

Research Writing
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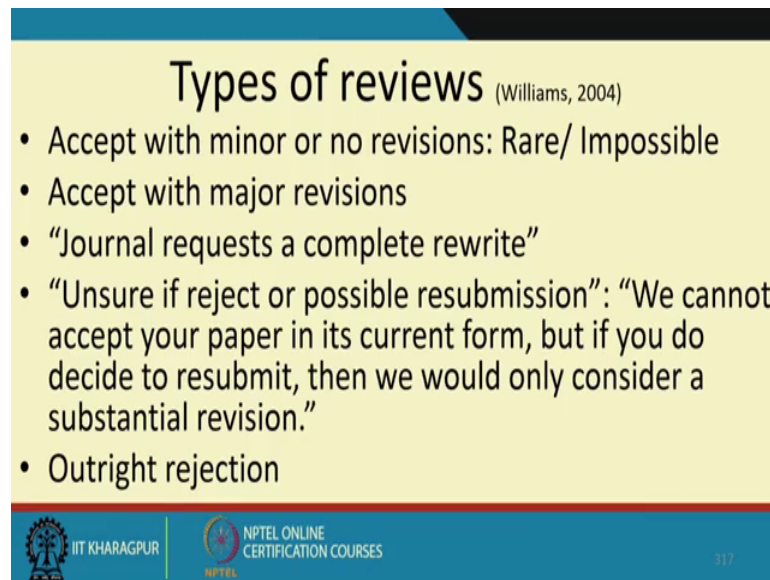
Lecture - 30
Responding to Reviewer Comments

Welcome back to the MOOC course on Research Writing. My name is Aradhna Malik and I am helping you with the courses and the course is drawing to a close and I know I have received a number of suggestions from all of you regarding what can and should be included. We try to accommodate as much of what you need as possible, but the time has come to finally, wind up everything and the last topic that I am going to address in this course is managing reviewer comments.

So, we are assuming that you finished your paper, you written your paper, you submitted to a journal. Now, you have started getting comments you know in response to what you have submitted. So, how do you respond to those comments, how do deal with the issues that come up while you know you are trying to publish your work etcetera. So, if there is anything else that we need to add to all of this I will either I will see if our technical team is able to accommodate request to add more lectures after the final conclusion is over or maybe I will put up some material I will try and help you as much as possible. So, let see what we have for you here will finish this and then will talk more about how the course has been wrapped up.

So, responding to reviewer comments. Now, the type of reviews that you can expect to get are you know you may accept, you know your paper is accepted with minor or no revisions which is usually rare or practically impossible.

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Types of reviews (Williams, 2004)

- Accept with minor or no revisions: Rare/ Impossible
- Accept with major revisions
- “Journal requests a complete rewrite”
- “Unsure if reject or possible resubmission”: “We cannot accept your paper in its current form, but if you do decide to resubmit, then we would only consider a substantial revision.”
- Outright rejection

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The best of researchers do not get this kind of a review. So, it is seemingly immature to expect that your paper will be accepted with minor or no revisions. You will obviously, you have done the best possible work that you think you can do ; however, there is always scope for improvement. So, please do not get disheartened.

The best of researchers need to face failure and rejection of the best work that they have done multiple times before their work is finally, accepted and published. So, please do not be disheartened, but if this can you know it will, if you have submitted your work to a good quality journal acceptance with minor or no revisions minor revision just still possibility acceptance in its current form will probably happen when you are maybe 50-60 years old, with 20, 25, 30 years of research behind you at that point this stage could come when you have this and then it is a big achievement.

The other type of review that you can get is except with major revisions which is what usually tends to happen. So, your paper is accepted, but with major revisions and you know you are expected to make major changes to your paper, you are expected to make significant changes you know things will be missing things will need to be added etcetera. Sometimes the journal may request you to rewrite your paper completely and that is another possibility. Sometimes based on the comments you get your unsure if your paper is rejected or requires a possible resubmission. For example, they just tell you we cannot accept your paper in its current form, but if you do decide to submit then we

would only consider a substantial revision. So, if that happens then you know you need to deal with differently, so let see how you can deal with these deferent type of comments that you get on your paper ok.

And of course, you could have an outright rejection they will say thank you very much for submitting your work, we are unable to publish your paper in its current form at this time. Now, if that happens please do not start crying; cry, do cry, do vent, to feel angry, but then understand that this is something that will happen to first time submitters to top notch journals. If you are submitting to a top journal you must have done excellent work you do not submit your work till you are sure that it is of a certain quality. So, you may feel that your work is worthy of being published in a top notch journal very nice.

