure that any manuscript submitted to the journal is scientifically sound, factual, clear, complete and original. The editors and/or reviewers will scrutinise the manuscript and check (but not limited to) the following;

- Does the manuscript fit the scope of the journal?
- Does the manuscript conform to the journal's guidelines?
- Is the manuscript of acceptable quality?
- Is the content and writing satisfactory enough to make it worth reviewing?

Not adequately addressing concerns raised by the reviewers and/or editors does not help the peer-review and publishing processes. Poor judgement when responding to reviewers'/editors' comments often produces a undesirable outcome. Merely stating that reviewers' comments were addressed is not helpful. Hence, upon receiving the reviewers'/editors' comments it is advisable for authors' to, by and large, follow each of these steps:

1. Browse the comments and carefully gather your thoughts before addressing them. Then take a fresh look at the comments and determine what modifications the reviewers'/editors' want to see in your manuscript.
2. Copy and paste the communication with all the reviewers'/editors' comments to your response note, and respond to each and every concern.
3. Address each reviewer's comments separately but on one response note. Additionally, avoid referring a certain reviewer "A" to another reviewer "B"'s response to any comment, even if they ask the same question. Respond to each reviewer as if his/her comments were the only ones you received. Also address the concerns the editor would have raised.
4. Even if the reviewer/editor is wrong it does not necessarily mean that, as an author, you are right. There may be cases where:
 - The reviewers' misjudge the importance of something they requested you to remove;
 - You may have misinterpreted the results;
 - You might not have properly or clearly explained something or failed to emphasize it sufficiently;
 - The reviewers may not fully understand the message conveyed and may question it;
 - You may have forgotten to include certain important aspects often resulting in your manuscript not being complete.

In such instances, clearly justify yourself in your response; and/or provide additional information that will clarify/complete the matter in question.

5. Choose your responses wisely to avoid re-submitting your manuscript over and over again.

6. Linked to point No. 2 above, it is advisable to re-state the reviewers' comments when you are responding to them. Use page and line numbers for any corrections that have been made, new information added or any other modifications that have been done.

Lastly it is an author's duty to make sure that s/he does not take long to respond to reviewers' comments. If a deadline for re-submission (normally less than three months) is missed, your paper might be removed from the system. Whenever re-submitting a revised version of a manuscript, authors should always remember to include a response note. In the manuscript they should also clearly indicate where corrections would have been made. A properly revised submission, accompanied with a well-detailed response note, will go a long way in improving the reviewing and publishing processes.

Voster Muchenje (vmuchenje@ufh.ac.za)

Editor-In-Chief, *South African Journal of Animal Science*

Department of Livestock and Pasture Science, University of Fort Hare, Alice, 5700, South Africa