

The editorial letter

Having sent your paper out to the review, the editorial letter you receive back is almost invariably unenthusiastic. Even when editors like the paper and the reviews were universally positive, the editorial letter will be bland – perhaps “in principle acceptable for publication if the authors can address the issues raised”. In general, “accepted” does not occur on the first submission, although some “rejections” should be interpreted as “accepted”.

The main types of letter:

Rejected – Editorial Rejection.

Rejected – Rejection following review. “Hard rejection”

Rejected – Rejection following review. “Soft rejection”

Rejected – Rejection following review. “Accepted”

How to tell the difference? Here are example letters of each, from the journal *Immunology and Cell Biology*.

Rejected – Editorial Rejection.

----- Original Message -----

Dear Dr XXX

Thank you for the submission of your research manuscript to our Editorial Office.

The Editorial Board has examined your manuscript and has, unfortunately, given it a low priority for publication in Immunology and Cell Biology. Thus, I regret to advise that we are unable to consider your manuscript for publication in ICB.

I hope the outcome of this specific submission will not discourage you from the submission of future manuscripts.

Yours sincerely

Dr Gabrielle Belz
Editor-in-Chief
Immunology and Cell Biology

As from the underlined text, the decision was made at the editorial board level (typically just a single editor) and was not sent out to review.

What to do: Move on to the next journal. Don't take it to heart and don't bother changing the manuscript substantially unless you are unhappy with it (in which case, why did you submit it?). This is largely a subjective call. In extremely rare cases (<1%) you can write back to the editorial board and ask them to reconsider their decision not to review. This is not a step to take lightly, as it questions the judgement of the editor and most likely this is a journal you would like to submit a paper to in the future. However, this approach can be successful.

Rejected – Rejection following review. “Hard rejection”.

----- Original Message -----

Dear Dr XXX

Thank you for the submission of your manuscript to the Immunology and Cell Biology Editorial Office. I have now received the reviewers' comments on your manuscript. These comments can be found at the bottom of this letter.

Unfortunately, the reviewers have raised a number of criticisms about your paper. In view of these criticisms your manuscript is not acceptable for publication in Immunology and Cell Biology. Although it may be possible for you to make extensive modifications to your manuscript to answer some of the reviewers' criticisms, your manuscript has not been given a high enough priority for publication in Immunology and Cell Biology. Thus, I regret to advise that we are unable to consider your manuscript for publication in ICB.

Thank you for considering Immunology and Cell Biology for the publication of your research. I hope the outcome of this specific submission will not discourage you from the submission of future manuscripts.

Yours sincerely

Associate Professor Gabrielle Belz
Editor-in-Chief
Immunology and Cell Biology

Reviewer #1 (Remarks to the Author):

Reviewer #2 (Remarks to the Author):

This is what we would call a “hard rejection”. As from the underlined text, the editor is not considering your manuscript based on the reviews. Often these letters will say something like “cannot consider further”, etc.

What to do: Move on to the next journal. Either the reviews were very bad, or the reviews were slightly bad but the editor wasn't enthusiastic. If you suggested reviewers in the cover letter, next time don't suggest them. On the positive side, you do have detailed comments from two “experts”. If they are useful, consider addressing them before sending your manuscript out to the next journal, but don't get hung up on experiments that would substantially delay your submission – since the next reviewers may want something completely different anyway. If the reviewers “didn't get it”, then consider rewriting, since it is at least partially your fault that the reader doesn't understand your message.

Rejected – Rejection following review. “Soft rejection”

----- Original Message -----

Dear Dr XXX

Manuscript ID ICB-13-OA-0088V1 entitled "XXX." which you submitted to Immunology and Cell Biology, has been reviewed. The comments of the reviewers are included at the bottom of this letter.

Unfortunately, the reviewers have raised a number of criticisms about the paper. If you are willing to modify the manuscript as suggested by the reviewers, I am happy to reconsider the manuscript for publication. Therefore, I invite you to respond to the reviewers' comments and revise your manuscript. Please ensure that you re-read your revised manuscript thoroughly, correcting any awkward English expression.