However, many times these top notch journals are looking for something more. So, if you get a total rejection and outright rejection, if you get a something you know if you get a comments saying that we are unable to publish your work please do not get disheartened this happens to most of us actually all of us we do our best work even after 20, 30, 40 years of research many times we face rejection many times we are told that our work cannot be accomodate in a specific journal please do not get disheartened. Understand that this is something that will happen to you the first time you submit your work top notch journal and accept it and move on.

Now, how do you respond to outright rejection what do you do?

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Responding to outright rejection
(Williams, 2004)

- Appeal to the editor for a change of referees
- Submit elsewhere

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You can appeal to the editor for a change of referees it does not work, but you are well within your rights to appeal to the editor for a change of a referees you think you done excellent work and you would like somebody else to take and look at it from a fresh perspective, fair enough. So, that you can appeal usually the editor will not accommodate your request and, but you can still try.

It may happen that you may get a change of referees and your paper maybe accepted with major revisions submit elsewhere, easiest thing to do. One journal does not accept your paper you think it is fabulous you take the feedback that you get from this outright rejection many times the referees will tell you what is missing in your paper you submit it to another journal or make those revisions and resubmit. Even if they ask you to you know they tell you that it is not acceptable in its current form you make the changes you take care of the problems that they have listed and try and resubmit it to the same journal and if your paper has improved they might consider it for publication.

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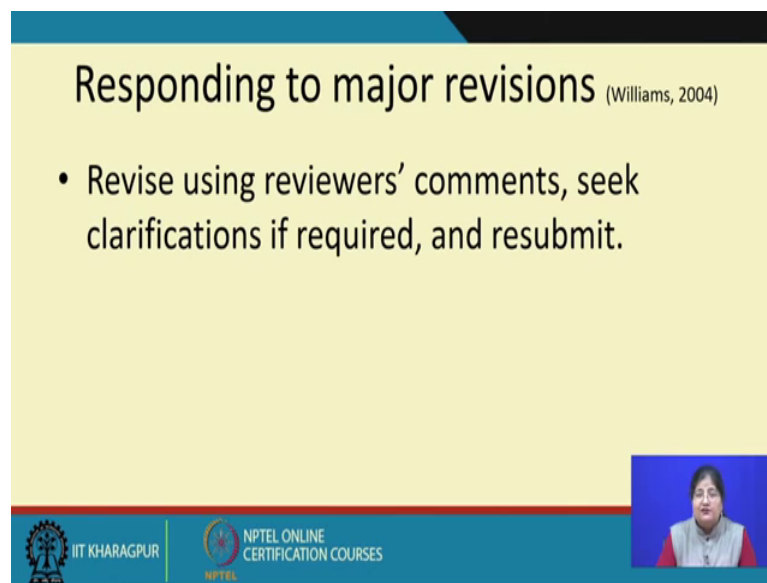
Dealing with need to rewrite (Williams, 2004)

- Using the comments made by the reviewers, rewrite your paper and resubmit
- Submit to another journal

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Now, dealing with a need to rewrite; if you have to if you are asked to rewrite your paper then what you do? Use the comments made by the reviewers rewrite your paper and resubmit very simple. Submit to another journal always a possibility and wait.

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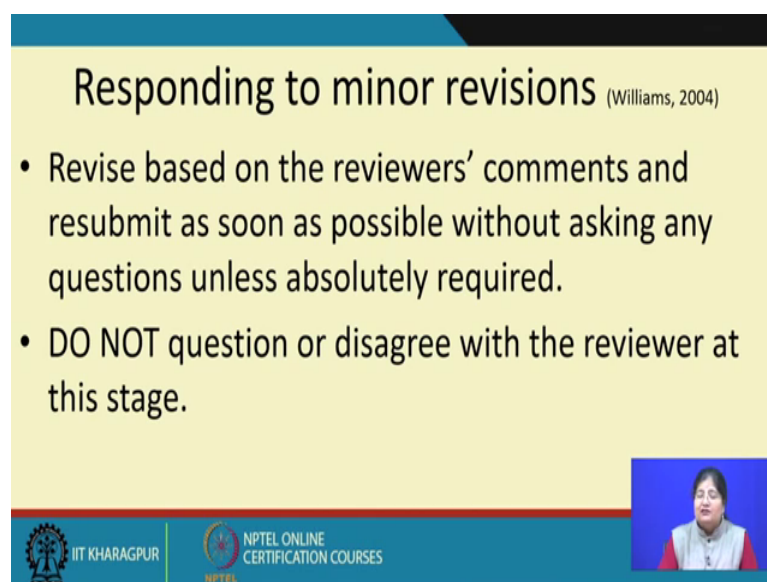
Responding to major revisions (Williams, 2004)

- Revise using reviewers' comments, seek clarifications if required, and resubmit.

