



Understanding and Overcoming Scholarly Paper Rejections: Common Pitfalls and Effective Strategies for Resubmission

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Abstract

It can be disheartening for researchers when their papers are rejected during attempts to publish in scholarly journals. This study examines common reasons for such rejections, including flawed or questionable methodology, lack of novelty or originality, weak study rationale, poor presentation, insufficient interpretation or discussion, incomplete or unjustified conclusions, absence of ethical approval, poorly written abstracts, and failure to adequately address reviewers' comments. Drawing on historical and empirical data, the study emphasizes the importance of perseverance in the face of rejection and offers practical recommendations for improving manuscripts before resubmission. It provides scholars with a comprehensive guide to overcoming rejection and navigating the academic publishing process effectively, incorporating both actionable strategies and psychological coping mechanisms.

Keywords: Scholarly, Paper rejection, Understanding, Pitfalls, Resubmission strategies

Introduction

For many scholars, the experience of having a research paper rejected is a familiar and often painful reality (Smith, 2023). Although rejection is an inherent part of the academic publishing process, it can be deeply frustrating. Achieving academic success requires a clear understanding of the underlying causes of rejection and the development of effective strategies for revision and resubmission. Scholarly writing and publication are grounded in principles of excellence, integrity, and intellectual honesty—qualities essential for career advancement across academic institutions.

However, the pressure encapsulated in the adage “publish or perish” has contributed to unethical practices within higher education, undermining the standards of academic writing and publication (Kayode et al., 2020; Kayode et al., 2024; Adom, 2024).

Consequently, many scholars face the discouraging experience of having their scientific work rejected. Yet, rejection remains a critical step in the publication journey. By understanding the reasons behind manuscript rejection and adopting strategic approaches to resubmission, researchers can significantly improve their chances of eventual publication. Publishing in peer-reviewed journals is undeniably a cornerstone of academic life, facilitating the dissemination of knowledge and supporting professional growth. Due to

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intense competition, however, many submissions are declined. Dah et al. (2024) reports that nearly 70% of articles submitted to prestigious journals are rejected at some stage of the review process. Common reasons include methodological flaws, insufficient engagement with existing literature, and misalignment with the journal's scope and objectives (Kosyakov & Pislyakov, 2024). While rejection can be disheartening, it should be viewed not as a personal failure but as an opportunity for growth and scholarly refinement (Narang & Kurian, 2024).

Rejection, therefore, plays a vital role in academic writing by prompting authors to revise and adapt their work to meet rigorous publishing standards (Krausman, 2020). Numerous factors contribute to manuscript rejection. Scholars such as Khadilkar (2018) and Krausman (2020) have identified common pitfalls, though often without detailed guidance for graduate students and early-career researchers. Others—including Pierson (2004), Ajao (2005), Ali (2010), Martin (2015), Fischer et al. (2017), Nair (2020), Adib & Nimehchisalem (2021), Delport (2021), Menon et al. (2022), and El-Gilany (2022)—have approached the issue from disciplinary and domain-specific perspectives.

This study builds on those foundations to offer clearer, more comprehensive insights into the ten most frequent reasons for manuscript rejection, along with practical resubmission strategies. It underscores the importance of resilience, suggesting that rejection—when constructively addressed—can catalyze academic success. The identified causes include failure to follow journal-specific guidelines, lack of originality or novelty, weak study rationale, flawed or questionable methodology, poor presentation and formatting, insufficient interpretation or discussion, incomplete or unjustified conclusions, poorly written abstracts, failure to adequately respond to reviewers' comments, and absence of ethical approval. By addressing these issues, researchers, especially graduate students and early career academics, can better navigate the publication process and enhance the quality and impact of their scholarly contributions.

Common Pitfalls Leading to Rejections

One of the most frequently cited reasons for manuscript rejection is methodological flaws. As Boud and Lee (2005) note, research characterized by inadequate study design, small sample sizes, or incorrect statistical analysis is unlikely to pass peer review. Such methodological weaknesses undermine the validity and reliability of the findings, making it difficult for reviewers to endorse the study. Another major contributor to rejection is insufficient engagement with the existing body of literature. McAlpine and Amundsen (2010) emphasize that manuscripts failing to situate their findings within broader academic discourse or neglecting to reference key studies are often perceived as lacking originality or scholarly significance. Journals expect authors not only to build on existing knowledge but also to contribute novel insights.

