

How to deal with a publication rejection?

Getting your work rejected is always galling, no matter how kindly you're let down. You put hours into a piece of work and more than that, we often put our heart and soul into it, too. You might get as far down the line as a completed article before peer-reviewers or series editors say, sorry no. I've been asked in the past about how to deal with rejection and until this Monday 10th October 2022 I hadn't had the experience of a completed piece of work being rejected, proposals and applications, sure but never an article that had gone through an internal peer-review process already. Rather appropriately the rejection email initially bounced to my spam box. It stings, I won't deny it, but that feeling fades – even over the course of a week. Over that time, I've reflected on the experience, and as I take the view that it is as important to share experiences of what doesn't work out as it is to share the 'successes', this piece is aimed at answering the question of how to deal with a publication rejection from my new experience. In what follows I've put together the key questions that have gone through my mind and that helped me come to a decision. If you've found this, then you'll probably also know that I decided in this instance to put the article on my website, free for you to access. That's not always the way to go but it's the decision I've gone with on this occasion. I hope, when you find yourselves at these cross-roads, the following helps you decide what's the right course of action for you and your work.

In true publication style I've added a few key words

#time, #value #values #perspective #proactive #action #process

Let's start at the beginning. **What** is the rejected chapter about and **why** did I write it in the first place? Answering this question can help you decide where you want to go next with your work.

This chapter is on the German TV series *Babylon Berlin*, and aptly as I write this the 4th series comes out today. See this Guardian article for more info on that: [Beautiful, decadent, damaged: a walk back in time through roaring 20s Berlin | Berlin holidays | The Guardian](#)

So why did I write it? I was approached about writing what became this chapter back in late 2018 following social media posts on a conference paper I was presenting at the time. Unsure whether there would be any publication following that conference I gave an initial yes to the request and waited to see what would happen, reasoning that it would be good to get one publication from all the work that had gone into that paper. That, it turns out, is precisely what happened. The conference publication went ahead, whilst it seemed like this one wouldn't get off the ground as the edited volume was initially rejected. Once it found a home I set about revising my proposal and getting on with the writing so that the two publications would follow seamlessly the one from the other. The article that did get published following the conference came out a few weeks ago, I'm pleased to say. You can read that one here: [The \(Trans\)national Appeal within Babylon Berlin? \(modernlanguagesopen.org\)](#) together with other contributions to the special collection

Watching the Transnational Detectives in [Modern Languages Open](#) So as nice as it would have been to have two publications on this, I have one.

The next consideration was **time** - in fact there are many dimensions to this. **Time** – it's been a long time from beginning to end. I could have chosen to send the rejected chapter to another journal, spending time re-working it to fit another journal rather than the edited volume it was originally written for, and then await further peer-review which may yield a different response or may yield another rejection. So I asked myself if that was really how I wanted to spend my time?

Time as the saying goes is also money. At the moment I have one main job and freelance as well, so I asked myself did I want to give up time on what is, in essence, an act of unpaid labour, all the more so during a cost-of-living crisis or could I spend that time on earning money? As nice as these publications are, they don't put food on the table or pay the energy bill, so in many ways the answer seemed obvious. Also, time spent on revising this article would also mean time not spent on other publications – on-going and future ones, as well as other projects. I know I'm due another article back soon and as much as I'm now a little more nervous about what peer-review responses will come back on that one, I want to be able to dedicate time to that and time to the paper I'm writing, the conference proceedings that need writing up as well. I'm also working on a project at work that I hope has a lot to offer in the longer term, so I want to direct my energies to that. I give an awful lot of my time for free as it is – too much – but I have to draw a line somewhere because time spent on revising this chapter is time not spent with my partner, family and friends, all of which will shortly bring me to points about **value** and **values**, but before we leave notions of **time** there are two more dimensions to consider, although we should probably call those **timeliness**. As I said above, the 4th series of *Babylon Berlin* is about to hit our screens, so if I'd decided to send this article to a different journal it'd be at least another 6 months to a year at best before a published version went out, and it would no longer be as relevant – its timeliness would have passed. Lastly, it was a comment by one of the series editors that also helped me make up my mind. They talked about the time they'd spent on the volume and the need to move on. I agreed – it has been a long time – I turned my thesis into a monograph in less time – but also, I wanted to put time between me releasing this rejected chapter and the volume it was rejected from appearing on the market. I think it's only fair for all that the two aren't connected.