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If you asked to this make major revisions on your paper what do you do? You revise using reviewers comments seek clarification, if you need clarifications and resubmit and hope that your paper will be accepted.

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Responding to minor revisions (Williams, 2004)

- Revise based on the reviewers' comments and resubmit as soon as possible without asking any questions unless absolutely required.
- DO NOT question or disagree with the reviewer at this stage.

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If you are asked to make minor revisions then what do you do? you revise based on the reviewers comments and resubmit as soon as possible without asking any questions unless absolutely required. They have asked you to make minor revisions these revisions may or may not appeal to your sensibilities. So, what, they ask you to put comas here

and full stops there and remove certain words and add certain words in the interest of saving time humour them, they know what they are doing. You must understand that your reviewers are very experienced people who know what they are doing they have asked you to make certain things you cannot question everything that comes your way yes you may ask questions, but you resubmit you know accept their experience respect their experience and effort that has gone for what it is worth and resubmit the work with the clarification. If you, it is usually you know unless you are really confused what question what they are saying do not disagree with what they are saying just resubmit your work.

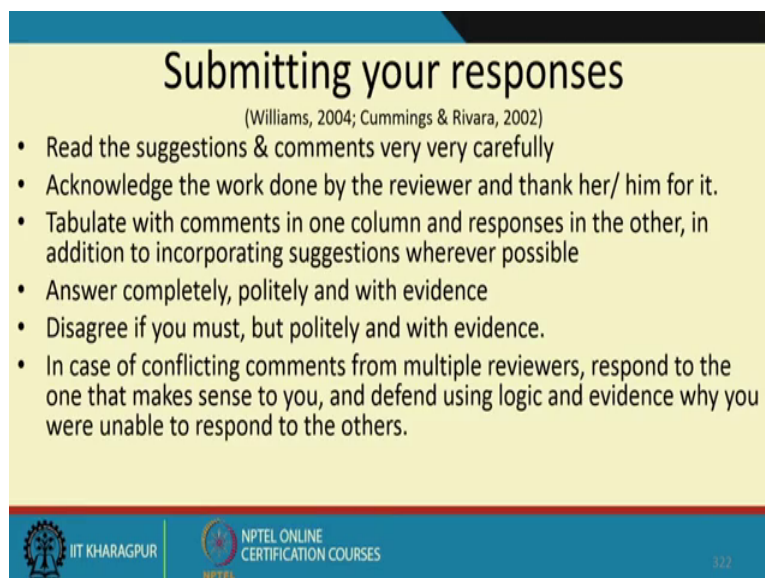
Do not question or disagree with the reviewer at this stage. Because they have taken the time if they are really accepting a paper; that means, they must have found it to be worthy of being accepted and published. So, you must not disagree with the, you must not disagree with the reviewer, you must not question the reviewer for making small suggestions and just say fine you asked me to do this the reviewers are putting lot of time and effort. And most of the times reviewers do not get paid anything, especially for top class journals reviewing papers is a service we do to the academic community. It is done free of cost we do not get paid for it we will not get recognised for it we review somebody else's work somebody else reviews our work.

So, it is a kind of you know of mutually beneficial sort of situation we are helping each other out. So, if somebody has taken time out of his or her busy schedule and has reviewed your paper and made certain comments and eventually found it worthy of publication papers are not just especially papers that are accepted or not accepted you know they are accepted after a lot of thought and incites has gone into your paper into understanding your paper. So, it takes more time to read a paper that is worthy of being accepted than it does to reject your paper. We do the same kind of work, but occasionally you see that the as a reviewer I can tell you that if the vision of the journal and the paper that has been submitted do not match then it could be an outright rejection.

Of course, when you are suggesting major revisions many times the focus needs to be changed things need to be clarified, but if you are accepting a paper you need to be absolutely sure that the paper that you are accepting is of a certain quality and it meets the standards or it meets the you know it upholds the reputation of your publication. So,

at that point please do not question or disagree with the reviewer just respect their experience and suggestion then go on the way.

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Submitting your responses
(Williams, 2004; Cummings & Rivara, 2002)

- Read the suggestions & comments very very carefully
- Acknowledge the work done by the reviewer and thank her/ him for it.
- Tabulate with comments in one column and responses in the other, in addition to incorporating suggestions wherever possible
- Answer completely, politely and with evidence
- Disagree if you must, but politely and with evidence.
- In case of conflicting comments from multiple reviewers, respond to the one that makes sense to you, and defend using logic and evidence why you were unable to respond to the others.

