

Effective responses to reviewers from real author cases



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Three Documents for Replying to Reviewer Comments

1. Reviewer comments from the journal (via email or a separate file)
2. Author's reply to these reviewer's comments
3. Main manuscript with text changes based on the reply.

PART 1: Format of the response to reviewers

1.1 Opening paragraph

Dear Reviewers of "Name of Journal"

Thank you for reviewing our manuscript entitled "....." for publication in "name of journal." We are thankful for pointing out some important modifications needed in the manuscript. The suggestions have been very useful for improving our manuscript. Our reply to the comments is given point by point in the following pages.

1.2 Copy and paste the comments from the reviewers into a new document.

- You must reply to all comments in the same sequence.

1.3a Font for the reply

If there are no format guidelines given, then **bold** the reviewer comments and write your reply in the standard font for English: Times New Roman.

Don't use: 맑은 고딕

Don't use: 맑은 고딕

Font example

RECOMMENDED FORMAT:

Referee #1

Comment 1

Lone electron would emerge in some defected models, eg. the oxygen vacuum defect. Thus, spin polarization should be considered in the calculations.

Thank you for your helpful advice. Although we had already considered spin-polarization in this study, it is not mentioned in the manuscript. To make it clear, we revised the manuscript as follows...

Thank you for your helpful advice. Although we had already considered spin-polarization in this study, it is not mentioned in the manuscript. To make it clear, we revised the manuscript as follows...

1.3b Manuscript font format

3) In the main manuscript itself, however, you should **color** the text or use MS Word “track changes” (변경 내용 추적) depending on the journal’s instructions for authors.

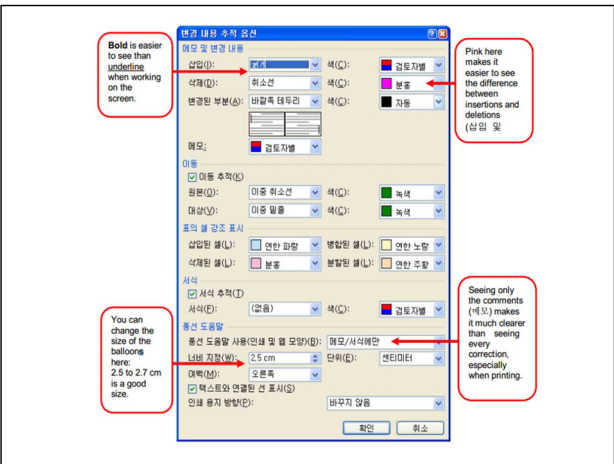
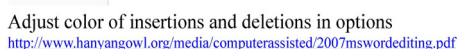
Example of a required format:

“In addition, please submit a copy of the revised manuscript indicated new text using **red** colored type (without a change of the font type or underlining).”

“In addition, please submit a copy of the revised manuscript indicated new text using **red** colored type (without a change of the font type or underlining).”

[illegible][illegible]

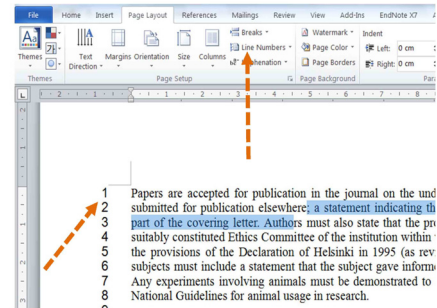
1.4 Track changes menu (변경 내용 추적)



Track changes options example

When you select options and change the default colors, it is really a good idea; you can then much more easily see the changes when you collaborate on documents together.

1.5 Use line numbers



Turning on the "line numbers"

(in Word, in the "page layout" menu) will make your life easier

(Some journals, especially life sciences, require that you use it in the original manuscript; even if they don't, it will make it easier for the reviewers).

1.6 Structure of the reply

- Ask yourself, "How can I make the job of the reviewer easier?"
- Include the exact text that was revised in your manuscript in your reply, if less than half a page.
- Use indent or italics and quotation marks to mark it clearly.
- Include the page and/or paragraph, or line number for every reply, so the reviewer can find it in the main manuscript.

Author's answer:

Thank you for your helpful suggestion. Although we had already considered spin-polarization in this study, it is not mentioned in the manuscript. To make it clear, we revised the manuscript as follows.

Revised text on page 4 paragraph 1:

"All calculations were performed with collinear spin polarization."