Equally important is the alignment of a manuscript with the journal's scope. Eve (2014) explains that papers misaligned with a journal's thematic focus or target audience are likely to be rejected, regardless of the quality of the research. Authors who fail to thoroughly examine a journal's aims and

scope risk desk rejection. Bowler (n.d.) points out that many papers are rejected outright due to noncompliance with journal-specific guidelines preventable error. Journals operate within clearly defined research niches. For example, Adib and Nimehchisalem (2021) clarify that submissions to the *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies* must focus on topics within education and literacy. Submissions outside these domains are desk-rejected to allow authors to redirect their work to more appropriate outlets.

Novelty and originality are also critical elements of scholarly writing. Ali (2010) argues that without these, a manuscript may be deemed non-scientific and uninteresting to readers. While replication studies are valid in certain contexts, most journals prioritize original contributions that advance knowledge (Shibayama & Wang, 2020). Editors seek manuscripts that offer fresh perspectives rather than reiterating established findings (Griffiths & Norman, 2016).

A poorly articulated study rationale is another common pitfall. The rationale serves as the intellectual foundation for the research and must be supported by strong theoretical or empirical justification. Without this, the research lacks direction and coherence. As a peer reviewer, the researcher has recommended rejection of manuscripts where the rationale or aims were vague or unsupported. In such cases, the results and discussion sections often contain irrelevant or redundant material (Pierson, 2004).

Manuscripts are also rejected due to weak interpretation or discussion of results. Some authors merely restate their findings without offering meaningful analysis (Ali, 2010). Others fail to engage with existing literature, leaving their findings disconnected from the broader scholarly conversation. In some instances, authors discuss results that were not presented or fail to situate their findings within the field, leading to a one-sided narrative that lacks depth. Incorrect, incomplete, or unjustified conclusions are another frequent cause of rejection. Conclusions should provide scholarly inferences that directly address the research questions or hypotheses. However, some authors present conclusions that are not supported by their findings or use the conclusion section to repeat the abstract or results, diminishing the paper's impact (Ali, 2010).

Abstracts, whether structured or unstructured, are critical components of a manuscript. As Thong et al. (2025) note, they serve as the second point of contact for editors and reviewers after the title. Abstracts should succinctly summarize the study's aims, methods, key findings, and conclusions. Unfortunately, many abstracts omit essential elements such as methodology or key outcomes, focusing instead on general aims and significance. Ethical approval is another vital consideration. While not all studies require formal ethical clearance, failure to mention ethical protocols can lead to rejection (El-Gilany, 2022). Adherence to ethical standards ensures research integrity and protects participants. Papers that neglect this aspect risk compromising scholarly credibility. Poor presentation and packaging also contribute to rejection. Manuscripts that deviate from journal templates or contain numerous grammatical and syntactical errors are viewed as unprofessional. Since language is the medium through which research is communicated, clarity and precision are essential (Adib & Nimehchisalem, 2021).

Finally, one of the most disheartening forms of rejection occurs after peer review, when authors fail to adequately address reviewers' comments. While conditional acceptance is encouraging, it requires thoughtful and comprehensive revisions. Authors who rush through revisions, ignore key suggestions, or reject constructive feedback risk having their papers declined. This stage is an opportunity to enhance the academic rigor of a manuscript, as this paper has benefited from. Successful navigation of this process demands humility, diligence, and scholarly maturity.

Effective Strategies for Resubmission: A Path to Publication

Significant modifications are often required during the resubmission process. As Cargill and O'Connor (2009) emphasize, preparing a stronger manuscript involves thoroughly addressing reviewer feedback, refining research methodology, and improving clarity of expression. Ensuring alignment with journal guidelines and enhancing the coherence and structure of the argument are also critical to increasing the likelihood of acceptance. Equally important is the cultivation of resilience in coping with rejection.

