Forum

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Editorial Aside...

With only limited space available for the Forum and PhotoFeature segments of this issue, the pages have been given over to another in Stephen Donovan's useful and insightful series of Notes for Authors, and to a longer than standard (hence described as "Extended") Photo Feature.

As diligent readers will no doubt have noticed, periodically we lament temporary shortages of publishable written submissions (not to mention – and apposite in context – abstracts and correspondence for Forum, as well as photographic material for covers and Features). We consider ourselves to be fair-minded and helpful editors... but, having read the "Note for Authors" contribution that follows, we will be watching with interest for any increase in the numbers of manuscripts arriving – and perhaps even for changes in the nature of some future submissions.

Notes for Authors

The positive side of rejection

Stephen K Donovan

Abstract: Rejection is a component of all publishing; editors accept only what they want to publish. The trick is to make sure that your editor wants to publish your latest research paper. But if your paper is rejected, why? It may be plain wrong; see what reviews and editorial comments are returned with your submission. Assuming their comments are critical, but constructive, are they easily dealt with? Remember, you are the expert on your own research; has your writing failed to do yourself justice? Then deal with any criticisms and comments, reformat and submit to a different, even-better journal, which means a different editor and different reviewers. Your job is to convince these few people that your contribution is worthy; turn rejection into a positive.

"Rejection helps because it makes you write better;
acceptance helps because it keeps you writing"
(Bukowski, 2016, p.68).

Peer review has worked well for me (Donovan, 2005, 2017) for more than 40 years. Indeed, it is a system that works for everyone if they let it do so. An author completes a research paper on subject XYZ. The paper needs to be published and is submitted to a relevant journal, in this case *Cave and Karst Science*.

The editor receives the paper, reads it and, we hope, thinks '*This is interesting*'. But the editor is not omniscient, not an expert in this particular field, so they approach one or more potential reviewers with relevant proficiencies. The reviewer(s) comment on XYZ. The editor collates all reviews and editorial comments, and forwards them to the author. What a windfall!

The author now has comments by savants with differing, yet relevant, expertise and contrasting (or not) points of view. How might the author then use these to improve the paper and make it the very best it can be?

The author can incorporate relevant ideas and criticisms into XYZ, making it a better paper that now should be more acceptable for publication. Be sure to acknowledge the hard work of the reviewers; they worked for you.

Who wins from peer review? Everyone. After submission, review and correction, the author's paper is improved. If the editor invited minor revision and resubmission, then do so with all due haste. If rejected, then submission to a different journal is facilitated and it is now more likely to be accepted. Once published, the paper is in an improved form for the elucidation and entertainment of the readership. Even the peer reviewers have won, because they have read the latest contribution to their field even before it was published (Donovan, 2005).

Yet I hear a rumble … I mentioned the 'R' word. What if the editor rejects my paper? This is a good question that must engender a multi-faceted answer.

The principal reason for a paper being rejected is that it is poorly written; its content is poor or just plain wrong; or the submission has been to the wrong journal due to a misconception of the author.

Poor writing is inexcusable, but easily dealt with by the author. Let a friend who writes well read your paper, armed with a red pen. I saw a six-word fortune cookie recently with a glaring spelling error. If the proof-reader of this fortune cookie failed in such a short document, then I assume that they could not be relied upon to correct anything longer. But the author of an academic paper must be consistently well-written.

Perhaps less common now than formerly – because jobs in today's universities and museums require the incumbents to be productive authors more than hitherto – but I have known good academic geologists shy away from publication. They may have had good data, excellent observations and supportable ideas, but they avoided publication in the peer-reviewed literature. I have always assumed that it must have been due to a lack of confidence in their own work when confronted by the thoughts of other experts in the field. They could not face the possibility of rejection.

Do not take rejection personally (Kracht, 2020, p.146). Think of rejection as criticism, yes, but also as advice that will be constructive if used to improve your submission (Luey, 2002, p.65; Paling, 2021). If you improve on your writing, you will have less chance of being rejected. How might you do this?

