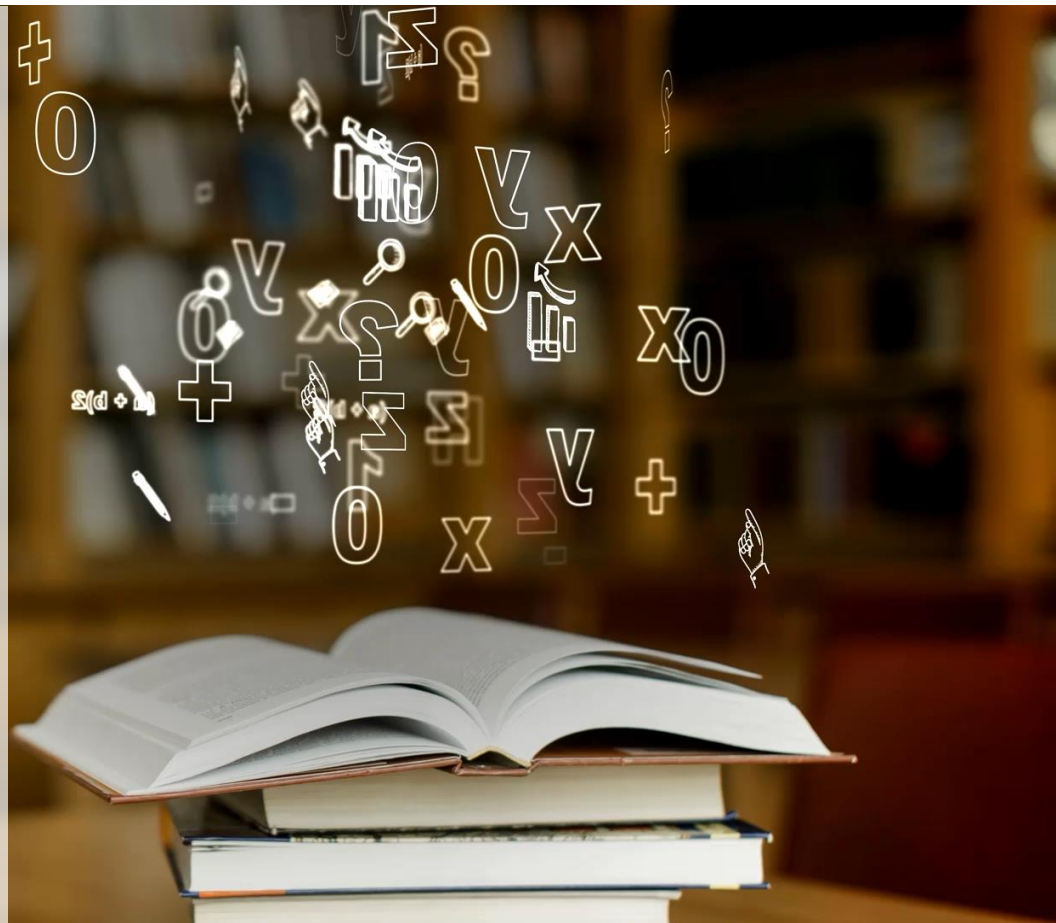


## Rejection in academic publishing: How can we avoid it? What does it mean when it happens to us?

Professor Nick Hopwood  
(UTS)

Curtin ThesisFest 2025



## Ask a well-published Professor if they have ever been rejected or had a nasty review

If she, he or they say 'no' you can say 'Nick Hopwood says you're either lying, or deluded'

Dear Dr. Berson:

I regret that the revision of your paper entitled "Insulin-<sup>125</sup>I Metabolism in Human Subjects: Demonstration of Insulin Transporting Antibody in the Circulation of Insulin Treated Subjects" is not acceptable for publication in THE JOURNAL OF CLINICAL INVESTIGATION. -----

Years after winning the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1977, Rosalyn Yalow would show here letter around proudly.