To submit your revised manuscript, please log on to the following website:
<<http://mts-icb.nature.com/cgi-bin/main.plex?el=XXX>>

Please note that revised manuscripts must be submitted within six months of a request for revision. Otherwise they will be treated as new submissions.

When submitting your revised manuscript, please include the following: an RTF-formatted version of the manuscript text JPEG, TIFF, PowerPoint or EPS-formatted figure files and a separate PDF file of any Supplementary information (in its final format). Please ensure that you highlight - either in red or underlining - changes you make to the text so that revisions can be easily tracked.

Please also include a point by point response to the reviewers' comments, uploaded as a separate Rebuttal Letter file. Do not include your rebuttal in your cover letter.

Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to Immunology and Cell Biology and I look forward to receiving your revision.

Yours sincerely

Associate Professor Gabrielle Belz
Editor-in-Chief
Immunology and Cell Biology

Reviewer #1 (Remarks to the Author):
Reviewer #2 (Remarks to the Author):
Editorial Comments:

This is what we would call a “soft rejection”. As from the underlined text, the editor is able to consider a revised version of your manuscript. Some journals do not explicitly invite a re-submission, but as long as they do not state that they will not consider a re-submission then it can be considered a soft rejection.

What to do: It depends. The door is still open for submission, but it is a strategic decision on whether the amount of work required to get the article in is worth it. High ranked journals will expect you to address essentially every point, and if you cannot then a resubmission can be a waste of time. Lower ranked journals will still expect most points to be addressed. At this time, it is simply a decision of whether the extra work involved is worth the effort to get into that particular journal.

One golden rule – if you write a rebuttal letter, try to address as many points as possible by experiments, and the rest by text changes. Avoid arguing that changes are not required, except in the most impossible cases. In particular, do not argue against minor points – just make the change. Sometimes if you have one impossible issue it even helps to have 19 minor points changed (regardless of validity), because then the editor sees you have ticked most of the boxes.

Rejected – Rejection following review. “Acceptance”

----- Original Message -----

Dear Dr XXX

Manuscript ID ICB-13-XXX entitled "XXX" which you submitted to Immunology and Cell Biology, has been reviewed. The comments of the reviewers, together with some editorial comments, are included at the bottom of this letter.

You will be pleased to read that the reviewers have recommended publication, but also suggest some minor revisions to your manuscript. Therefore, I invite you to respond to the reviewers' and editorial comments and revise your manuscript.

To submit your revised manuscript, please log into the following website:
<<http://mts-icb.nature.com/cgi-bin/main.plex?el=XXX>>

Please note that revised manuscripts must be submitted within six months of a request for revision. Otherwise they will be treated as new submissions.

When submitting your revised manuscript, please include the following: an RTF-formatted version of the manuscript text JPEG, TIFF, PowerPoint or EPS-formatted figure files and a separate PDF file of any Supplementary information (in its final format). Please ensure that you highlight - either in red or underlining - changes you make to the text so that revisions can be easily tracked.

Please also include a point by point response to the reviewers' comments, uploaded as a separate Rebuttal Letter file. Do not include your rebuttal in your cover letter.

Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to Immunology and Cell Biology and I look forward to receiving your revision.

Yours sincerely

Associate Professor Gabrielle Belz
Editor-in-Chief
Immunology and Cell Biology

Reviewer #1 (Remarks to the Author):

Reviewer #2 (Remarks to the Author):

Editorial Comments:

Officially, this is not an acceptance. As the underlined text notes, the reviewers (not the editor) are positive, and the editor is simply willing to look at a revised manuscript. Often the editors will even note that this is not a letter of acceptance and that no guarantees are made. The subtext, however, is that you should break out the champagne.

What to do: Revise the manuscript to correct as many points from the reviewers comments as possible. Even though this is leading to an acceptance, if you don't make enough of an effort at this stage the paper will go through review again leading to a very similar letter. Take note of the time-scale that is mentioned: here it is six months, which suggests the editors are expecting to wait while you do another experiment. If they mention a short time-scale (eg, 4 weeks), then the editors do not expect any complex experiments (but do them if you can).