

EDITORIAL

Revise and Resubmit: It's Not a Consolation Prize!

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As the editor of *Mathematics Teacher Educator*, I make decisions about whether to accept, reject, or ask for a revision of a manuscript based on the extent to which the manuscript addresses the review criteria that have been specified (see <http://www.nctm.org/publications/content.aspx?id=34670>). This requires a careful reading of the manuscript itself as well as the feedback from three reviewers (one of whom is a member of the Editorial Panel). The reviews provide me with additional information and insight on which to draw in making a decision. The reviews are not “averaged” in any way (e.g., one Accept, one Revise and Resubmit, and one Reject do not yield a Revise and Resubmit), nor does the majority rule (e.g., two Accepts and one Revise and Resubmit do not result in an Accept). It is important to look beyond the particular category a reviewer chooses to what the reviewer actually identifies as the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript. Many times the reviewer might indicate Revise and Resubmit when in fact the review provided is more consistent with Reject (e.g., many essential elements are missing). Hence, the reviews help inform, but do not dictate, the editor’s decision.

In the remainder of this editorial, I want to focus on Revise and Resubmit, perhaps the most nebulous and misinterpreted of categories, for the benefit of both authors and reviewers. Revise and Resubmit (R&R) is not a default rating or a consolation evaluation given when a manuscript is not accepted. It is only given when fixing the weight of what needs to be revised for the manuscript to be accepted seems doable (i.e., there is a clear pathway to get there) and a complete rewrite of the manuscript is not needed. A description of manuscripts warranting an R&R, developed by the *MTE* Editorial Panel, is shown in Figure 1.

For reviewers, it is often tempting to give an R&R rather than a Reject because an R&R seems kinder and more collegial. It is important to bear in mind that when a reviewer recommends R&R, that means the reviewer sees a clear way to change the manuscript so that it meets the criteria to be accepted, and it is clear that the author has the capacity to make those changes. For instance, the manuscript may need to tie more closely to a literature base or may need to describe the evidence in more detail. Clearly, an author can do both things. If, however, the reviewer notes that more or different evidence is needed to support claims made and it is not clear whether the author has such evidence, the decision should be Reject. Or, if the content of the manuscript is a bit nebulous or scattered and there are multiple ways the author could choose to go with a revision, the decision

Revise and Resubmit

The manuscript has enough potential to warrant the effort and time of authors, editor, and reviewers to revisit it.

The manuscript is not acceptable in its current form as it is missing more than one essential element noted for Accept, but there is a substantial idea that targets a central issue for the *MTE* audience and the reviewer offers clear and specific suggestions for improvement. Part, but not all, of the core of the article is there.

It is clear that the author has the potential to successfully revise the manuscript. The weight of what needs to be fixed is doable; it does not need to be an entirely new manuscript. It will need new writing, taking some things out, and/or reframing. As the core gets refined, the manuscript could shift to be outside of the scope of *MTE*. Thus, it will change substantially enough that it needs to be reviewed again.

<http://www.nctm.org/publications/content.aspx?id=34669>

Figure 1. A description of the R&R category created by the *MTE* Editorial Panel.

should be Reject, as the path forward is not clear. Although no one wants to receive a decision of Reject, it is kinder and more collegial to recommend the decision category that best fits the manuscript, as it provides both the editor and the author with a more honest and realistic view of the work that should be done on the manuscript to make it appropriate for *MTE*.

To date, 12 authors have received requests to R&R their manuscripts, 10 of those 12 manuscripts were accepted for publication, and all 10 have been published. Of the two remaining R&R manuscripts, one has been resubmitted and is currently undergoing a second round of review, and the other one has not yet been resubmitted. This is not to suggest that getting an R&R guarantees future acceptance—it does not. What it does say is that when authors make use of the feedback provided to improve the manuscript in particular ways, it can lead to a successful outcome. To aid the author in revising the manuscript, the author receives a detailed letter from the editor that clearly indicates specific issues that the author needs to address in the revision. The main point of the letter is to articulate a clear pathway for the author to follow in the revisions.

