

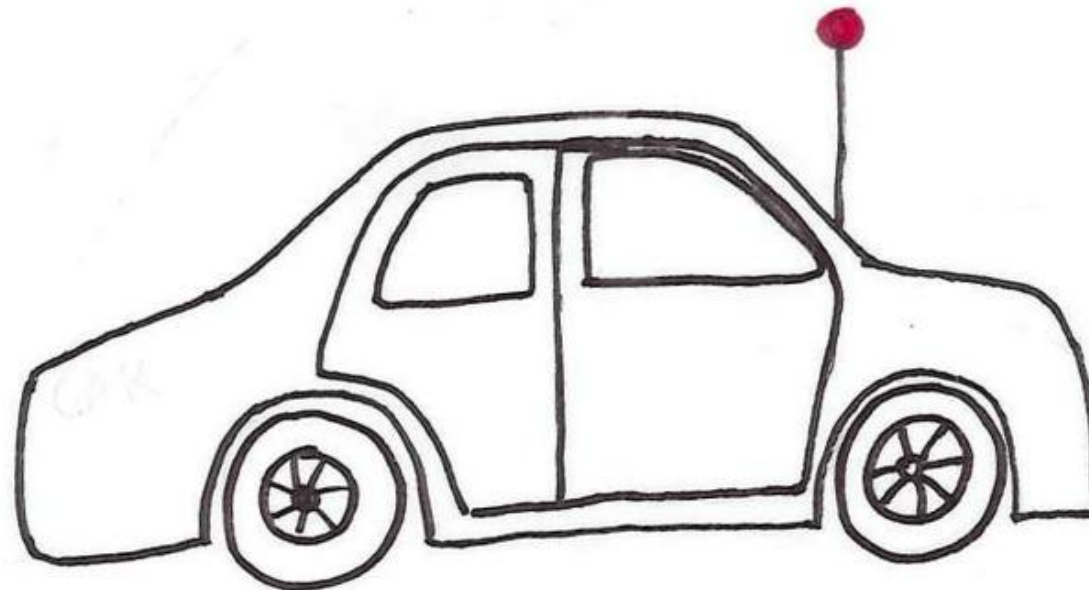
From Stress to Progress:

Responding to Critical Peer Reviews

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Your manuscript as submitted



... and after peer review and revision



Responding to critical or negative peer reviews is a serious source of anxiety, especially to young researchers and first timers.

As stressful as it may be, this is an integral, inherent and unavoidable part of the process of quality scientific publishing.

