

The Reviewer Response Toolkit

How to answer peer reviewers, including Reviewer 2, with responses that get your revision accepted. Templates, model replies, and a pre-submission checklist from PhD methodologists.



Written by PhD methodologists researchgold.org

Most revisions are not rejected on the science

They are rejected on the response. Editors and reviewers re-read your paper through one lens: did the authors take the comments seriously, address every point, and show exactly what changed. A correct study with a defensive, incomplete, or disorganised response letter loses. This guide gives you the structure, the tone, and the exact wording that turns a tough review into an acceptance.

PRINCIPLE

Your response letter is a second manuscript. It is read more carefully than the paper itself, because the editor uses it to decide whether the reviewers will be satisfied. Treat it as a deliverable, not an afterthought.

The three things every reviewer is checking

1 Did you address every single point?

One skipped comment can sink the revision. Every comment gets its own numbered response, even the ones you disagree with.

2 Can they see the change without hunting for it?

Quote the new text and give the page and line. Never make a reviewer search the manuscript to confirm you did what you claim.

3 Are you gracious, even when you disagree?

Tone is scored, not stated. Thank, agree where you can, and disagree with evidence rather than opinion.

The anatomy of a winning response

A strong submission has three parts, in this order. Keep them separate and clearly labelled.

1 A short cover letter to the editor

Three to five sentences. Thank the editor, state that you have addressed all comments, and summarise the most important changes. This frames everything the reviewers read next.

2 A point-by-point response document

The heart of the submission. Every reviewer comment is reproduced in full, followed by your response and the exact change made.

3 A clean and a tracked-changes manuscript

Provide both versions so reviewers can verify changes quickly and read the final paper cleanly.

The format that reviewers trust

Use a consistent three-line pattern for every comment. It signals discipline and makes the reviewer's job effortless, which is exactly what earns goodwill.

The point-by-point pattern (repeat for every comment)

Comment [R1.3]: [Paste the reviewer's comment here, word for word.]

Response: [Thank them, state what you did, and explain briefly why.]

Change made: [Quote the new or revised text.] (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).

WATCH OUT FOR

Never paraphrase a reviewer comment to make it easier to answer. Reviewers notice, and it reads as evasive. Reproduce the comment exactly, then respond.

Five rules that decide how you are read

- ✓ **Thank first, always.** Open every response with genuine acknowledgement. It costs nothing and resets a tense review.
- ✓ **Agree wherever you honestly can.** Conceding small points buys credibility for the one or two places you need to push back.
- ✓ **Show, do not assert.** "We have revised the methods" is weak. Quote the revised sentence and give the line number.
- ✓ **Disagree with evidence, never with opinion.** When you decline a change, cite a reference, a guideline, or a statistical reason, not your preference.
- ✓ **Answer the question behind the comment.** A reviewer asking "why this test" is really asking "convince me your analysis is valid". Address the underlying concern, not just the surface request.

Copy-ready response templates

Adapt the bracketed placeholders. These cover the situations that come up in almost every revision.

Cover letter to the editor

Dear [Editor name],

Thank you for the opportunity to revise our manuscript, [Title], and please pass our thanks to the reviewers for their careful and constructive comments. We have addressed every point in full. The most substantial changes are: (1) [change], (2) [change], and (3) [change].

A point-by-point response follows, with all changes quoted and located by page and line. We have included both a clean and a tracked-changes version of the manuscript. We believe the paper is considerably stronger as a result, and we hope it is now suitable for publication in [Journal].

Sincerely,
[Corresponding author], on behalf of all authors

When you agree and made the change

Comment [R2.1]: [Reviewer comment.]

Response: We agree, and we thank the reviewer for raising this. We have [done X] accordingly.

Change made: "[Quote the new text.]" (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).

When you partly agree

Comment [R1.4]: [Reviewer comment.]

Response: We appreciate this point and agree with part of it. We have [done the part you accept]. Regarding [the part you do not], we have instead [alternative], because [brief reason]. We hope this addresses the underlying concern about [the real issue].

Change made: "[Quote.]" (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).

When you respectfully disagree

Comment [R2.5]: [Reviewer comment.]

Response: We thank the reviewer for this suggestion and have considered it carefully. We have chosen to retain our original approach for the following reason: [evidence, citation, guideline, or statistical justification]. To make this clearer for readers, we have added a sentence explaining the rationale.

