

PROPOSAL THOUGHTS – Part 2

The response

BY Harriet Earle

You've written your proposal; you've sent it off. It's been through peer review and you are now met with two (or sometimes three) reviews of your document, each outlining its merits and weaknesses. What do you do now?

The first thing *not* to do is panic. Even if the reviews are negative, it's not the end. There may be a lot of very carefully considered ideas within that you can implement to make for a much better overall piece of work. A 'not suitable for publication' should be followed with 'at this time'. The right time might be months away – you should not be instantly disheartened. Here is my four-step process for dealing with reviews.

1. Read them. This is obvious, right? Read both through and get a feel for what is said. Do not rejoice or despair... yet. Take a break and then read them again. You might like to get a highlighter out and underline suggestions for change (I like to highlight compliments in a different colour too). Look at what is being said about the proposal/project, its strengths and weaknesses, the suggestions moving forward.
2. Compare and contrast. You will have more than one reviewer and they may disagree on some points; there may even be a complete contradiction on others. This is not unusual, and it is not a major problem. It does, however, take careful navigating. Look at the point of disagreement and think about how you position yourself. Are they both valid points? Does one reviewer make a better point than the other? Do you have a third response that

will 'solve' the problem while maintaining the argument and overall strength of the book? Make some notes.

3. Write your response to the editor. This goes to the editor, not the reviewer. The reviewers will likely not see this document. I like to start with a 'thank you' to the reviewers and a positive statement about the rigour of the reviews. Gratitude always goes down well!

Next, outline your key points. Where do the reviewers suggest the biggest change and what will you do about it? How are you going to work with the reviews to make your work stronger? You should remember that the reviewers are likely to be experts in your field and this may be one of the few times you'll get a glut of advice from them - use it well! But you should also remember that you don't have to agree with every suggestion they make. If you have good, clear reasons for not changing something, write it here.

Remember: this is YOUR book. The reviewers may not necessarily agree with some of your choices but if you believe they are of genuine academic interest (and rigorous in their inclusion) go for it.

4. Start work. I tend to start making the smaller changes immediately. That way, if the editor responds with news that the project is 'moving forward' (coy euphemism for either a contract or another review round), you can hit the ground running.

Important note: Peer Review should **never** tear you down. It is a place for constructive, concrete feedback and critique that aims to improve and develop a piece of work. Reviews pass through the editor before they reach you and should not be rude, insulting, or downright unprofessional. If you receive one that you think is any of these

things, you must contact your editor with your concerns. This is not a case of 'kicking up a fuss', it's about maintaining academic integrity and good conduct.

Appendix:

The response I wrote to my reviewers for a book on comics, dated 12/3/19. This is the full response - some of it will not make full sense out of context but I present it here to give you an idea of the type of tone and wording I used.

Response to the reviews of *New Critical Idiom: Comics*

I would like to take the opportunity to offer my heartfelt thanks to the proposal reviewers. All three reviews are incredibly thorough and thoughtful. I agree with all the points that were made and I hope that the alterations I've made address the issues outlined. I'd also like to thank them for being kind - such encouragement is a lovely thing to receive and the care they put into their reviews is very much appreciated.

Below, I outline the proposed changes and I am also attaching an amended proposal, with changes marked:

- I fully appreciate that this text is literary in its focus and, furthermore, that this is a problem. I am consciously trying to de-lit my way of speaking about comics in my own research and so I am delighted to have the opportunity to extend this endeavour to this text too. In focussing less on textual reading and more on the interplay of word and art, with special focus on the visual reading, I aim to achieve this throughout this text.

- The proposed seventh chapter does not work in the way I was thinking, and the reviewers agree that it is the most problematic part of the proposed text. Therefore, I will scrap this idea and use the 7000-word chunk to write a separate chapter on audiences, readerships, fandoms and the material culture surrounding comics. I may make brief mention to the (now massively popular) cinematic universes and their impact on the comics arcs but will keep this mention short. This new chapter will feed into the chapter on women and LGBT+ representation which follows it.
- I wasn't happy with the chapter on violence and trauma - it's a big topic and a fascinating one but I don't think this is the place for it. Instead, I propose a chapter on comics journalism and social comment (including thinking about the works of such artists as Joe Sacco and Sarah Glidden and publications like The Nib).
- I have renamed chapters 5-7 as 'Issues' rather than 'Themes' to move away from any suggestion of largely thematic textual analysis and instead signpost that these chapters are thinking beyond the textual and into wider concerns of publication cultures, representation, and authorship.
- I would like to include images if this is at all possible. In the past, I have been successful in getting permission from Fantagraphics and D&Q but would be happy to give special consideration to newer artists, who may be prepared to give permission directly.