Submission



Pre-review check



Formal peer review
of the manuscript

Reject

Major
revision

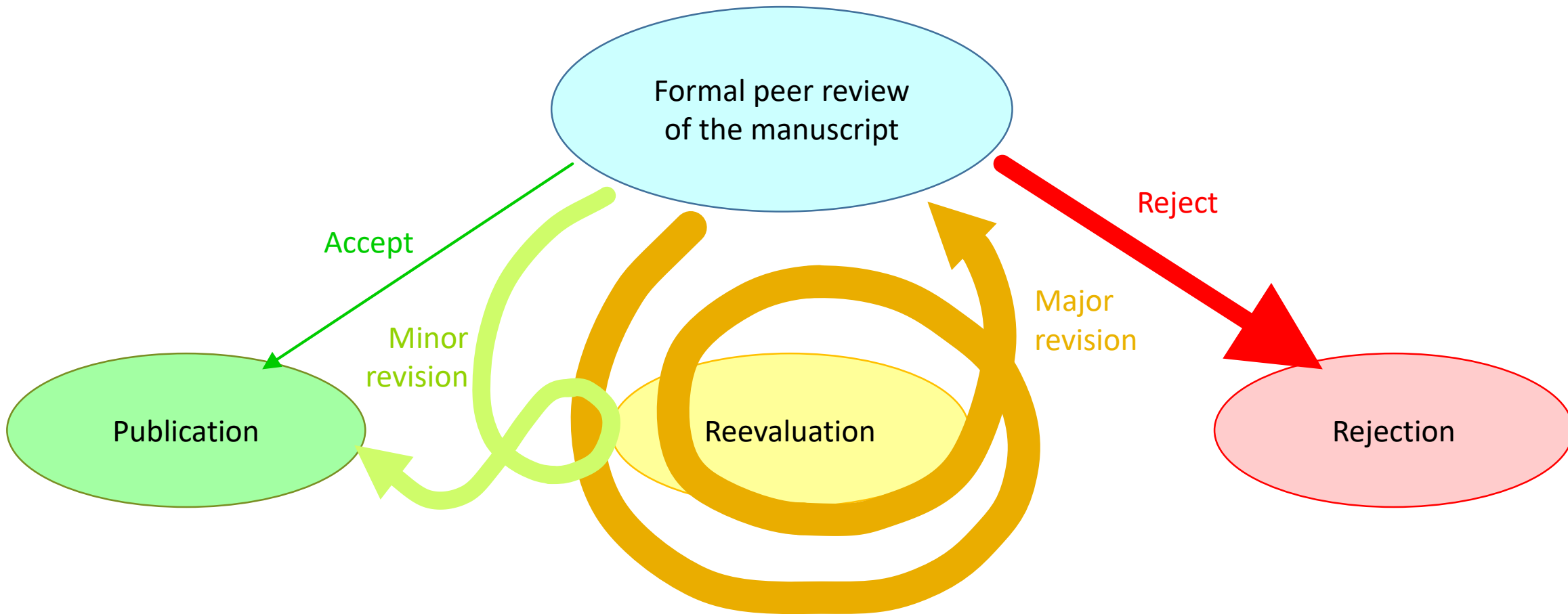
Accept

Minor
revision

Reevaluation

Publication

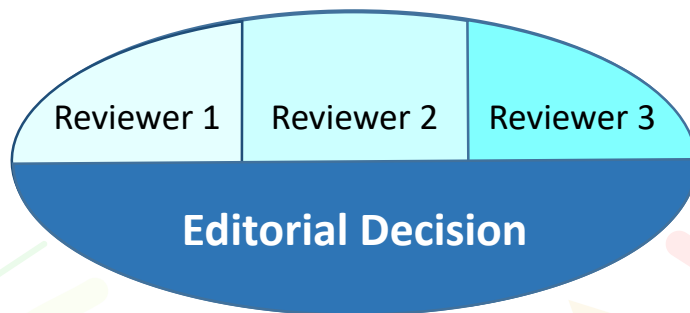
Rejection



Submission



Pre-review check



Reject

Major
revision

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Minor
revision

Reevaluation

Publication

Rejection



Responding to peer reviews requires responding to **each and every point** of **each and every review** obtained.

If a comment contains various points, break it up into several responses and address each point separately.

Given multiple review reports, the response to each of them shall **also discuss** any changes in the manuscript that are due to the remarks made by the other reviewers.

Some journals / online submission systems have a template for response to reviewers, but if free text is allowed, there are **some best practices** that can be easily followed.

Be prepared with the following set of documents:

- (obvious) the revised manuscript
- (not so obvious) a marked-up copy of the revised manuscript
 - Use the “Track changes” function, highlight changed fragments in colour
 - Help yourself with tools like [Draftable.com](https://draftable.com)
- (obvious) Responses to all Reviewers
- (not so obvious) Response / cover letter to the Managing Editor



Formats of point-by-point responses:

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Proin eget ligula eget arcu pharetra cursus?

Pellentesque vitae orci ac lectus sodales ornare non eget ipsum. Ut hendrerit. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus.

Ut vel augue faucibus, vehicula urna pretium, mattis turpis. Aenean magna turpis sagittis?.

Cras quis viverra justo, eu condimentum arcu. Morbi sapien justo, rhoncus sit amet sem eu, cursus egestas ante.

- Repeat all the reviewer comments **verbatim**. Copy and pasting is a simple enough task.
- Indicate precisely **what and where** is the change in the manuscript.
- Save the reviewers' time. Make it as **sweet and easy** as possible to digest your revision.
- If a reviewer must hunt for information to understand what you did, they will be **irritated** and more likely to ask you for more.

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Proin eget ligula eget arcu pharetra cursus?

Ut vel augue faucibus, vehicula urna pretium, mattis turpis. Aenean magna turpis sagittis?.

Suspendisse maximus ante sed velit accumsan, ut interdum nulla ultricies. Mauris massa odio, rutrum condimentum metus vel, malesuada hendrerit quam. Proin nec rutrum ante, quis.

Pellentesque vitae orci ac lectus sodales ornare non eget ipsum. Ut hendrerit. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus.

