

HOW TO WRITE AN ARC REJOINDER

RESEARCH, INNOVATION &
COMMERCIALISATION



Should I write a rejoinder?

- YES. All applicants **must** take the opportunity to lodge a rejoinder. Your position in the ranking can be improved by a strong rejoinder, which affects your chances of being offered a grant.
- Reading an assessor's report can provoke many emotions. When you write the rejoinder, you need to back your arguments with facts and examples, and avoid emotional language.
- Consider writing a first draft with your gut reaction, sit on it and then throw it out. Afterwards start afresh and avoid writing an emotive response.
- Writing an effective rejoinder will probably take several drafts and benefit greatly from feedback by colleagues.



Note: Assessor reports only represent advice to the ARC. 'Glowing' reports do not necessarily mean you will receive a grant. 'Critical' reports are not necessarily damning. It is the ARC College that will make the final recommendations to the ARC Board and in turn the Minister. Your rejoinder needs to be designed to help the College make the best-informed decisions by addressing any concerns the assessors may raise.

The membership of the College is available on the ARC website at: <https://www.arc.gov.au/about-arc/arc-profile/arc-committees/arc-college-experts>

You can also find College of Expert members linked to FOR codes here, under the relevant ARC scheme: <https://sites.research.unimelb.edu.au/research-funding/arc>

REJOINDER RESTRICTIONS

As noted in the Grant Guidelines, applications must contain all the information necessary for assessment. Rejoinders should therefore draw only on information already provided in the Application. New information, including new research results/methods, cannot be included.

Rejoinders should not include reference to any new awards, appointments or publications which may have occurred in the time since the submission of the Application. Track records and publication histories are assessed as at the time of application submission and therefore, no updates can be provided.

Rejoinders should not include any information that was left out of or incorrectly entered in the original Application. Modification to the Application can only be made if requested by the ARC.

Rejoinders should **not** include any information about scheme round eligibility. Eligibility issues are dealt with in a separate process. If you believe any comments are related to eligibility or are inappropriate, please contact RIC and submit an ARC Assessment Review Request Form.

Rejoinders should not include messages to the ARC as they are not viewed by ARC staff and are provided directly to ARC College of Experts Panel.



How do I access my reports and lodge my rejoinder?

Assessor reports are available for viewing in RMS and rejoinders are created in RMS. The rejoinder must be written during a limited period (i.e. usually 10 working days from the release of assessor comments).

The ARC Rejoinder Process and user guide on Submitting a Rejoinder in RMS is online at: <https://www.arc.gov.au/grants/grant-application/rejoinders>.

If you have forgotten your RMS password please select the '**Reset Password**' link on the [RMS homepage](#) and follow the prompts.

The rejoinder is limited to 5,000 characters (including spaces). Pictures, graphs or other documents cannot be inserted or attached.

You can edit and save the rejoinder a number of times before submission to RIC ("*submit to Research Office*").

Make sure you submit to RIC in RMS by the internal deadline – this is usually 2 days prior to the ARC deadline, and enables RIC to confirm that all the rejoinders have been finalised and are ready to be submitted to the ARC.

NOTE: RIC Major Initiatives team reviews LE, FL, CE, IH & SR Centre rejoinders



The Reports

- The reports you receive are from external expert assessors, who are anonymous to all except the ARC.
- The ARC sends each application to a number of Assessors and follows up overdue reports. Despite their best efforts, the number of reports the ARC receives varies from one to seven and, in rare cases, there may be no reports. The ARC makes all the reports it has received available to academics. **The chances of success are similar for any number of reports.**
- A score (A-E) is not provided to applicants or to RIC. Scores are provided to the College of Experts by assessors for each of the scheme's selection criteria with a weighted average. The ranking of your application relative to others by the assessors that is most important. **You cannot deduce the strength of your assessor's support from their written comments alone.**
- The College of Experts panel to which your application is assigned then develops an overall ranking with relative weighting of Assessors and panel members. Even knowing an individual assessor's scores would not indicate the final College ranking of your application.

Who reads my rejoinder?

- Rejoinders are not sent back to Assessors - they are only read by members of the College of Experts. Keep your audience in mind when writing your rejoinder.
- There is no point in engaging in an argument with the author of a report, as they will not see your rejoinder. It is more important to think about how the College of Experts will evaluate the claims made by the assessor and whether your response adequately addresses concerns.
- The principal spokesperson or 'shepherd' for each application on the ARC College of Experts and at least one other member of the discipline panel (or a member from another panel in the case of multidisciplinary projects) will read your rejoinder, in conjunction with the assessor reports, and will make final recommendations on scores and rankings based on the responses provided.
- If a spokesperson wants the assessment panel to consider some issue in depth or to convince them to readjust scores or ranks, they will need strong arguments. Help them make those arguments by providing those arguments in your rejoinder.
- College panel members are very busy with limited time. Clear, brief and compelling rejoinders are essential. Do not feel you need to use all 5000 characters if you can address all comments with less text. Succinct replies may be viewed more favorably.

Getting Started on the rejoinder

- There is no one 'style' or 'ideal model' for rejoinders.
- Write your rejoinder in simple, clear, direct plain English. Direct your rejoinder to the College of Experts, not to the assessor. Remember that College members may not be experts in your fields so avoid jargon and convoluted language.
- Address all questions and criticism(s) raised in your assessor reports.