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Now, how do you submit your responses? Read the suggestions and comments very carefully. I have used to varies here because you may tend to miss out or overlook certain things. Many times after we have had enough experience with writing papers or we are at a certain age or stage in life we feel that we know more than the other person you may, but somebody who has specifically taken on the responsibility to review your paper and accept or and take a decision on the quality of your paper knows what they are doing. So, if they have made a suggestion please read their suggestions completely and very carefully.

Acknowledge the work done by the reviewer and thank her or him for it like I told you we do not get paid to review. So, please acknowledge what they have done and say thank you for reviewing my paper and then move on. Tabulate with you could tabulate the comments and your responses. So, you could make a table and you could say comment number reviewer 1, comment 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and action taken let me show you how you do it here I will just show you how to make that table so many times good journal send your papers to several reviewers. So, what you do is reviewer 1. So, what you can do is you can tabulate your responses to the comments made by the reviewers. Now, this is how you do it.

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Document/ Submission No.

Summary of responses to comments made by reviewers

Reviewer 1

S. No.	Comment	Response

Reviewer 2

Comment No.	Comment	Response

I have made these tables for you. What you can do is typically your work if you are submitting, your work to a peer reviewed journal your work is reviewed by 2 or 3 reviewers. Now, when your work is reviewed by 2 or 3 reviewers then what the ideal thing to do is just list their comments because papers can run in to 30-40 pages depending on which field you are from, what the size of your research is etcetera.

So, you can just list that if they are if the comments are numbered excellent, if they are not numbered then what you can do is you can make a table like this you can remove this instead of saying comment number you just say serial number, sorry you say serial number. Then you say comment and court the exact comment that the reviewer has made and respond to it here, respond to it in the review revised paper and also summarise the responses you have or your responses to the comments in the form of a table. So, the reviewer knows that you are really taken pains to review their work.

And then reviewer 1, reviewer 2, reviewer 3, so you will get 3 different reviews and then you take all that and put it here on the sheet you label the sheet as summary of responses to comments made by reviewers. Identify your paper its always a good idea when you are submitting something like this. You can mention the identification number of your paper on the top right hand corner. So, over here in the header you mention document number or submission number you know you will have some sort of unique identification number. So, you mention that here and then you respond.

And so even if you know typically your responses will run into several pages and this header once you mention this, this gives them a reference points. So, they can pullout the original paper and then they can look at what you have done. So, this is a very good idea to send with the covering letter when you respond to reviewer comments ok.

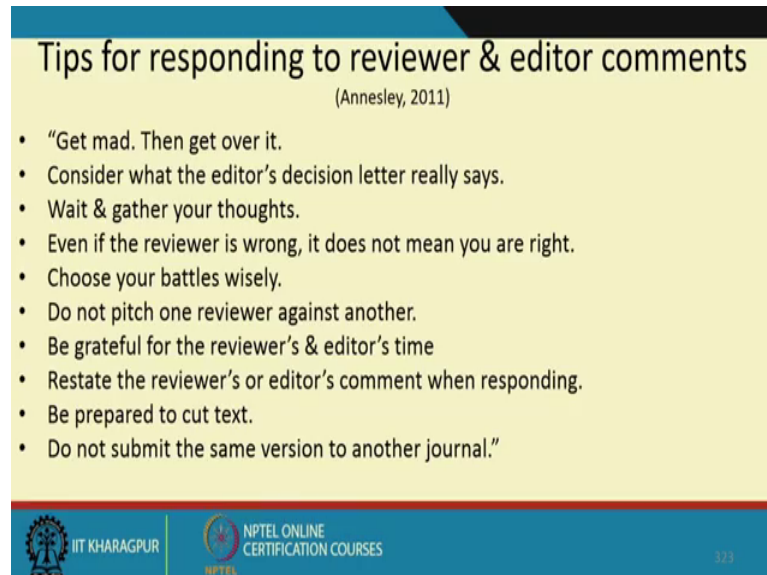
Then answer completely politely and with evidence. Now, they would have asked you to do certain things. So, respond to the comments made by the reviewers with the evidence with logic and a very very politely respond to their comments. Now, many times or occasionally, not many times occasionally you may find that you disagree with the observations made by the reviewer at that point please feel free to disagree, but very politely and with evidence you say thank you very much for noticing this, thank you very much for pointing this out, I understand your prospective, I understand or I can see why you have made this observation. However, I choose to disagree because of these reasons reason 1 2 3 4 5.