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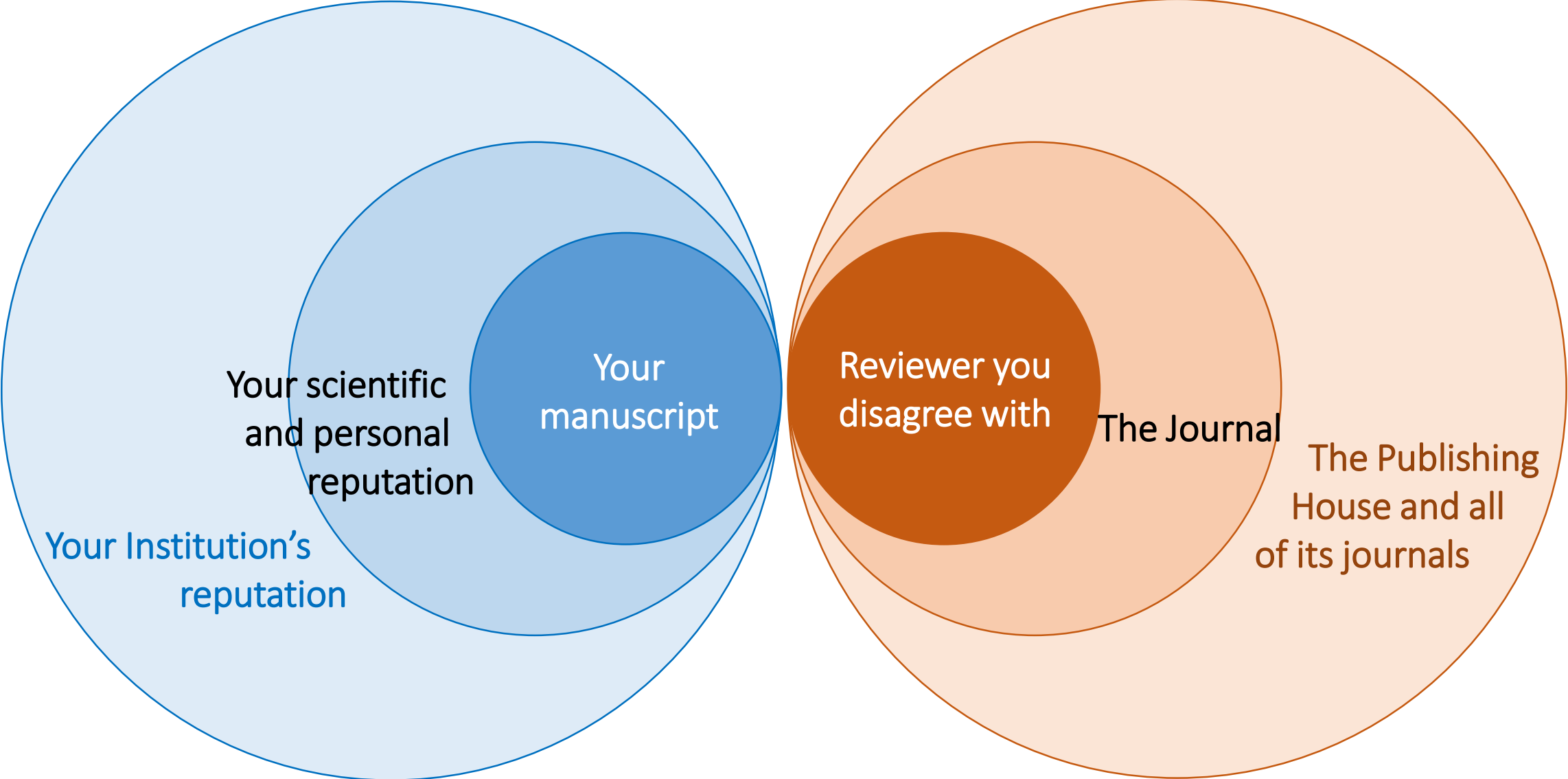
Some **Do-s** and **Don't-s**

- ✓ Thank the reviewer for all recommendations. Thank the editor for the opportunity to present a revised version of the manuscript.
- ✓ Thank also in the Acknowledgement section of the revised manuscript.
- ✓ Perform additional experiments and describe them in the revised manuscript, if warranted, to respond to reviews.
- ✓ Be concise and particular in your response. Cite your sources in both the revision and the response (especially if new references were added).
- ✓ Refer in your responses to page numbers, line numbers, paragraphs, etc.
- ✓ Be respectful and polite with the reviewer, even if you disagree with them.

Some Do-s and Don't-s

- ✗ Don't add data, results, citations, co-authors, etc., without justification.
- ✗ Don't 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.
- ✗ Don't submit a verbose 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.
- ✗ Don't write a response that you would not want the reviewer to read; always assume that the editor will send your responses to the reviewer. Pause before responding.

Implications from an inappropriate response to the reviewer



Some useful expressions

(when you disagree with the reviewer)

- ✓ “Thank you for this suggestion. It would have been interesting to explore this aspect. However, in the case of our study, ...”
- ✓ “You have raised an important point here. However, we believe that ... would be more appropriate because ...”
- ✓ “Your summary / observation is accurate at a high-level, but it misses some key details like ..., which we have attempted to elaborate in the revision.”
- ✓ “While we respectfully agree that ..., we argue / consider that ...”

Some useful expressions

(when you don't understand the review, or believe the reviewer didn't understand you)

- ✓ “We are not sure we understand the reviewer’s question. We think they might want ... so have responded by doing ... and If we have missed the meaning, we request for an opportunity to respond again.”
- ✓ “In the reviewer’s sentence - ‘...’ It is not clear what ... he/she is referring to and why more data needs to be added. Without additional clarification, it is impossible to address the reviewer’s concern.”
- ✓ “Regarding your comment ..., it appears that there has been a misunderstanding. We realize now that our poor presentation obscured some important aspects of ...”

Don't forget your ultimate goal:

To have your manuscript published.

... as quickly and smoothly as possible.

To preserve your scientific and personal reputation.

... and your chances for future publications in that journal.



Thank you for your attention! 😊

THE FIVE STAGES OF PEER REVIEW



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