(This sentence would then be **bolded** or **colored** in the main manuscript if "track changes" were not used).

1.7 Common errors in replies to reviewers

- Don't thank them *too* much. "Thank you for your helpful suggestion" after every answer is *not* sincere.
- Thank them when they make a good point that improves the paper but not for just a minor correction.
- *Thank you for indicating that a period is missing. We really appreciate the correction.*



Machine gun reviewer questions!

Real example!

This manuscript is improved, but still has some major flaws. ... I am still unclear about the practical use of this system. If I wanted to create this system and use it to ..., would I ...? Would I wait for ...? Is there an amount of time that should be allowed to ensure that ...? Is it more important to ... or can you use ... to reach the same conclusion? What temperature should ...? Can I use a mixture of ... instead of ...? Why was it important to show that ...? How does this help me use the on my own? Under what conditions can I use this?

1.8 Machine gun question: reformat it!

- It is OK to reformat the reviewer questions.
- Separate the answers out one by one for easier reading. However, keep the same comment number but add a letter.
- Example: 3a, 3b, 3c, etc.
- Remember though that all comments should be answered.

PART 2: Best practices and strategies

2.1 Mirroring: repeat back the words of the question in your answer

1. Are the dimensions of this supercell big enough in order to avoid interactions between the periodic replicas of the supercell?

A. The dimensions of this supercell are sufficient to avoid defect-defect interactions because ...

2. Under what conditions do the ...

A. The conditions under which are as follows: 1)

2.2 Don't just explain, but revise

If the reviewer does not understand something, explain what the reviewer has not understood and then revise the **main** manuscript.

A. As you asked a question about this issue, it is predicted that this ambiguous notification of the spectral weight may confuse the readers of this manuscript. Therefore, we inserted additional sentences explaining why the spectral weight of the unfolded band structure appears as a non-integer as follows...

*** If something is unclear to the reviewers, it will probably also be confusing to the readers.

2.2a Revise but don't blame!

But don't emphasize that the reviewer has not understood. Be positive and use the present tense to indicate where the information can be found.

- ✗ We already mentioned/explained this,
- ✗ As we already explained in Section 2.2,
- ✗ As was mentioned in the manuscript, ...

○ "We agree that this is an important point, and we address it on page A, paragraph B, line C."

○ "This is a valid point, which is explained on page 4"

2.3. When to disagree

- Pick your battles!
- Sometimes the reviewers may not understand your paper.
- Their request for new experiments/work etc. is unnecessary or impossible.
- If you disagree with the decision of the editor, you can write a polite rebuttal letter indicating why you disagree.
- Make sure the co-authors all agree to the reply document in all cases.

2.4 When the reviewer does not understand

- First, double check with your co-authors and colleagues whether they agree with your understanding of the comment.
- Restate the points of the reviewer to make sure you understand and to confirm their point of view. Then, try to explain it more simply like to an undergraduate. Don't assume that the reviewer is an expert in your research area. Finally, use references if possible to support your point of view.

2.5 A framework for disagreeing with reviewers

1. Start by indicate the points that you **agree** with.
2. **Distinguish** between the points you agree with and those you don't.
3. Indicate **your point of view** but don't use personal pronouns to emphasize disagreement (we, you).
4. Try to find **references** for support. Consider using the passive or "IT has been" structures:

Example: However, it has been shown/ argued/ demonstrated/ proven that ... [1]

1. **[Establish agreement]** We agree that is not independent of the effect of This is because ..
2. **[Distinguish your case]** However, researchers have found that the relationship between A and B in cases of shows greater variability than the standard case Specifically, this occurs when
3. **[State your position]** Therefore, x is sufficiently independent of Hence, the value of was not changed in this reply.

2.6a. Grammar for agreeing with reviewers

We (definitely) agree that	X is true/ generally true/indeed true	in many/most/ normal cases.
It is true/correct that	X is an important/critical/ factor	in cases where
Normally,	is not independent of the effect of/ correlates with/ can be confounded by X	
The referee is right to point out	that ___ x is	
We acknowledge that	the sample size/response rate/ is limited.	
	the methodology does not fully account for X.	