# To understand rejection... a tipping point

Many reviewers recommend **major revisions** – this is normally fixable

The recommendation to **reject** – is normally game over

## What tips articles from revise to reject

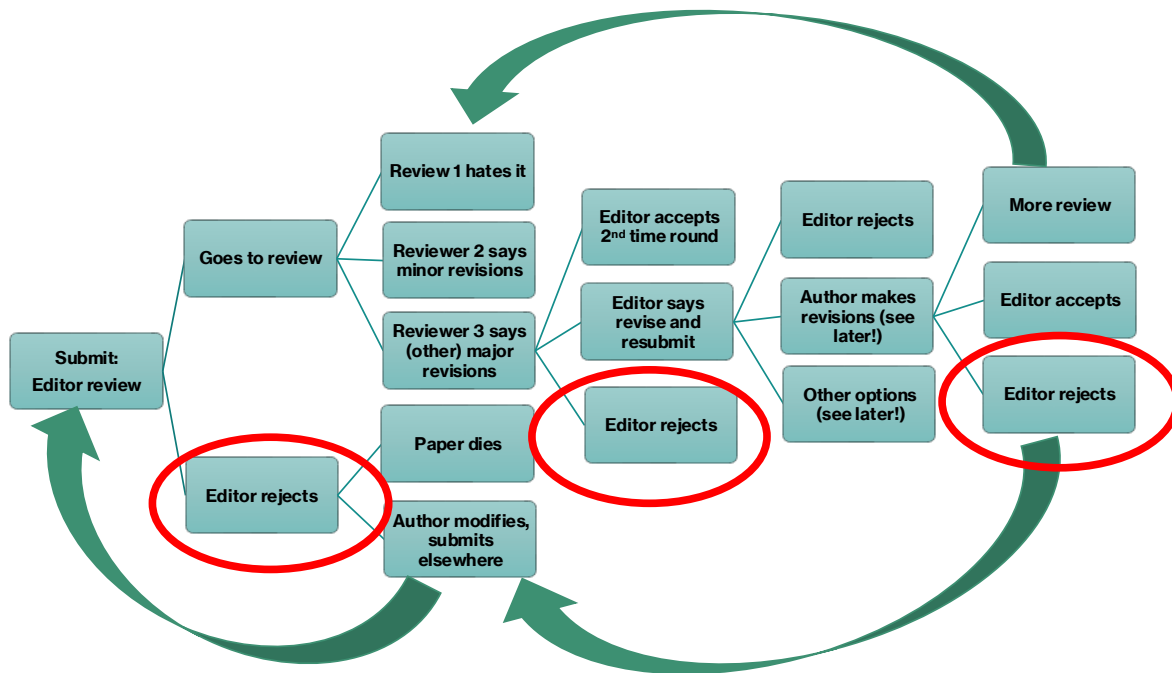
### Major revisions

- Some missed literature
- Methodological details
- Clarity of explanation
- Need for sharper argument / contribution