All of this brings me round to **value** and **values**. What value does this, or any one publication have? In financial terms, next to none. You don't get rich publishing academic work, even when you factor in secondary royalties. But linking back to time – surely that has value – an unquantifiable value perhaps but is fair to say my time has value and that's reason enough not to spend more time on something. There is also **value** in terms of what it contributes to the field. Well, I'd hoped it had value, but does it have more value than the article I've already contributed? Are the points made in this chapter not already implicit in the published article so I'm not really contributing any more with this one anyway? Looking at it another way should this one chapter be afforded any more value than the others I'm working on, just because it came back ahead of the others? In a way I feel that, if anything, the things I am working on at the moment have more value in terms of potential positive

impact on people, so that helped me make my decision as well. But then you have to ask yourself what value this chapter would have for my academic career or rather whether not publishing it in a peer-reviewed journal would make any difference? I doubt it. I'm well aware of the publish or perish mantra, which in my experience needs more nuance and therein lies a blog post, but no, I don't believe that any one publication makes or breaks a career. A publication record is just that a record of the collective works you've either sole or jointly authored, and it's the cumulative effect that matters, so that hiring panels can see you are continuing to publish. I could be wrong but I'd rather demonstrate my continued writing than stalling on one piece that has a knock-on effect on others. I wonder as well if there's more value in having this article rejected as a learning experience for myself but also in my mining it, as I'm trying to do here, to share and help others. With that in mind if any readers would like to share their experiences of rejection and how you dealt with it, I'd be happy to create a shared, jointly authored resource. After all, it is all about **perspective**.

It is quite easy to lose **perspective** when you first get rejected. You doubt yourself and your abilities, but you're not the sum of your publications by any means. As much as it stings a rejection is never (at least it should never be) about the person – it is just about that piece of writing as seen at that time and in relation to the proposed place of publication. I've already had 5 peer-reviewed pieces published, the first as a PhD student and the rest since – so that gives me a hit to miss ratio of 5:1 even before we factor in podcasts, conferences, talks and co-authored policy initiatives. So seen from that **perspective** it really isn't so bad. There's also the context that frames your perspective. Although this chapter started a few years ago, this final version was written in difficult circumstances, as I documented in my blog post for Prolifiko that you can read here: <https://t.co/K4biGqRWiA> [content warning: deals with topic of miscarriage]. Had I known I'd be rejected, I could have saved myself a lot of distress in writing this chapter, but I don't regret writing it. Had I not, I wouldn't have made the wonderful connections I did, and called on the support of Bec and Chris at <https://twitter.com/beprolifiko>. The process also made me a better and ultimately a more confident writer. Sure, this is not the ending I would have chosen but the context in which this chapter was written also gave me the **perspective** to say – enough – for me, getting a chapter rejected was not the worst thing that could have happened because the worst thing that has happened in my life by far eclipses this one publication. That's a more extreme perspective than I hope anyone reading this and deciding what to do with their rejected publication has to help guide their choices, but I've included it to illustrate how **perspective** matters and how it helps you decide what to do.

Lastly, then my final three key words grouped together **#proactive #action #process**. I'm not one for being passive. It is easy to shrink away from a rejection, but I felt much better about being **proactive** – I felt the need to decide what to do. I honed in on this route pretty quickly and chose to follow the advice that said, listen to your instinct. I've now taken **#action** by writing this piece and uploading the article to my website – launching it into the world. All of this is part of the **#process** of dealing with a rejection and moving on, which, together with kind and supportive comments from those who matter in this life, have made me feel infinitely better.

I hope this helps you – if not now then at some point in the future. Thanks, above all, for taking the time to read this.