2.6b. Grammar for disagreeing with reviewers

However,	in our work/paper/article,	X is
	in the case of our paper,	
	in the method we use,	we attempt to ...
		X was not included because
		the focus in our work is different.
		it is not relevant in this work because X does not
	X may be caused by / confounded by/ associated with ...	
	it is not necessary to run further tests because ...	
Despite this,	we believe that	

2.6c. Don't use pronouns when disagreeing

2) Avoid use of "you" when disagreeing

- Use the passive instead

EXAMPLES

- **X:** The comments were very helpful and we have changed the text as recommended. However, we disagree with one of your comments.
- **CORRECT:** The comments were very helpful, and we have changed the text as recommended except for page two paragraph six, **which was not changed** because ...

2.6d. State your position

As a result/ Hence/Therefore, In consequence,	X was not changed.	
For these reasons,	further tests were not done.	
Following this method,	no additional samples were included.	
	it was not possible to ...	
In light of these recent studies,	the method used in this paper was deemed appropriate.	
Following the work of X et al.,		
Building on the findings of X et al.,		

2.6e. Agree but suggest future work

- However, we agree that including this variable would be beneficial in future work.
- We agree that this is an important area that requires further research.
- However, we agree that further research should examine this factor.

2.6f. Use references whenever possible

- References help the editor decide between the reviewer and author when there is disagreement (Williams, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaad.2004.01.049>

Structure:

- This method was used by X.
- A similar methodology was used by X.
- Kim et al. also included/did not include X.
- Recent work by Choi et al.,
- According to Park et al.,
- This view is also held by X who concluded that

2.7 Make a template for your lab or dept.

- Some journals have a template for the article format. Your lab should have templates for documents like cover letters and replying to reviewer comments.
- PhD students have great difficulty writing such documents but are sometimes asked by faculty to do it without guidance.

PART 3. Common misunderstandings

3.1 The reviewers are trying to help you!

- The reviewer is your (sort of) friend! They are trying to help you make a better paper.
- Email the editor for clarification if you don't understand a question, according to advice from a Springer Publishing representative.
- Don't wait too long for a reply about your paper.

3.2 The reviewer(s) may not be competent

- Some reviewers just give poor reviews.
- Don't assume reviewers are experts in your exact research area. In addition, they can be Ph.D. students or post-docs. You may need to explain some things to them.
- Don't be too surprised if they disagree!
- All reviews are not equal, so focus on the quality reviewer that you think the editor will follow.

3.3 How to handle comments about English

- Reviewers who complain about the English often have poor English!
 - *"Some linguistic inaccuracies can still be found that a quick review by a native speaker is still recommended."*
 - *"The English of this paper needs to be improved. Please have a native speaker proofreading this paper carefully."*
 - Has the article been checked by a native tongue speaker with expertise in the field? (Elsevier)
- If they mention a few errors. Don't believe the reviewer has corrected all the English.
- When should you get proofreading?: First submit or second submit proofreading?

3.3a. Don't trust the reviewers' English corrections

- Original 4) Page 11, line xx: 'compared to differences in RT. differences'
- Reviewer's revision: "compared to differences in CD, differences in the ... characteristics of ... noises in a ..."
- My revision: "compared to **the** differences in **the** CD, **the** differences in the ... characteristics of **the** ... noises in **the** ..."

3.3b. Don't trust reviewers who spend most of their time on English corrections

- They may be trying to compensate for not having much to say about the content of the paper.

3.4. Rejection is normal

- It is not if, but more likely WHEN your work will be rejected.

https://www.princeton.edu/~joha/Johannes_Haushofer_CV_of_Failures.pdf

3.5 Journals have hierarchies

- Understand the hierarchy of journals in your field: Regional or national journals will sometimes take articles not acceptable in SCI international journals
- Don't give up, unless there are critical problems with the methodology! Revise and resubmit to other journals. Getting a review is a learning process to make you a better researcher.
- Doing a major revision is better than submitting to a different journal in the long run (Williams, 2004).

TEAMS

Gulf Coast
League East



Gulf Coast
League
Northeast



Gulf Coast
League
Northwest



Gulf Coast
League South



3.6 Managing anger

The reply you want
to send.



The reply you
actually send.



Questions

- I would be happy to answer questions if you are writing a reply in the future
adamturner7@gmail.com
- I am also looking to get permission to collect samples for my materials.