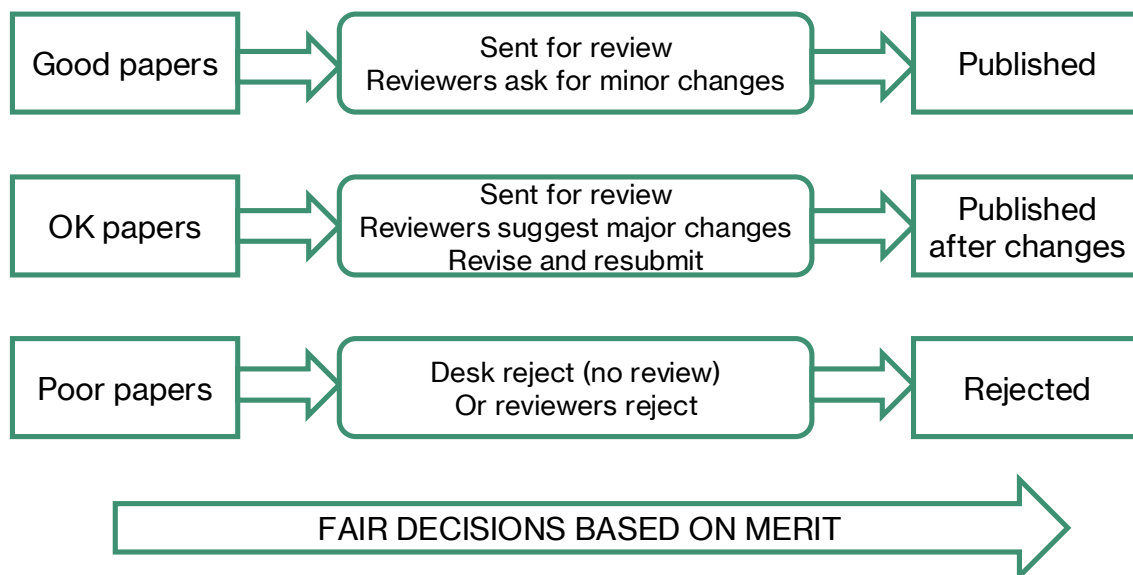
### Reject

- Good paper in the wrong journal
- Half-cooked research
- Missing key literature (or papers the reviewer wrote)
- Flawed methods
- Unclear to point of confusion
- Unjustified leaps from data to conclusion
- No clear contribution (nothing original)

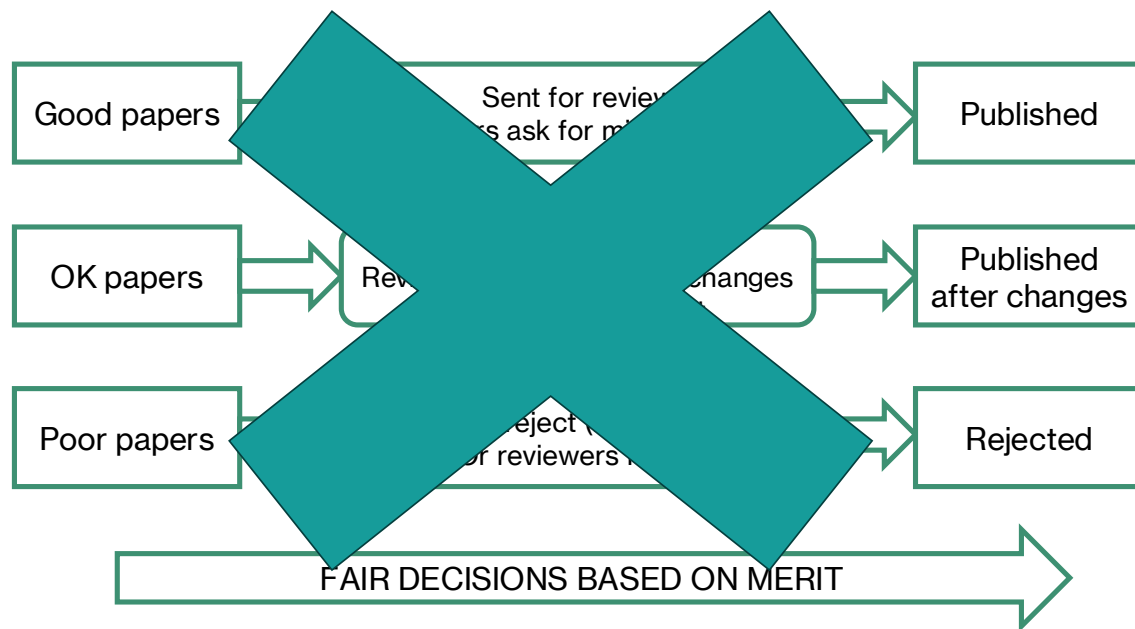
## To understand rejection... the process



## To understand rejection...



# To understand rejection...

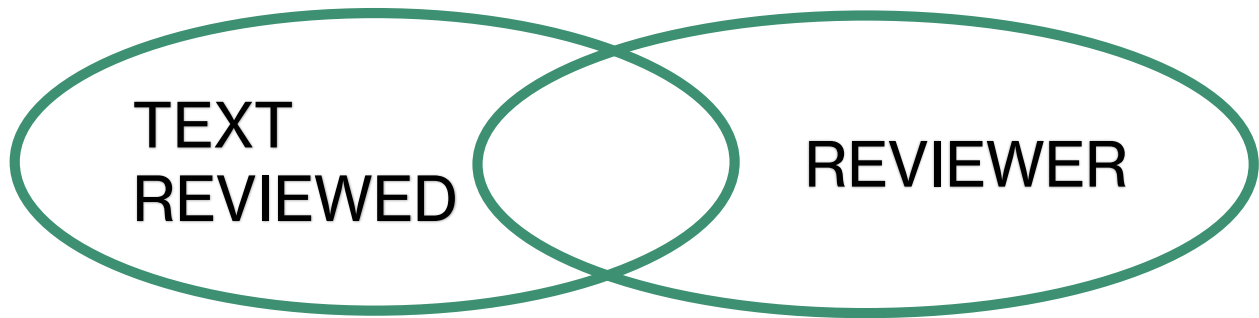


Reviews not neutral responses. They are rendered by researchers who have particular **histories**, **agendas**, and **needs**. They reflect **both the reviewer and the manuscript reviewed**. It is much easier to... understand their meaning, if you have some sense of their origin.



