Soft skills for mathematicians, L4+L5

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2026

Advice when giving feeback

- Be positive – give constructive suggestions

- Zoom out and focus on the bigger picture: good structure, suitable level of detail, ...

- Which parts are best and which can be improved and how?

The structure

- Is the logical order good? Could it be improved?
- Is the introduction good? Does it catch interest?
- Is the last section good? Does it "wrap it all up"?

More advice when giving feeback

Language and style

- Is it well-written in terms of language? Possible improvements?
- Is the language varied and "lively"?
- Are the figures, tables and references adequate?

Mathematical contents and level

- What readership is it suited for?
- Which mathematical parts are most interesting?
- Could more be done to interest/motivate the reader?
- Is the mathematical level fairly constant?
- Other sugestions for improvement, anything unclear?

Giving feeback to a colleague

- Start with describing positive things

- Then mention some general thing(s) that could be improved

- Give at most 3 (or so) general points of improvements

- When suggesting improvements it is good to refer to other good parts of manuscript: “Section 3 need a bit more details for the reader to easily follow, more like the style in Section 5”

- Minor points and typos are much less important: give for example an annotated copy of manuscript

Being a referee

- Being a referee is a good experience: you (hopefully) learn new theory, it makes you think about writing, it looks good on your CV

- First you should of course read the manuscript in some detail (but you are not responsible for the proofs!)

- Discuss with yourself the pros and cons of the manuscript

- Most of the time you enter your feedback in an editorial system

- Often you should tick one of several recommendations: Accept, Minor corrections, Major corrections or Reject

- Sometimes you are also asked more qualitative questions: Is the scinetific question of high relevance? Is the paper well written?, ...

Being a referee, cont'd

- Then you can't write free text in two places: "Confidential comments to the editor" and "Comments to the authors

- In confidential comments you can be explicit arguing shortly your recommendation and if you have serious doubts of paper quality

Comments to the author

- Write first a short paragraph describing the contents. Possible also add some positive and negative reflections
- Don't explicitly write your recommendation (Reject, accept, ...) - this is decision of editor
- Then write some "Major comments" on things that can be improved: Restructuring, things needed to be added or removed, level of detail, language, ...
- Then add some "Minor comments": some specific parts needing attention. You can, but do not have to, list typos and grammar

Submission response

- After some time you will get response from journal:
Quick rejection: "Not suitable for our journal". Consider suitable alternative and submit. Positive: no long delay

Rejection after review: Positive: Reviews with constructive suggestions. Negative: Long delay. Revise comments you agree with and resubmit to alternative journal

Major revision: Negative: requires much work. Positive: if **all points** are addressed it will be accepted

Minor revision: Make suggested changes and resubmit quickly

Resubmission

- Text from editor indicates what really needs to be revised

Important to remember: (nearly) all editors and referees are kind, competent and spend time on your ms "for free"

- They want to help improve manuscript

- If they don't understand you must explain better

- **Revising is boring** (but important)

- **Revise quickly**: appreciated by journal and it will get even more boring if you wait

- **If rejected**: revise manuscript according to (most) suggestions and submit elsewhere.

Resubmission cont'd

- **If Major revision or Resubmission encouraged**
  - Respond/adjust to **all** comments raised by editors and referees
  - Try to follow their advice as much as possible
  - One possible exception: if reviewers suggest big extension you may write: ".. beyond scope of paper" and insert the suggestion in discussion for future work
  - Avoid changing things not requested (except typos)
  - Thank editor and referees in response letter (in acknowledgements only if they were important)

Response letter

Response letter:

- Thank referees and editor
- Paste **all** comments by referees into letter
- After each of their comments, using distinctive text format (e.g. italic or different color): explain very briefly how you addressed it and give page reference(s) to revised manuscript
- Even if they are wrong: "The text is now changed to better explain what we mean"
- Short comments (with page reference) – explanations in manuscript. E.g. "This important point is now addressed on p xx"
- Don't give long arguments/explanations
- Comments requiring much work which you don't find meaningful should be adressed at least in part