

How to Get Your Paper Rejected

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My background

I have well over 150 rejections

I am confident that I've been rejected more than anyone in this room

I might have more rejections than anyone at ISSRE !

My submission to ISSRE 2020 was rejected

In this talk I will
“learn you my experience”
about how to be rejected

Some great rejections

“As usual, Offutt got it wrong” – TSE 1993

A study like this should have been published in about 1980 – TAV 1989

“The presentation needs considerable improvement.” – TAV 89

*“We are sorry to say your paper has been **REJECTED**” – Letter from editor*

“Better than average American academic paper, below the standard of papers written by European (non-English) academics” – FTCS 1990

Reviewing is hard work !

**Be polite enough to make it easy
for the reviewers to reject your
papers**

Here's how ...

To be rejected ...

#2

Choose problems that nobody cares about

This not only makes it easy for the reviewers to reject the paper ...

Your paper can help them sleep !

To be rejected ...

#4

Don't evaluate your solution

Obviously, the idea works or you wouldn't have had it

To be rejected ...

#5

Don't connect the dots

Problem ... Solution ... Evaluation

If your experiment doesn't actually check whether your proposed solution fixes the problem, reviewers can happily vote reject

But be careful ... this is somewhat subtle and some reviewers might miss it ...

To be rejected ...

#6

Write badly, don't edit

Not only does this obscure your points ...
it frustrates the reviewers so they want to reject your paper,
no matter how good the research is

To be rejected ...

#8

Don't motivate

One of my favorite comments to write as a reviewer is

“Why in the hell are you doing this ?”

To be rejected ...

#9

Don't admit limitations

That gives the reviewer something to do

To be rejected ...

#11

Don't revise accepted conference papers

This one is a little subtle ...

This is for future planning

The current paper is accidentally accepted, but the next time the reviewers read one of your papers, they will remember

To be rejected ...

#12

Get mad about criticism

Especially useful with journal revisions

“The third comment by reviewer #2 was foolish, and we refuse to change the paper for fools.”

“Based on this comment, it’s clear to us that reviewer #2 is not qualified to review this paper.”

To be rejected ...

#13

Assume reviewers are smart

I have reviewed hundreds of research papers

I can assure you, the first thing I
do is put on my stupid hat

To be rejected ...

#16

Use “*et al.*” in reference list

Whose name did you leave out of the author list ?

Hopefully the reviewer’s name

Strategies for being accepted

Be persistent

One of my best papers was rejected
FOUR TIMES

ISSRE March 2003

FSE May 2003

ICSE December 2003

TSE Feb 2004—July 2005



Jeff Offutt and Ye Wu. *Modeling Presentation Layers of Web Applications for Testing*. Journal on Software and Systems Modeling (SoSyM), 9(2):257–280, April 2010
— Currently 163 references on Google Scholar

10 year most influential paper (MIP) award: MODELS 2020

Focus on quality

Don't try to publish in good places
Do try to do valuable research

Don't go halfway—be your own harshest critic

Use criticism to get better

If the reviewer was confused, write better

Summary rejection tips

1. Plagiarize
2. Choose problems that nobody cares about
3. Choose problems others have solved
4. Don't evaluate your solution
5. Don't connect the dots
6. Write badly, don't edit
7. Don't include relevant work section
8. Don't motivate your work
9. Don't admit limitations
10. Send to the wrong venue
11. Don't revise accepted conference papers
12. Get mad about criticism
13. Assume reviewers are smart
14. Criticize the reviewers in responses
15. View a "revise and resubmit" as a rejection
16. Use "et al." in reference list

Questions to PhD students

How many papers have you had
rejected ?

How many papers have you had
accepted ?

Do you understand the concept of
resilience ?