

## How to Deal with the Rejection of a Scientific Manuscript

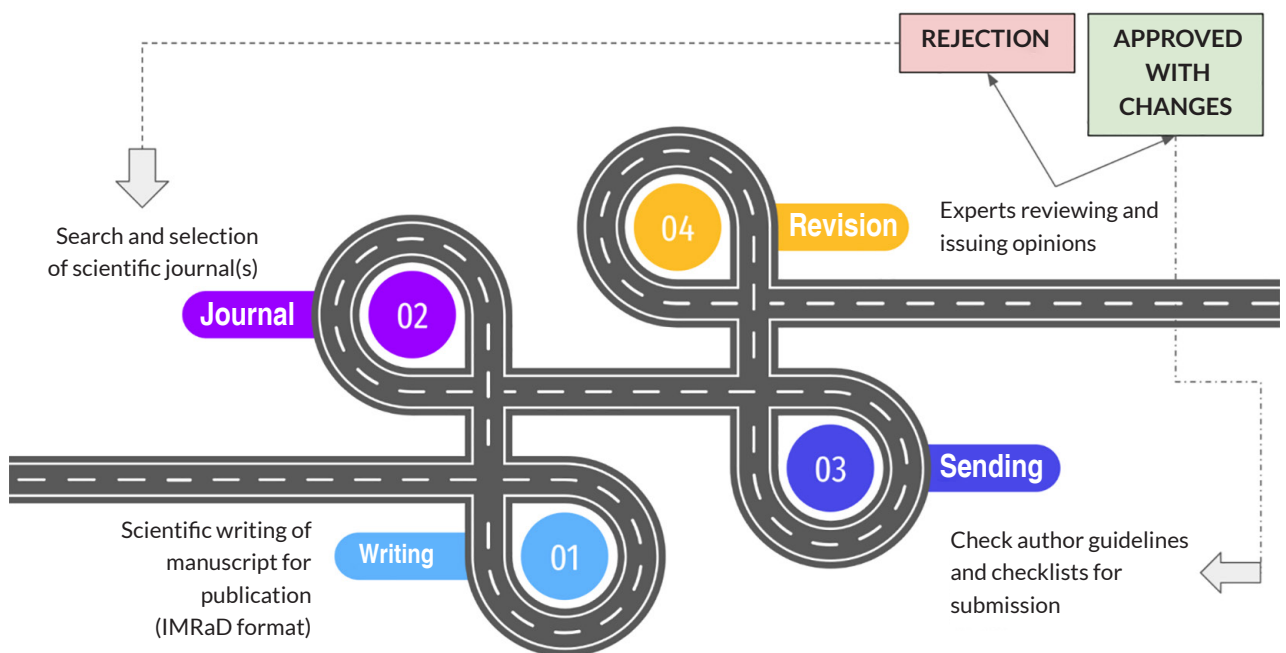
To the editor

Based on a publication by the team of the Adult Emergency Department of the Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires<sup>1</sup>, we took the opportunity to standardize the rejection before submission to indexed and peer-reviewed academic journals. We will comment on the lessons learned based on our experience, emphasizing the steps for overcoming the editorial process satisfactorily and achieving successful publication.

In the health sciences, scientific writing and publication represent an enormous challenge in clinical research, and there are some key factors to navigate this tortuous path (Fig. 1).

First, we must talk about and naturalize manuscript rejection because it represents an uncomfortable but not unusual event in the life of the investigator<sup>2</sup>. Many (if not all) authors have experienced such unfavorable decisions at some time, and they should not be seen as the end of all hopes<sup>3</sup>.

Secondly, we should know that a substantial number of rejected manuscripts find their final destination, sooner or later, in one journal or another, after undergoing a process of continuous editorial improvement. Unfortunately, this trigger paper suffered four previous rejections in other journals before publication<sup>1</sup>. At first, it may annoy, frustrate, anger and/or discourage. Then you understand the game and decide whether you want to play it<sup>4</sup>. Then



**Figure 1.** Roadmap for scientific writing and publica

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you understand the game and decide if you want to play it<sup>4</sup>. Only by accepting and normalizing it as an integral part of the process can negative emotions be overcome more quickly. It should be noted that it is the role of the first author to spend as much time as necessary to force herself to think straight, stay motivated, and dedicate herself to working hard until she reaches her goal.

Additionally, protected time is a crucial factor during this editorial process. On the one hand, it can take several months between submission and receipt of a final decision. Following the above example, this article was received on 8/2021 and finally accepted on 4/2021, with two rounds of asynchronous exchange with reviewers; first, it received significant changes, then minor changes. However, the first submission was original to another journal in 6/2020, so the overall effort in the publication could practically account for two years of dedication, effort, and teamwork.

Arbitrated journals are those in which the quality and interest of the articles are examined by independent evaluators, reviewers, juries or peers. One should remember that a reviewer for one journal may also be a reviewer for another. Then, without addressing or attempting to resolve the comments received in the face of the rejection, you may encounter another new rejection almost automatically. The author should use a rejection to refine, improve and move forward as an iterative process. Instead of caving in and giving up, the author should take back the reins, accept constructive criticism, and attempt to rewrite the article<sup>5</sup>. In fact, acknowledging the reasons that lead to the rejection allows us to improve the quality of the manuscript and increases the likelihood of publication<sup>3</sup>.

It is worth noting that choosing a suitable journal is not an easy task because of the wide availability following the exponential growth in the latest years. Undoubtedly, the subject matter is one of the essential factors not to be overlooked when choosing a journal. One should consult the editorial preferences and scope of the journal(s), browsing back issues and recent publications, which takes a few minutes well spent, to check that the focus does indeed match one's presentation.

Finally, each journal sets specific guidelines or standards for authors, and editors expect them to be read and followed. It is then good practice to go through the chosen journal's website to explore the instructions and make any necessary adaptations (as regards sections, manuscript format, reference style, maximum word length, number of tables and figures allowed, etc.).

In conclusion, while rejection can be disappointing and discouraging, the first step for the author is to pause and reflect. Once this initial setback is behind, she should analyze the possible reasons to try to resolve them. If she considers the changes suggested are needed, she has to do so without delay. At any rate, if an author thinks she has a solid scientific basis and the project is interesting, novel, ethical, and relevant, there is no need to worry, but rather, to look for a new journal and persevere until she reaches his goal.

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