

ONE TIP

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DR. THOMAS GOOD

The rejection of a manuscript can test one's ego: is it seen as failure or learning opportunity? I submitted my dissertation to the *Elementary School Journal (ESJ)*. I was delighted with my revise and resubmit letter from Philip Jackson, its editor (Jackson was cited in my dissertation and this was a thrill). My glow was quickly extinguished by the copy editor's suggestions, which were filled with a sea of red marks! I lost much time perseverating on the deficiencies rather than the opportunity that the revision presented. Eventually, I learned how to use reviewer information to improve my writing... and eventually I became *ESJ*'s editor.

When I submitted my dissertation, it was commonly thought that learning required continuous success (avoid failure at all cost). Rohrkemper and Corno (1988) challenged the shibboleth—failure is bad—by noting that classroom failure is inevitable and that mistakes can allow for adaptive learning. Fortunately, today, most believe failure is part of learning but accepting this can be very difficult for young writers.

Many academic papers are rejected! Everyone gets rejected: get over it! Let the rejection letter sit for a while, then re-read it to learn why it was rejected. Understanding the cause of the rejection enables you to determine if deficiencies are correctable. Some problems are intractable (e.g., a study with too little power is not worth rewriting); if so, accept the rejection and move on. If editors say your paper is not within the journal's intellectual scope, find another

journal. Persuading a disinterested editor that your paper is appropriate to the journal's mission is impossible.

Many deficiencies are correctable (e.g., poorly written sections or a confusing theoretical statement). When revising, clearly point out how reviewers' criticisms were addressed. Generally, you can conclude whether the paper can be revised or not, but sometimes you may decide that the review was inadequate (e.g., identifiable errors). What now?

Editors are human (although it may be difficult to remember this), busy, and often make decisions on topics they know little about. No one person understands educational psychology completely. Accordingly, editors are dependent on reviewers' knowledge, but they also know that reviewers are sometimes careless. And, yes, some reviewers are biased (e.g., prefer conclusions similar to their own).

Editors will consider that reviews may be flawed, but are constrained by the reality that they risk losing reviewers by frequently discarding recommendations. Still, most editors will reconsider a decision if presented with a clear and compelling argument. Unfortunately many authors respond to rejections by submitting to a less desirable journal.

Rejection is common; the goal is to focus on learning and how to improve your research presentation. Some rejections are warranted, some are fixable, some are unfair but your task is to learn, improve and move on.

If you enjoyed this piece, we encourage you to read a full-length version of Dr. Good's advice on the Division 15 website, [here](#). You may also find an archive containing all past issues of One Tip [here](#).

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.