Getting Started on the rejoinder - continued..

- Put the most important argument(s) in the first one to two paragraphs. Catch the readers' **attention**.
- You may wish to use short quotes from the assessor reports to reinforce and highlight certain points, juxtapose comments (e.g. where three reports help 'rebut' a criticism made in the fourth), or put your observations in context. This can also be useful because some College members may not have a copy of the reports in front of them when they first read rejoinders. However, repeating an assessor's comments verbatim where you do not tie them to an argument you wish to make, simply wastes valuable space. Refer to the assessor ID number and the relevant section of the report to identify issues.
- Your aim is to get the College of Experts to 'go back' to the reports, help them sort through perhaps contradictory remarks, convince them (where warranted) that one report or one assessor's criticisms are out of step with the others, and then in effect help them present your case to the College.
- Some researchers like to address assessor comments by theme, e.g. if a number of assessors have made comments on a particular issue. Some organise rejoinders by selection criteria. Depending on what reports are provided, choose one that's more suitable than the other.
- Acknowledge good suggestions made by assessors and indicate how you could include them in your application.
- Keep in mind that rejoinder response must also comply with the ARC Medical Research Policy.



Rejoinders vary according to the mix' of reports

Some people may be fortunate enough to receive reports filled with positive comments only. In such cases there is less to do in the rejoinder and the aims of the rejoinder are very different compared to other scenarios, e.g. where:

- one assessor makes both positive and negative comments, or
- some reports seem more positive than others, or
- reports seem 'in conflict' with one another, or
- all reports support some aspects of the application as good, but raise questions or criticisms about other areas.

Tactics when all the comments are overwhelmingly positive

- Keep the rejoinder brief.
- Aim to reinforce the support given by the assessors.
- Include key abridged quotes and the ID of the assessor quoted in brackets.
- Briefly summarise the strong points made by the assessors again in the conclusion.

Tactics for all

If you believe the assessors have not taken your research output relative to opportunity into account, ensure you clearly state this in your rejoinder. The Panel will take this into consideration.

Tactics when some comments are not so positive or reports vary in their apparent support for the application

- A rejoinder that effectively counters criticism(s) raised in assessor reports can lead to the College of Experts viewing the application more favorably.
- An assessor report that is markedly different to the others provided may be regarded by the College of Experts as being 'out of touch'. In these cases, a well written rejoinder can be influential.
- It might be very useful to juxtapose reports (e.g. 'Assessors A-C all indicate the track record of the group is outstanding, but assessor D questions key publication X). It is convincing if you can show that the assessor has made an incorrect criticism, because they have misunderstood your application or because there is published literature that contradicts the assessor.
- Keep a balanced perspective on all the comments made by the assessors. Ensure that you address all negative comments, even those where assessors have obviously misunderstood your application.
- Address specific issues and make a reasoned response, citing references where possible.
- Don't question the expertise of the assessor in a personal or emotional way. Don't accuse the assessors of ignorance or careless reading. Avoid irony or flippancy.
- Accept valid criticism by acknowledging alternative approaches or studies mentioned by assessors. If appropriate, outline how some of the suggestions are, or are not relevant.
- Formulate your response to a negative report in a positive way. Explain how you may have already considered this issue.
- If you can, substantiate your claims against negative comments using the claims of the positive comments. Then move on to address criticisms in the reports.

Tactics when some comments are not so positive or reports vary in their apparent support for the application – continued...

- Don't address criticisms in the format of a long list; select the critical few that have the most weight.
- Don't elevate minor criticisms into a major issue. Deal with minor criticism by returning to the positives in the reports (but without exaggeration).
- If the criticism of your project is that it is too broad, don't try and reformulate the project in the rejoinder. Simply restate what the core aims are and why they are sound and achievable.
- Where an assessor's report suggests 'ideological divisions' in the area of your project, one possible approach for the rejoinder is to state that you are aware that you are working in an area where these divisions exist. Then state how your project transcends these divisions. Use assessor reports as examples of the existing divisions.
- Criticisms by assessors on budgets are now part of the selection criteria and important when the College of Experts determines the final budget. You should address any area of academic importance, e.g., a suggestion that a research assistant rather than a research fellow is required.



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FOR FURTHER ADVICE

- Having a look over successful rejoinders is also very instructive, if your colleagues are willing to share them.
- Discuss your reports, the rejoinder process and successive drafts with your colleagues and especially with ARC grant mentors, grant holders and other applicants.
- For some schemes, RIC will hold a seminar to assist in responding to assessor comments. This is an opportunity to hear from senior colleagues on their experience with the rejoinder process.
- It is very important that draft rejoinders are read by a number of people. This may involve 'exposing' the negative comments received to one's colleagues, but it is much better to seek advice than show the rejoinder to no-one.
- Further information on rejoinder submission is provided by the ARC at:
<https://www.arc.gov.au/grants/grant-application/rejoinders>

With thanks to University academic colleagues and other workshop presenters and participants over the years who have shared their views and experiences about the rejoinder process.

This version was published 26 June 2023.