When a revised manuscript is resubmitted, it is sent back to one reviewer from the first round (usually a reviewer who recommended R&R) and two new reviewers. In addition to receiving the revised manuscript, all three reviewers receive the editor's decision letter, the initial reviews, and the letter from the author detailing how he or she has addressed the desired revisions. The point of sharing this information is to make the reviewers aware that they are reviewing a revised manuscript and to let them know exactly what the author was asked to do in the revision. Although the reviewers are free to raise any issues they wish, they are also able to assess the extent to which the authors did what they were asked to do.

One Author Team's Experience

In an effort to shed light on the R&R process, the Editorial Panel of *MTE* invited Eva Thanheiser to share her and her coauthors' experience with the R&R process at a session held at the annual Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators meeting in January 2013. The purpose of this session was to provide a specific example—from an author team that had successfully navigated this process—of the relationship between an original article that is submitted to the journal, the feedback that is sent to the authors, and the final version of the article. (An abstract of the article written by Thanheiser and her colleagues appears in Figure 2.)

Helping prospective elementary school teachers (PSTs) recognize that they have something useful to learn from university mathematics courses remains a constant challenge. We found that an initial content interview with PSTs often led to the PSTs' changing their beliefs about mathematics and about their understanding of mathematics, leading to the recognition that (a) there is something to learn beyond procedures, (b) their own knowledge is limited and they need to know more to be able to teach, and (c) engaging in the mathematical activities in their content courses will lead them to learning important content. Thus, such an interview can set PSTs on a trajectory characterized by greater motivation to learn in their content courses.

Figure 2. The abstract for the article written by Thanheiser, Phillip, Fasteen, Strand, and Mills, 2013.

In her presentation at the AMTE meeting, Thanheiser used the graphic shown in Figure 3 to describe the ways in which the article changed over time in response to the feedback received. The [final version of the article](#) provides more detail about what the authors did and why, better connections between the existing literature base and what the study adds to our understanding, a more elaborated evidence base for the claims that were made, and specific suggestions for teacher educators.

Conclusion

Although every author hopes that the articles she submits will be accepted immediately (and with minor revisions!), this is not always the case. When an author receives a R&R from *MTE*, it is an opportunity to clarify and enhance the point she is trying to make in order to influence the thinking and practice of other teacher educators. Although I recognize that an R&R can be discouraging, taking the feedback provided seriously, can, as it did in Eva and her coauthors' case, lead to a desirable outcome.

Despite the fact that there is no prescription for how to deal with a request to R&R a manuscript, Tanya Golash-Boza (2011) outlines a process for revising a manuscript that may be useful (see <http://getalifephd.blogspot.com/2011/03/how-to-respond-to-revise-and-resubmit.html>). The ten steps to a successful revision that she describes are for the most part a way of keeping track of what you have been asked to do and how or whether

<p>Intro Quote</p>	<p>Results</p> <p>Interviews as a tool to motivate PSTs Themes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is something to learn 2. PSTs don't know it yet 3. PSTs need to know math to teach <p>Added a table with conceptions Refocused write-ups to "PSTs said, ' . . . ' " Provided more information in the tables (content and reflections)</p>
<p>Background and Literature</p> <p>Connected to PSTs' content knowledge Connected to PSTs' beliefs Expanded connection to PSTs' beliefs Explained the different to prior work in more detail Explained the context in more detail</p>	<p>Summary and Conclusions</p> <p>One-on-one interview—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be a powerful tool to motivate PSTs • instructor can model how to pay attention to student conceptions <p>Feasibility Added a section tying back to beliefs Discuss characteristics of tasks Added info on usefulness of interview</p>
<p>Methods</p> <p>Detailed description of the interviews Explain the process of coding and identification of themes Added more specific information: Timing and Numbers</p>	

Figure 3. The ways in which Thanheiser and her colleagues enhanced the manuscript based on the feedback provided by the editor and reviewers. (Note: Blue text indicates what was addressed in the first version of the manuscript; red text indicates what was added based on the Revise and Resubmit letter; green text indicates what was added based on the Acceptance Pending Additional Revisions letter.)

you plan to address the issues raised. This level of organization can help ensure that you have addressed (or explicitly chosen not to address) each issue that has been raised by the editor or reviewers and provide content for the letter to the editor that specifies how you have addressed the issues raised.

Acknowledgment

On behalf of the Editorial Panel, I want to thank Eva Thanheiser for openly sharing her experiences with the Revise and Resubmit process with us. It is not easy to share one's struggles in a public setting, and she did so with both professionalism and humor.

References

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