

The Tone and Rhetoric of Your Responses

Below you will find some sample responses to reviewer criticism. For each of the scenarios, decide which of the provided responses is best. There is an “answer key” below which offers what we believe to be the most appropriate response in each case and the rationales behind our decisions.

Scenario 1: Reviewers A & B disagree and another reviewer or the editor has not provided you guidance about which reviewer should be favored.

Sample Response 1: Thank you for pointing out the confusing nature of Figure 8 and suggesting I remove it altogether to improve the coherence of my article. Reviewer B was similarly confused by the figure, but suggested that adding a third panel to the figure that incorporated elements from panels 1 & 2 would make it easier to understand. In this version of the paper, I have added this panel and hope my original intention for wanting to include this figure is now clear.

Sample Response 2: Both you and Reviewer B expressed confusion about Figure 8; however, you provided me with different solutions. While your suggestion to delete the figure altogether would have been much easier, I chose to follow Reviewer B’s advice to add a third panel to the figure. I think this addition is the better revision.

Scenario 2: A reviewer has mischaracterized your ideas.

Sample Response 1: On page 3, you suggest that I posit a Marxist explanation for why my subjects chose to purchase household goods they did not need. However, this is not what I argue. On page 5 of my article, I clearly state, “Though many of these provided explanations for household purchases may sound Marxist, I hope to emphasize that I present these accounts *verbatim* from my interview subjects. I do not wish to imply a direct relationship between my own analyses of these consumers explanations and what their own descriptions might suggest.”

Sample Response 2: You note that on page 3 I provide a Marxist explanation for why my subjects chose to purchase household goods they did not need. I did not mean to imply this, but having re-read my text I note that this is unclear until page 5 of my article where, for the first time, I write, “Though many of these provided explanations for household purchases may sound Marxist, I hope to emphasize that I present these accounts *verbatim* from my interview subjects. I do not wish to imply a direct relationship between my own analyses of these consumers explanations and what their own descriptions might suggest.” In this revision, I have moved this text forward to page three (line 5). I hope this makes my ideas and their relationship to Marxism more clear.

Scenario 3: A reviewer attempts to re-frame your argument and take it in a direction you did not wish to pursue.

Sample Response 1: Thank you for drawing my attention to how I might use network analysis to describe the kinship communities of religious worshipers. I truly think it would be fascinating to explore my topic from this point of view and I’ve added some lines to my concluding paragraphs suggesting how such an analysis might broaden the interpretations I make in this article (page 31, lines 12-17, “Of course, given the methods used in this analysis, my interpretations are necessarily bounded by the particular variables I chose to compare. A future study might broaden such conclusions by using network analysis to cross reference the material similarities between objects that I elucidate here with the

discourse similarities and familial relationships between those who exchanged such objects.”). I regret that performing such an analysis is beyond the scope of this present study, but look forward to pursuing this line of inquiry in my future research.

Sample Response 2: Thank you for drawing my attention to how I might use network analysis to describe the kinship communities of religious worshippers. I agree that this method makes my work much more robust, and you will see throughout the manuscript how I have modified my work, accordingly. Indeed, as your original review suggested, applying this method makes my work far more substantial and takes its significance beyond the field of anthropology.

Sample Response 3: Thank you for drawing my attention to how I might use network analysis to describe the kinship communities of religious worshippers. Though I’m aware that network analysis is beginning to gain traction in anthropology, my attempt to situate my work as an intervention into material culture studies should make clear why incorporating network analysis is well-beyond the scope of what I attempt/hope to do here.

Scenario 4: A reviewer wants you to add several references. This would not only add to the (already tight) word count of your article, but you feel that many of their suggestions are examples of work you explicitly disagree with and you are worried that these suggested additions might be the work of the reviewer him/herself.

Sample Response 1: Thank you very much for recommending these sources. I've carefully reviewed them all and incorporated several into the revised manuscript. The others will surely be helpful to my future work, but pertain less closely to the arguments I am making here. In the revised version, I emphasize my article’s contribution to collective memory studies. Given this emphasis, I found works of Bradshaw, Olick, Lipsitz, and Neal very helpful for articulating my points, making more balanced arguments, and for offering background information (Respectively, they are now referenced at the end of p. 1, throughout p. 2, in the upper-middle of p. 3, and in the upper-middle of p. 4).