Rejection is a fact of the life of any writer, academic or otherwise. That it frightens some academic authors is a further fact, but some manuscripts are accepted, some rejected, and the world continues to turn on its axis. If you have a paper rejected, so what? Your sole aim should now be to improve it so that, next time you submit the paper – most likely to a different journal – it will be accepted. But how?

Sometimes we submit a paper to the wrong place; I give a cogent, even comical example of this in Donovan (2017, p.139). Journal editors do not accept or reject a paper as a 'duty'. Editors are not ogres. They accept papers that they want to publish and reject those that they do not. This gives you the key to scientific publication; write papers that an editor will want to publish. Simple.

Most obviously, write well; make your arguments hold water; include relevant illustrations; and ensure that your conclusions are interesting, even exciting. You should start with the title. Two papers might be identical, but which would you be tempted to read: '*More palaeontological observations from Scrivener's Cave*' or '*Predation by bears, hyaenas and Neanderthal Man in Scrivener's Cave*' (Martinsson, 1972)? You are a salesman; selling your paper to the editor and reviewer(s), and the title, as well as everything you write, is part of your sale's 'pitch'.

So, you have submitted a paper that is both interesting and well written, which conforms to the format and style of the target journal, but which is rejected, nonetheless. Why? Maybe your paper is just wrong, but I am on your side – I assume it is right. So, why reject a paper that is right? There are many possible reasons. The simplest is that the target journal is receiving too many submissions and the editor must reject many papers that are otherwise acceptable. Remember, your task is to write good science that is accepted by both the reviewer(s) and editor. But even if it is good, be aware that journals can reject papers through lack of space (perhaps not such a problem for those published only on-line). But what must you do to get your paper published after rejection?

First, accept the editor's decision as final. Never try to cajole an editor to accept a paper that is already rejected. They won't and they will identify you as a whiner in the future. Your aim must be to revise and submit to another journal, which will involve reformatting at the very least. But did the reviewer(s) and editor not make suggestions for improvement that you could act upon? And what about your own reaction? It is now weeks or months since you submitted the typescript. Read it again, in the light of your fresh perspective. Are there obvious parts that now cry out for improvement, even if only minor? Once again, the time has arrived to polish, polish, polish your paper for submission.

Whatever you do, unless a major flaw is recognized in the first review, the minimum that rejection means is that you have failed to 'sell' your science to an editor and reviewer(s). That is, two or three people. Resubmit to another journal and you will be dealing with different people with unlike ideas and approaches. There are those who mistakenly regard the editor and reviewers as judge, jury and executioners. No! They are more like buyers, looking for pretty summer frocks for their storefront. Find some different 'buyers' with different (dare I say, superior) taste.

I would never advocate that a paper, if rejected, is simply put in a drawer and forgotten. After all the effort by yourself and co-authors, that paper must be made public. Get it published. If a paper has been revised in the light of expert review and editorial comments, which informed your corrections and changes, then it has surely been improved. So, when (not if) you submit this improved version, go to a different journal; never recycle to a journal that has rejected it (unless the editor specifically asks you to come back following revision). And send your paper to a journal with a higher research profile. It now stands a better chance of acceptance. Improved typescript, new editor, new reviewers – it is a heady mix. I have followed this methodology with success for many years. I have a happy memory of a paper rejected by a local journal, polished and rejected by a second (better) journal, and finally published in a high-profile, international journal at the third attempt – ha!

Charles Bukowski opened this article for me. It is right for him also to wave us out:

"*Old Ez[ra] Pound used to say,*
"Do your work."
And I knew exactly what he meant.
Even though to me writing is never work ..."

(Bukowski, 2016, p.168).

