Responding to peer review

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Peer review is far from perfect
“[peer review] is slow, expensive, largely a lottery, poor at detecting errors and fraud, anti-innovatory, biased, and prone to abuse.”

Richard Smith
“In most cases they are in fact deciding that one shade of blue is competitively superior to another shade of blue, which is, of course, nonsense.”
Never respond within 24 hours

Unless you only need to make a few minor changes or you’ve got the wrong review
What I don’t like to see #1

• Avoiding the question
• Deliberately misinterpreting the question
• If a comment is not relevant then say so and say why
What I don’t like to see #2

• “We always do it this way”
• Citing papers that have made the same mistake
What I don’t like to see #3

• Keep your cool
• If a reviewer has said something daft then editor will likely spot it too (you can help the editor spot it)
What I like to see

- Engage with the ideas
- Take on and make improvements
- Give reasons for not making changes
- Take your time; may be substantial re-analysis
Word count

- Stuck between making changes based on the reviewers’ comments and going over word count
Good Reporting of Clinical Trials

Austin Bradford Hill, 1965

Four questions to which readers want answers when reading reports of research.

1. Why did you start?
2. **What did you do?**
3. What answer did you get?
4. And what does it mean anyway?
Hadley Wickham
@hadleywickham

Something I write very often when reviewing a paper: what do you want the reader to know or be able to do that they couldn't do before?
Tips

• Knock off the easy stuff first
• Read and cite the journal that you’re submitting to
• Volunteer to review papers
• Develop a thick skin
We further believe that the proposal would have been stronger if the PI had more than one primary aim. For example, why not add as a secondary aim the possibility of spread through miasma? This more credible theory enjoys considerable support in the scientific community, and even if the PI does not assign it a high credibility, collecting evidence about miasmas would improve the overall priority of this application.”