Sample Response 2: You recommend several sources that relate directly to the school of thought I attempt to discredit in my argument. As you are surely aware, this journal counts citations in their word count and including more references from this school of thought will give me less space to strengthen my own, contrary, argument. Accordingly, I’ve added four of the dozen references you mention – Bradshaw, Olick, Lipsitz, and Neal; (respectively, they are now referenced at the end of p. 1, throughout p. 2, in the upper-middle of p. 3, and in the upper-middle of p. 4). The other eight books/articles you have referenced may be useful to my future work, but do not pertain directly to my article’s emphasis on collective memory.

Answer Key

Scenario 1: Reviewers A & B disagree and another reviewer or the editor has not provided you guidance about which reviewer should be favored.

Best response is #1

Note how Response #1 begins with an expression of gratitude to the Editor for helping him/her to improve the article's coherence, in contrast to the more curt tone of Response #2. The author in Response #1 concedes that the original version of the paper may itself have been a source of confusion, rather than implying, as Response #2 does, that the reviewers and Editor may be at fault. Response #1 also offers a more detailed justification of the author's decision to create a new panel, rather than vaguely declaring the change to be the "better" option. The author in Response #2 may be seeking credit for pursuing the less "easy" option but s/he never adequately justifies the chosen course of action.

Scenario 2: A reviewer has mischaracterized your ideas.

Best response is #2

The first response is overly defensive in tone and blunt in its mode of address ("I clearly state"...). The author comes across as extremely sensitive to criticism and irritated at a perceived error of comprehension on the part of the reviewer. Response #2 is far more humble, quickly conceding that the postponement to page 5 of the statement specifying the paper's relationship to Marxism may have compromised overall clarity. Response #2 also gives details as to the practical steps the author has made to remedy the problem and ensure that no further mischaracterizations arise.

Scenario 3: A reviewer attempts to re-frame your argument and take it in a direction you did not wish to pursue.

Best response is #1 or possibly #2

In this case there are two appropriate responses that the author may choose depending on how far they are prepared to alter the article by incorporating a different method of analysis. Response #1 begins by thanking the reviewer or editor for the suggested change but then respectfully declines to pursue it for reasons of scope. To show that s/he has not dismissed the suggestion out of hand, the author cites the relevant line in the article acknowledging the potential value of the proposed analysis. The author then ends with a good-faith promise to pursue that line of analysis in future work.

Response #2 is perfectly appropriate in terms of tone, but there is a worry that the author may have too hastily changed his/her method to satisfy the reviewers. The author will need to have considered carefully whether or not s/he can affirm the changes made and is willing to stand by the new article if and when it is published. When making such a drastic change, authors should also keep in mind that doing so will make their revision process both harder and longer. If time is of the essence, it's probably best to stick with your original approach regardless of how compelling this new avenue sounds.

Response #3 begins well enough, but ultimately implies that the reviewer may have been responsible for misidentifying the appropriate scope of the article. Suggesting that the reviewer's proposal is "well-beyond" the article's purview is a tacit indictment of their ability to correctly gauge its aims.



Scenario 4: A reviewer wants you to add several references. This would not only add to the (already tight) word count of your article, but you feel that many of their suggestions are examples of work you explicitly disagree with and you are worried that these suggested additions might be the work of the reviewer him/herself.

Best response is #1

In Response #1 the author makes clear that s/he has engaged the suggested literature in depth, while at the same time giving a substantive justification for not incorporating all of it into the article. The author acknowledges that even the scholarship that is added with his/her argument has been helpful in creating a more “balanced” article. The author provides the precise location in the revised version (page and line number) where s/he has addressed the recommended literature.

The author in Response #2 starts in a combative tone, declaring that his/her intention is to “discredit” a certain branch of literature. The author then misleadingly implies that there is a tradeoff to be made between discussing opposing views and presenting his/her own (it should always be possible to address opposing viewpoints in the course of defending your own claims). The author also gives the impression that s/he is falling back on a technical consideration (in this case word limits) to avoid having to sincerely engage the suggested literature. The overall tone of the response borders too closely on condescending, especially when the author calls the editor’s attention to their own journal’s submission requirements (“As you are surely aware...”).