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Extended Photo Feature

Hydrological anomalies in Magpie Sough, Ashford, Derbyshire, UK

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Magpie Sough, which discharges into the River Wye upstream of Ashford in the Water at British National Grid Reference SK 17950 69613 (Photo 1), was the last of the great Peak District lead-mine drainage levels (soughs), being driven between 03 March 1873 and 18 August 1881. In 1966 the rock roof near the tail of the sough collapsed, water backed-up behind the blockage, and access was lost until 1974, when it was dug out by members of the Peak District Mines Historical Society (Willies, 1974). Butcher (1975) described the geology that the sough passes through, and suggested that 80% of the water discharging from the sough tail is derived from a "boil-up" on a mineral vein (Townhead Vein) that was intersected *c*.915m southsouthwest of the sough tail. The Magpie Mine shaft is about 700m southsouthwest of the boil-up and when the vein was crossed the water elevation in the shaft dropped, demonstrating a hydraulic connection. Christopher (1981) noted that there are, in fact, two boil-ups where the sough has intersected Townhead Vein, one entering from the east and one from the west that has a higher discharge (Photo 2). Christopher found that on 04 February 1978 the Boil-up East water was 1.1°C warmer than the Boil-up West water, and that there were small differences in the major-ion chemistry, despite the two inputs being part of a single conduit system prior to the driving of the sough. Six subsequent spot measurements by the present author between May 2006 and April 2025 found a smaller temperature difference of 0.6°C and similar conductance.

***Photo 1**: Magpie Sough tail.*

***Photo 2**: View facing northnortheastwards down Magpie Sough from the intersection with Townhead Vein. Water entering on the left is from Boil-up West, with Boil-up East water entering from the right.*

***Photo 3**: Fieldgrove Vein west input.*

***Photo 4**: Fieldgrove Vein east input.*

About 570m southsouthwest of the sough tail, workers driving the sough intersected Fieldgrove Vein where – although it has not previously been noted – groundwater enters from the west (Photo 3) and from the east (Photo 4). This is similar to the situation at the sough's intersection with Townhead Vein, but in this case the dominant flow enters from the east. The differences are are also greater and in the opposite direction, with the western input being 0.7 – 0.9°C warmer, with a conductance 65 – 85 µS/cm higher, than the water entering from the east.

It is reasonable to assume that, before the sough was driven, water flow along each of the mineral veins was uni-directional, most likely from west to east on the basis of surface topography. As water now flows into the sough from both west and east, it must also be the case that the original outlet(s), or at least some point between the sough and the outlet(s), is higher than the elevation of the point where the sough intersects the vein, thereby creating a hydraulic gradient towards the sough. The depth of water in the channel between the sough tail and the River Wye was measured at 15-minute intervals between 01 October 2009 and 07 October 2013 and, based on an approximate depth versus discharge rating curve, the average flow was 476 L/s, a substantial amount of water. Water-tracing experiments with fluorescent dyes have shown that some of the discharge is derived from Knotlow Mine in the River Lathkill topographic catchment but there must also have been recharge from the local area. This raises the interesting question of where any water was discharged before the sough was constructed, because there are no records of springs in the area to the east of the sough drying up following its construction.

The differences in temperature (and at Fieldgrove Vein in chemistry) between the inputs from west and east require further study and it is hoped that the water tracing experiments can be repeated with fluocapteurs at each of the sough inputs to gain greater understanding of flow processes

In addition to this being an interesting case study, there are two generic points to be made. The first is a very simple message that without measurements being made, the evidence of anomalous behaviour would not have come to light. A combined temperature and conductance meter can be purchased for less than £50, and should be a standard item of kit for cave explorers! Secondly, many studies, particularly those undertaken by persons who are precluded from underground sampling, either by lack of expertise or by restrictive employer Health and Safety regulations, involve sampling at groundwater output points, principally springs and the outfalls of adits/soughs. Results of such sampling provide a good indication of the load of metals, nutrients, and other substances being discharged into a surface stream, but they do not help to identify from where any substances of potential concern might be derived. Underground sampling is essential to narrow-down the limits of catchment areas and to allow source – receptor – pathway modelling.

Acknowledgements

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