Researchers can overcome setbacks by adopting a growth mindset, viewing rejection as a natural and constructive part of the academic journey (Gilbert et al., 2020). Productively engaging with criticism—rather than internalizing it—can transform rejection into an opportunity for scholarly development. Thus, a manuscript's journey does not end with rejection. By carefully considering reviewer feedback and implementing thoughtful revisions, researchers can significantly improve their chances of eventual publication.

Key Resubmission Strategies

- **Thoroughly Address Reviewer Comments:** Responding to each reviewer's concern is the cornerstone of a successful resubmission. Authors should provide detailed explanations of revisions and include a point-by-point response document (Wilson, 2024). Where disagreement arises, authors must respectfully justify their decisions with supporting evidence.
- **Revision and Refinement:** Manuscripts should be extensively revised in light of reviewer feedback. This may involve restructuring arguments, clarifying ambiguous sections, conducting additional analysis, or incorporating new literature. Authors are encouraged to use library resources to access recommended studies and strengthen their work (Wilson, 2024).
- **Consider Alternative Journals:** If the original journal's scope proves unsuitable or the required revisions are extensive, authors may consider submitting to a different journal. Thorough research into alternative outlets is essential to ensure alignment with their aims and scope. Tools such as Journal Citation Reports (JCR) can help identify high-impact and relevant journals (Wilson, 2024).
- **Seek Expert Advice:** Consulting mentors, subject librarians, or colleagues can provide valuable insights into manuscript improvement and journal selection. Libraries can facilitate connections with domain experts who offer constructive feedback and strategic guidance.

- **Maintain a Positive Attitude:** The path to publication is often challenging, and rejection is a common experience. Maintaining optimism, viewing rejection as a learning opportunity, and persevering through setbacks are essential for academic success (Chen, 2021).

Conclusion

This article has explored ten common reasons for manuscript rejection and provided practical strategies to address each. Its distinctiveness lies in the integration of personal experiences and discipline-spanning advice not commonly found in existing literature. Among the most critical causes of rejection are inadequate study justification, lack of originality, and flawed methodology—issues that cannot be corrected post hoc. While other factors may be addressed after the study is completed, these foundational weaknesses often result in rejection.

It is important to note that not all rejections stem from errors. Even well-crafted manuscripts may be declined due to journal space limitations or editorial priorities. Whether authored by seasoned scholars or emerging researchers, rejection should be viewed as an opportunity to refine and elevate academic work. Authors are encouraged to revise their manuscripts based on detailed feedback, thereby enhancing scholarly rigor and increasing the likelihood of successful resubmission. Although this study offers a comprehensive overview of rejection causes and remedies, future research could enrich the discourse by incorporating real-world case studies. Insights from journal editors and peer reviewers would provide additional depth and broaden understanding of editorial decision-making.

Recommendations

To improve manuscript quality and reduce the risk of rejection, authors should:

- Conduct thorough methodological assessments using field-specific guidelines (e.g., CONSORT for clinical research).
- Seek peer feedback on research design and execution.
- Perform comprehensive literature reviews to ensure the study addresses a meaningful gap.
- Clearly articulate the novelty and relevance of findings.
- Strengthen the study rationale by engaging with practitioners and stakeholders.
- Attend writing workshops to enhance clarity and coherence.
- Craft abstracts that succinctly summarize the study's objectives, methods, results, and conclusions using standard structures (e.g., IMRaD).

Future Research Directions

To deepen understanding of scholarly rejection and improve resubmission strategies, future studies should:

- Conduct in-depth interviews with journal editors and reviewers to explore decision-making processes.
- Perform meta-analyses of interventions (e.g., mentoring, writing workshops) aimed at improving publication outcomes.

- Develop and evaluate AI-based tools to help authors identify and correct common manuscript errors.
- Track researchers' publication trajectories to examine links between career development, resubmission strategies, and rejection rates.
- Compare peer review practices across disciplines to identify best practices.
- Investigate the impact of open science practices (e.g., pre-registration, data sharing) on manuscript quality and acceptance.
- Explore how cultural differences influence writing styles, research approaches, and interactions with editors and reviewers.

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