It is a good idea if you incorporate all their comments occasionally the reviewer has not see realistically speaking the reviewer has not had a chance to delve so deep into the specific area that you have written about they would be experts in the field they are expected to be experts in the field, but they would not have may be had a chance to delve. So, deep into your area plus what has happened is that you know you have spent months working on one study the reviewer may have been doing something different. So, the time they get to go through your work and understand things from your perspective is very little as compared to the time, but you have spent writing it.

So, at that time you can disagree please tell them that you are saying things from a different perspective maybe that will help sharpen your paper maybe you can build that explanation into your paper to disagree if you must, but very politely and with evidence. In case of conflicting comments from multiple reviewers, occasionally what will happen is that you will get conflicting comments. So, two reviewers are saying something totally different, you know one is saying one thing the other is saying something different. So, in case that is the case then respond to the one that makes most sense to you and defend your lack of response to the other or your lack of adherence to the other comment using logic and evidence as to why you were unable to respond to the other reviewers and that is absolutely fine. But please do it as politely as possible do acknowledge at every point

to acknowledge the work that has gone into making these comments into the review that have that you have received.

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Tips for responding to reviewer & editor comments
(Annesley, 2011)

- "Get mad. Then get over it.
- Consider what the editor's decision letter really says.
- Wait & gather your thoughts.
- Even if the reviewer is wrong, it does not mean you are right.
- Choose your battles wisely.
- Do not pitch one reviewer against another.
- Be grateful for the reviewer's & editor's time
- Restate the reviewer's or editor's comment when responding.
- Be prepared to cut text.
- Do not submit the same version to another journal."

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Now, some tips for responding to reviewer and editor comments. You will get upset, you will feel uncomfortable that you the work that you have worked so hard at or what you have really put in so much of effort into has not been accepted, but then be angry be upset vent. And then finally, get over it. Consider what the editors decision letter really says do not be blinded by the negative comments. It is a very emotional thing because you have spent so much of time working on something, writing a paper text time, writing a paper is difficult, you delved into it, you work so hard in it and somebody says you know there is an outright rejection or they ask you to make number of changes. So, just try and find out what the editors decision later is letter is actually saying.

Then wait and gather your thoughts. Try and find out why they are saying this as you get more and more experienced with your work you will realise that they are coming from a totally different perspective, they are seeing new knowledge being generated day in and day out. So, what you think is new, may not be so new from that perspective the most common comment is what is your contribution. The most common reason why papers are rejected outright is what is your contribution or many times the clarity the fit between the methods used and the research question is not very clear or there is lack of adherence to the literature. So, or there is lack of enough emphasis on the previous literature. So,

you must wait and revisit what you have done in light of the reviewers comments and then assess things and then start thinking about how to improving it how to improve it sorry. Even if the reviewer is wrong it does not mean that you are right there is some gap remaining. There must be a reason why the reviewer made the comment that he or she did.

Choose your battles wisely; too much of disagreement could result in rejection of your paper like I told you. This is a free service that reviewers do to the academic community or for the academic community they are spending time do not get angry do not get upset with them. Agree to what the suggestions they are making as long as you know it is not totally against the main theme of your paper or unless use you realise that they have totally misunderstood or something in the way that you have said has led to a misinterpretation of your work. So, at that point feel free to disagree, but then find out where you should disagree and where you should just go and agree with whatever they are saying.

Do not pitch one reviewer against another. Do not say that, so and so has said this and you are saying this and so I am agreeing with this person, and I am disagreeing with you and you know um you have to keep all of them you know you have to treat all of them with respect, do not get them to fight with each other. So, do not start a battle between two reviewers that one feels this and you feel that. So, please get together and decide what you want me to do that maybe a typical reaction, but that is not something that will help your paper get published.

Be grateful for the reviewers and editors time; restate the reviewers or editors comment when responding it helps them refresh their memory. Many times reviewers review more than one paper, so restate their comments. Be prepared to cut text, many times your paper gets rejected because it is too long it has a lot of information that should not be there, lot of words are there that can that you can do without. So, be prepared to reduce the length of your paper if required. And do not submit the same version to another journal submit the paper to another journal make the changes that your previous reviewers have given you or adviced and then submit your paper to another journal.

So, these are some of the tips that you can keep in mind while getting your reviewers and while taking care of the comments that your reviewer and editor have made. Now, this is all we have time for in this lecture it is time to wind up.

So, thank you very much for listening. The last lecture will focus on a summary a review of all the slides that we have covered the entire study material and if I get more questions in the meantime I will try and address those also. But the last lecture will just be a conclusion and a wrap up and the lecture after this, and I will go through all the slides in that lecture and try and highlight the points where I feel that confusion may occur. So, thank you very much for listening and for participating so well and so wholeheartedly on the forum.

Thank you.