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### Turning Rejection Letters into Practical Advice

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# **It Works for Me: Becoming a Publishing Scholar/ Researcher**

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**Shared Tips for the Classroom Professional**

**Hal Blythe**

Foundation Professor of English  
Eastern Kentucky University

**Charlie Sweet**

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Stillwater, Oklahoma  
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Never think that just because an editor asks for revisions, and even perhaps states that pending revisions he/she would like to publish an article, that the article is automatically accepted. You should always convey your best work in your first submission. If the reviewers request revisions, execute your absolute best the first time, and if, after revisions, the article is ultimately rejected, it cannot hurt to rework the manuscript and petition for one more chance. Like Brunhilda singing *Twilight of the Gods*, and that old saying, "It isn't over till the fat lady sings," a manuscript isn't published till it's published.

*Greta Freeman*

University of South Carolina Upstate

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## Turning Rejection Letters Into Positive Advice

Rejections are good for aspiring academic writers. The rejection letter is a reality check and a sober reminder that they still have some additional fine tuning to do. The positive approach to dealing with rejection letters is to look for the advice. In other words, take the comments, if there are any, and rewrite, rewrite, rewrite—this exercise gives you an opportunity to buff and polish a rejected piece of writing into an accepted piece of writing. There are three thoughts that I have about rejection letters.

First, remember that you are the writer, the creator, the engineer of your own work. Take control of what you produce. Focus your attention on the purpose of your writing project and then re-engineer your writing sample to reflect what the publisher is looking for. Let go and let your authentic self recreate the message you are aiming for in a manner which will impress the publisher. Again, remember, you are the creator of your works. Develop an ego and keep it!

Second, remember that you are not the only one to receive rejection letters. Some famous authors have received rejection after rejection. The rejection letter is one of the steps in being an academic author—it is part of the publishing process. How you handle rejection will determine how serious you are with your writing.

My third thought is simple: keep in mind that rejection can be a great motivator, a second chance to get it right.

The following are some of my strategies for overcoming the disappointment of receiving rejection letters.

- Don't stop writing. You must keep the momentum; keep your attention and mind focused on writing.
- Writing must become a habit. The rejection process must be understood as one step

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in getting your writing off to a better start. Take time to lament, scream out loud if you must; but write all of the time. The volume of writing you do will give you much needed practice, and practice will inevitably give you a better chance of having your works accepted.

- Think of rejection letters as the voices of your private writing consultants. Listen to the advice of the publisher; however, don't forget that sometimes publishers are biased and their needs may be profit centered. If your rejection letter contains recommendations for improving your manuscript, then you have hit gold—incorporate the recommendations. Rewrite with the goal of improving your initial submission. Use the publisher's feedback to improve your writing project.
- Do not get frustrated, get even. When it comes to addressing rejections, fight the good fight. Talk with a talented writer and ask for advice. Listen to the experienced voice and incorporate valuable suggestions into your manuscript.
- Take the rejection as an invitation to stroll through the park, dine out, or attend a favorite movie. Pause for a moment and do something good for yourself. Writers are aware that they all too often have to make sacrifices in order to produce good writing. So, when that rejection letter arrives, view it as a golden opportunity to do something for yourself, shift gears for a moment, then get back to work.
- Put on your protective armor; don't let the pain of rejection hurt you. Just be prepared—have patience and thick skin. Psychologically, donning your armor gives you a sense of having some protection from the “enemy.” That language may be a little harsh, but getting rejection letters is not a laughing matter, especially if you are a tenure track faculty member.

My mentor once told me to be tenacious about writing. When rejections come, and they will, I was advised to be steadfast in my efforts to refine my manuscript and get a fresh copy back to the editor. Do not give up! Work with conviction, be passionate, and keep producing new and fresh writing projects.

A final word about the rejection letters: I receive negative and positive rejection letters from editors. The positive ones provide sound advice; they recognize my potential as a writer. The positive rejections are more personal in tone. They show understanding, and, in some cases, they show empathy. Do not be discouraged; continue to aim for successful, published works. The following is an example of a positive rejection letter I received:

Dear Sherwood:

My apologies for the very long delay in getting back to you. . . I had hoped to carve but the time to not just read the material you sent, but to think about the cohesiveness of the project, and consider it in the light of the literature — but kept getting waylaid by issues that needed immediate attention.

I've now found time to test my first impressions, and regret to say that, as it stands, I don't think the book will work. The chapters cover too much disparate ground: the experiences of both undergraduate and graduate students, faculty / classroom issues, student affairs, study abroad, and campus-wide diversity initiatives. I don't think there's enough material in any one area to make this a compelling purchase for a faculty member, a student affairs practitioner, or a diversity officer.

I can see that the book reflects the wide variety of responsibilities that you have taken on, and the expertise you have developed, but regret that I feel the book needs a clearer focus on a defined audience. As it stands, I believe it would be hard to sell, Stylus Publishing, LLC / Kumarian Press (2010).

The fact that the publisher took the opportunity to read my manuscript and provide some thoughtful comments was greatly appreciated. I have taken time to digest the publisher's comments, and I am now in the process of re-thinking the overall project. In fact, I have decided to construct three manuscripts out of the one submitted. Now, how's that for thinking positively about rejection?

### Reference

Stylus Publishing, LLC (2010). Sterling, VA.

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