Author's Toolkit

Writing Better Technical Papers
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A task that always accompanies publication of a technical paper is corresponding with an editor and possibly reviewers.

**Corresponding with Editors/Reviewers**

The editors of technical journals have the difficult but critical job of ensuring that paper submissions meet their basic standards for publication and, moreover, contribute to the prestige of their periodicals/organizations.

I often assist my customers in responding to editors and reviewers (or “referees”). Let me give some common-sense advice on this.

First, prioritize the needs of the journal’s readers, as the editor certainly does:
- ☒ This work will greatly advance the field of...
- ☐ Our results for all-weather sensing will greatly interest the readers of *Android News*...

In addressing referee comments, respond to all points made, both major and minor. Start with a humble and cooperative tone:
- ☒ The points you raised are duly noted.
- ☐ Thank you very much for your helpful comments on our paper.

It’s certainly normal for authors to be passionate about their work, but you should avoid sounding overly defensive, argumentative, or insulting:
- ☒ The referee clearly does not have sufficient knowledge of this new technology, and thus is not qualified to make such comments.
- ☐ It seems that the referee did not fully understand my explanation—sorry I was not clear. Let me give an example that may help.
- ☒ The referee’s point makes no sense in this context and thus we can neglect it.
- ☐ This point is not applicable here because...

Clearly it is not a good strategy to fight with people the journal has entrusted to evaluate submissions.

For detailed replies to major comments, first indicate that you understand the points raised, then quickly clarify the points you agree with, next explain your disagreement, if any, with other points, and finally describe how you are going to modify your paper.

For very simple replies to minor comments, a standard “boilerplate” answer is fine:
- ☒ This was revised as you suggested.

When citing the location of a revision—such as page and line numbers—be sure to clarify whether you are referring to the newer/revised version of the paper or to a previous version.

An attitude inviting open collaboration with the reviewers will only strengthen your paper!

**Figure Numbers: Give a Final Check!**

Typically, a paper is revised many times before its final submission. A common change that arises from this process is new, replaced, or deleted figures, requiring some or all figure numbers to be changed.

This is not a major hurdle, it simply requires the author to make a new sequence from Fig. 1 to Fig. *n*. However, the tricky part is ensuring that all mentions of figures in the text are changed to the final figure numbers.

In my customers’ papers, I sometimes see a text description of a figure that refers to an *old*, incorrect figure number. Normally, I can correct this, but if a few figures are very similar, an error may be easy to overlook.

Even if you use hyperlinks to figure numbers, always **confirm** in your final version that figure numbers in the text match the right figure.

**Grammar Questions? read@athuman.com**

**Mini Quiz: What’s Wrong?**

1) One possible approach might be to adjust...
2) This can potentially be useful for finding...
3) One possible option is to increase the...

(Answers: 1) change to “possible approach is to”; 2) change to “this is potentially useful”; 3) OK, but “possible” is usually unnecessary here)