Change made: "[Quote the clarifying sentence you added.]" (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).

HOW TO USE IT

Notice the pattern when you disagree: thank, give evidence, and still make a small change (usually a clarifying sentence). Reviewers rarely insist when they see you engaged seriously and improved the text anyway.

When two reviewers contradict each other

Comment [R1.2 and R2.3]: We note that Reviewer 1 suggested [A] while Reviewer 2 suggested [B].

Response: We are grateful to both reviewers. As these suggestions point in different directions, we have adopted [the option you chose] because [reason], while acknowledging the alternative in the discussion so readers can see both perspectives.

Change made: "[Quote.]" (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).

When a request is out of scope

Comment [R2.7]: [Request for a large new analysis or new data.]

Response: This is a valuable direction and we thank the reviewer. A full [new experiment or dataset] falls outside the scope of the present study, which is [restate scope]. We have added it as an explicit limitation and a direction for future work, and where possible we have addressed the underlying concern by [smaller analysis you did add].

Change made: "[Quote the limitation paragraph.]" (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).

The statistical and methodological comments that stall papers

These are the comments our methodologists answer most often. Each pairs the reviewer concern with a response that is honest, specific, and defensible. Replace the placeholders with your study details.

REVIEWER SAYS Your sample size is too small to support these conclusions.	A STRONG RESPONSE We have added an a priori power calculation showing the study was powered to detect an effect of [size] at [alpha] with [power]. Where estimates are imprecise, we now report confidence intervals and have softened the wording to reflect the precision available. (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).
REVIEWER SAYS You did not adjust for obvious confounders.	A STRONG RESPONSE We have added a multivariable model adjusting for [confounders], selected on clinical and theoretical grounds rather than by statistical significance alone. The adjusted estimate is [value], and the direction of the effect is unchanged. (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).
REVIEWER SAYS Why did you choose this statistical test?	A STRONG RESPONSE We have added a sentence justifying the choice: [test] was appropriate because [assumptions met or distribution or design]. We also report a sensitivity analysis using [alternative test], which yields consistent results. (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).

REVIEWER SAYS

There is high heterogeneity in your meta-analysis.

A STRONG RESPONSE

We agree heterogeneity is substantial (I-squared of [value]). We have used a random-effects model, explored sources through pre-specified subgroup and sensitivity analyses, and now discuss the clinical and methodological heterogeneity directly rather than pooling uncritically. (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).

REVIEWER SAYS

You report many comparisons without correction.

A STRONG RESPONSE

We have clarified which analyses are pre-specified and confirmatory and which are exploratory. For the confirmatory family we now apply [correction], and we present exploratory results as hypothesis-generating rather than definitive. (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).

REVIEWER SAYS

Risk of bias in the included studies was not assessed.

A STRONG RESPONSE

We have added a formal risk of bias assessment using [tool], summarised in a new figure, and we now discuss how study quality may influence the pooled estimate. (Page [X], lines [Y to Z]).

PRINCIPLE

Every model reply above does the same three things: it concedes what is fair, it adds something concrete and quoted, and it never claims more certainty than the data allow. That combination is what reviewers trust.

The pre-submission checklist

Run every revision through this list. If you cannot tick a box, the response is not ready.

- ☒ Every reviewer comment is reproduced in full and answered individually.
- ☒ Every response names the change and gives the page and line number.
- ☒ The cover letter summarises the three most important changes.
- ☒ You thanked the reviewers and conceded every point you honestly could.
- ☒ Each point where you disagree is backed by a citation, guideline, or statistical reason.
- ☒ Any contradiction between reviewers is acknowledged and resolved explicitly.
- ☒ Out-of-scope requests are reframed as limitations or future work, with a smaller change where possible.
- ☒ Statistical claims match the data exactly, with confidence intervals where precision matters.
- ☒ Both a clean and a tracked-changes manuscript are attached.
- ☒ The tone, read end to end, is calm, grateful, and confident.

WHEN THE REVISION NEEDS MORE THAN WORDING

Some reviews ask for new analysis, not new sentences

If a reviewer is asking for a power calculation, an adjusted model, a sensitivity analysis, a risk of bias assessment, or a re-run of your meta-analysis, our PhD methodologists handle response-to-reviewer corrections end to end: the analysis, the figures, and the point-by-point letter. You stay the author and make every final call.

Get a quote for your revision

researchgold.org . Written by PhD methodologists . We work in writing, on your schedule.