



Writer's Camp



REFRAME Rejection: Practical Tips for Developing Rejection Resilience

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Manuscript rejection is an inevitable part of the publication process. Use the experience for personal growth.

“**A**ccepted without revisions.” The words every author wants to see when the decision from the editorial office reaches their inbox. That was my experience nearly 10 years ago with my first peer-reviewed publication, but it hasn’t happened since. When my next manuscript was rejected, I wasn’t prepared. I remember feeling angry, frustrated, and unworthy. I wanted to give up on the paper altogether for fear of another rejection. I’ve come to realize that these feelings are normal, even for seasoned writers. But rejection can have a substantial impact on doctoral students and early-career scholars who haven’t developed **rejection resilience**.

How to REFRAME Rejection

Early-career scholars are more likely to give up on papers sooner due to rejection sensitivity, which can subsequently lead to depression, low self-worth, and decreased academic performance.¹ Rejection can come as a speedy “desk reject” which may initially result in shock and anger. Given the quick response time, it may sting a bit less or for some, it may be more painful. However, rejection after a long period of review can be more difficult to overcome. This often coincides with disappointment, sadness, and vulnerability, as scholars want to be accepted and valued by their peers.² When I experienced my first rejection, I remember calling one of my mentors and asking them how they dealt with it. Their response was, “I give myself 48 hours to be upset, and then I reopen the email and carefully read the reviewers comments with an open mind.” It sounded simple and as I learned, it was effective. Over time, I have worked to develop my own rejection resilience by learning how to **REFRAME** rejection.

R	Realize that rejection is unavoidable. Rejection is part of the process, and everyone will experience it at some point in their career. Find comfort in knowing that you are not alone.
E	Examine the reason for rejection. Remind yourself that rejection isn't personal and seek to understand why it occurred. Was the paper outside the aim and scope of the journal? Was the case for significance made? Was there lack of clarity in the design? Were the findings poorly interpreted or overstated? ³
F	Face the feedback. Instead of avoiding the responses from reviewers, embrace them with an open mind. Recognize that they took the time to review your work. Set aside any negative emotions, carefully read each comment, and try to really understand the reason for each response.
R	Refocus before resubmitting. Take your time. It can be tempting to turn the paper around quickly, but instead, sit with it for a while. Be thoughtful when searching for another journal and patient while crafting revisions. The last thing anybody wants is to rush into another rejection.
A	Aim for clarity. Remember that you know your work better than anyone else. But even though it makes sense to you, it may not make sense to others. Before resubmitting, consider asking a colleague to provide feedback on your work. Even the best papers can benefit from additional clarity and review. ⁴
M	Model the way. Share your experiences with rejection. Talking about your experiences with others can be beneficial for both parties, especially for doctoral students and early-career scholars who are new to publishing. I have a 'rejection log' saved on my desktop that I often share with students to help them visualize how common rejection is, but also to encourage them to never give up on publishing their work.
E	Engage in peer review. One of the best ways to understand the process is to be part of it. There is value in reviewing the work of others. Through peer review, I have learned how to critically appraise my own work, write more clearly, and edit more thoroughly.

Conclusion

Before you submit your next manuscript, take a step toward developing rejection resilience. Reflect on your own personal experiences with rejection and think about how it made you feel. Next, revisit these tips and consider what you might do differently in the future to help prepare you for your next (inevitable) experience with rejection.

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Change happens when the pain of holding on becomes greater than the fear of letting go.
— Spencer Johnson

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