

ONE TIP

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“As I was approaching tenure, I submitted a three-study manuscript for publication in a well-respected psychological journal. It was, I thought, crucial for a positive tenure decision, in part because it was my first publication including causal attributions. I thus was very nervous about the decision. My anxiety was exacerbated by the reputation of the journal editor, who was known to be smart, exceedingly critical, and very wordy (although perhaps that

describes most journal editors). He lived up to his reputation. My manuscript was returned with a “revise and resubmit,” accompanied by a commentary about its shortcomings that actually was longer than the submission. I could not read the review for a few days because I was so desperate but then poured over his feedback, addressing as many of his serious doubts as possible. The extended time needed to understand his comments provided the chance to complete another study, which I added to the resubmission. This process was reiterated on two more occasions until a final positive decision was reached regarding the manuscript, which now included six studies. I am pleased to report that it remains one of my most highly cited papers.”

Here are some publication guidelines I took away from this experience:

- Editors are appointed to that position for a reason – they tend to be smart, critical, and wordy. Take their feedback seriously and use it to improve your work, rather than searching for strategies that might “mask” some deficiency.
- More is usually better. I was given the opportunity to include many studies because of the review process but should have pursued this goal without the external push. The later studies should replicate some findings reported in the prior research. This will increase attention to the paper and add confidence in the publication as well as demonstrating a systematic approach to some problem -- all positive inputs for academic advancement.
- Publication of multiple studies often requires a relatively simple methodology and a focused idea, so that the research can be completed in a very timely manner. If you want to examine the effects of early socialization on subsequent marital success, promotions may be hard to attain. But if this is the issue of significance to you, then have some related and meaningful research that can be easily conducted in the intervening period.
- One clear correlate of publication success is persistence. Do not be overly disheartened by a rejection or revise decision; try again, but only after the manuscript is improved. However, persistence in the face of failure is not always a virtue. As the song says: “There is a time to hold um and a time to fold um.” My rule has been, if rejected three times, fold um; that is, three strikes and you are out! Move on, saving what is possible and discarding what is causing the most difficulty. We may be the only industry that throws away 80% of its products, but that is the nature of the academic publishing world. Of course, reviewers, like baseball umpires, are sometimes incorrect. I have what I regard as some very good papers my file drawer because of “unfair” rejections. But then again, I have some questionable papers that have been published in fine journals. God evens the score if there are enough submissions.

One Tip is published bi-monthly by the Membership Committee of APA Division 15 (Educational Psychology). In One Tip, senior scholars tell their stories and share insights for junior scholars. If you would like to contribute a piece, please contact Division 15 Membership Committee Chair, Serena Shim at sshim@bsu.edu.