Graue 2006

## To understand rejection... what is really going on



## Proof no-one is safe

Referee could just have said no without  
instead **arguing I was a cretin** with no clue...  
Comments were **cruel and venomous** as if he  
wanted me to give up for good...  
Clear message was that **I was an imbecile.**  
**Insecurity** on his part?  
I had a **gem of a rejection** not too long ago



Prof Stephen Mumford (Nottingham) via patthomson

# Proof no-one is safe... and it is no shame

"The central issue presented by your manuscript is not 'interesting'. The hypotheses are banal... My colleagues broke out into laughter"

Suprateek Sarker – Editor in Chief  
4,994 citations, h = 33

"The authors are marketing professors and need to read current and forthcoming [!] papers in MIS journals"

Allen Dennis, AIS Fellow  
19,596 citations, h = 62

"Having failed to situation and ground a phenomenon of interest, the author is unable to diagnose a compelling problem or topic, and thus is left with stating 2 fuzzy and uninteresting RQs"

Joey George, LEO Award Winner  
9,011 citations, h = 40

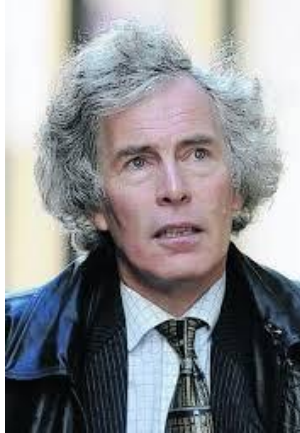
"This is the worst paper I've ever read. It must have been done by a Masters student and if so, I'd fail him [sic]"

Professor Rudy Hirschheim – LEO Award Winner  
20,613 citations, h = 65

This is a rather dull re-hash of very familiar ground... as a piece of policy analysis this is derivative and lacking in insight and originality. It would merit a 'B' as an M.Ed. essay

The paper is well written. It does illuminate an area of policy which has left its mark on the educational landscape and which foreshadows current, and important initiatives.





Geoffrey Walford, 2001

Once the **anger** of receiving such referees' comments has subsided, the only possible reaction is **laughter**. The referee seems **hardly to have read the article** at all... what I take to be a **gratuitous insult** at the end is hardly an appropriate comment. I am actually surprised that the editor did not delete this last sentence before sending the review to me



Geoffrey Walford, 2001

When such disparate reviews are received, the paper is resubmitted elsewhere as soon as possible. The paper was later published in [A\*] where both reviewers were happy to accept it... at the time I was actually a member of the Editorial Board. What is clear is that there was no favouritism in the way this article was dealt with! And I also do not think that I had made any potential enemies on the Editorial Board. **The use of referees sometimes leads to odd decisions.**



Graue 2006

Harsh rejections are unpleasant. Negative critique is often difficult to separate from the writer's self. It seems to take no time at all for wounded writers to generalize from **poor article** to **defective writer** to **hopeless academic**, when objectively all the reviewer text is authorised to say is that the article, or parts of it, do not work.

# How to avoid rejection...

## The ultimate secret tactic



**How to avoid rejection...**  
**The ultimate secret tactic**  
**Works every time, 100% success**

**How to avoid rejection...**  
**The ultimate secret tactic**  
**Works every time, 100% success**

Never submit anything for review

# A better way to think about rejection...

Be ready to join the club of rejectees

Avoid avoidable rejection

- Target appropriate journals
- Cite work that shows you belong (even if at cost of a few words)
- Make your original contribution crystal clear
- Don't submit too early

Respond to rejection

- It may be about them not you
- It's about your article, not you
- You choose what to change when you submit somewhere else
- Talk to others about it (they will respect you more, not less)