Appendix

Effective Responses to Reviewers From Real Author Cases

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1. Example from a Real Response to Reviewers

The following excerpts come from a response to reviewers posted on the internet. The research is about levels of mercury (Hg) exposure through eating various types of fish. The manuscript was written by research staff from the U.S. FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and EPA (Environmental Protection Agency). Because this work was done by government staff, the reviewers' comments and authors' responses were made public.

The reviewer suggests that the author use a different method.

Comment: "The model uses a simplified relationship to estimate mercury blood levels from intake rather than incorporating a pharmacokinetic model to estimate blood levels. There is a simple one compartment model that provides reasonable predictions of mercury blood concentrations from acute and chronic intake information (e.g., Stern, Reg. Tox. Pharmacol. 25: 277-288, 1997; Ginsberg and Toal, Risk Anal. 20: 41-47, 2000). This pharmacokinetic model has the advantage of employing a range of parameter inputs that will create a distribution of blood levels for any intake level that will better represent population variability than the current FDA approach. That approach does not really take into account inter-individual variability in pharmacokinetics."

The authors show their agreement with part of the reviewer's comments.

Before disagreeing, the authors provide a reason. "Given the fact that" introduces the reason.

"We think this is appropriate" is a polite way to disagree. "For current purposes" limits the value of the authors' method to this study, implying that the reviewer's method could also be useful in other situations.

Response: The model is simplified relative to the Stern model in that it assumes steady state kinetics. Given the fact that most toxicological analyses (including the RfD derivation) make the assumption that chronic exposure is the relevant dose metric, we think this is appropriate for current purposes. However, it is not true that population variability is not represented – a distribution is employed which is derived from the Sherlock et al., 1984 study. This distribution is somewhat narrower than the Stern model – this result is attributable to the assumption in the Stern model that blood levels are directly proportional to dose and body weight. It is likely that this assumption causes the Stern model to overestimate pharmacokinetic variability.

The authors now defend the value of their method, citing a paper that explains in more detail.

In the end, the authors disagree with the reviewer, but provide polite detailed reasons for their perspective. Beyond defending their own method, they describe the problems with the reviewer's suggested method. This allows the editor to decide whether the authors' perspective is worth publishing.

The reviewer suggests that the authors do additional work.

Comment: “Regarding model limitations, the authors note in their *Risk Analysis* paper that species consumption patterns for each consumer may be more highly correlated than is specified in the current model. Some additional exploration with sensitivity analyses would be useful.”

The authors agree directly with the reviewer when possible.

The authors provide more specific details of how they would follow up on the reviewer's suggestion.

Response: We agree that additional work could be done in this area. In particular, the 30 day fish consumption frequency data can be used to capture the variation among individuals of the variation in seafood consumption habits. It does appear that some frequent seafood consumers eat one particular species consistently, while others eat a wide variety. These data may provide a basis for differentiating the degree of interindividual vs intraindividual variation on a species by species basis. We are working on a model that is more closely integrated with the NHANES survey.

But, the authors don't agree to do more work for this manuscript. They will publish the additional analysis as a separate paper.

The authors use the term “agree” to be polite, but are actually disagreeing with the reviewers indirectly. The authors say that advice to the public should include omega 3 fatty acid content and PCB contamination of fish, but the paper is good enough without this information.

The reviewer suggests that the authors use a more complex method that would require substantially more work.

Comment: Two reviewers felt that analyses should consider risk trade off by considering the omega 3 fatty acid content of fish species. It was also noted that analyses, and presumably the EPA/FDA fish advice, should consider PCB contamination of fish.

Response: We agree that the ultimate fish advice (and the scientific basis thereof) should include these factors. This is, however, much beyond the scope of the current analyses.

The reviewer suggests that the authors include some additional statistics.

Comment: A scenario should be included that reflects no consumption of albacore [참치] (as opposed to no consumption of medium group fish.

Response: The current draft of the manuscript for publication includes a scenario that limits consumption of albacore to 6 oz., but does not include one with no albacore consumption. We expect that elimination of albacore consumption will have a very minor effect on the blood mercury predictions.

The authors highlight the fact that they have included similar statistics in their paper.

Next, the authors argue that including the additional statistics suggested by the reviewer would be redundant.

Source: US FDA and EPA, An Intervention Analysis of Exposure to Methylmercury for Consumption of Seafood. To view the entire response to reviewers, scroll down to Part III: <http://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/03/briefing/4010b1-12-%20EPA.htm>.