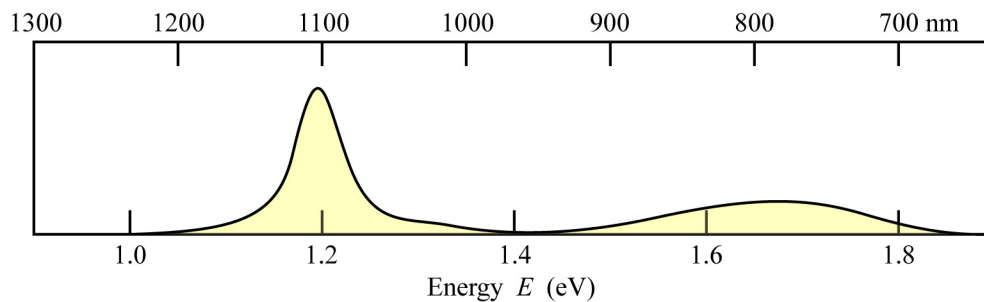


Professor, why was my paper rejected?

Receiving a letter from the editor of a journal, a few months after a paper was submitted, notifying the authors that the paper was rejected, is very disappointing. Valuable time is lost. Is the rejection justified? Below are two examples of papers that were rejected.

First example: A Ph. D. student and I had written a wonderful paper. Just before sending it out we decided to include an additional reference. We already had 13 references and now added the new “Reference 14” which we cited early on in the paper. When I saw the version revised by the student, the reference sequence was 1, 2, 14, 3 I asked the student to re-number all references (can be tedious) so that they are in an ascending order. However, the student sent the paper out without the change and told me “it doesn’t matter which sequence the references are in”. When the paper came back, it was rejected. The referee had noted “references are in random order”.

Second example: A Ph. D. student and I had written an exciting paper that contained a luminescence spectrum. The lower abscissa showed “energy” and the upper abscissa showed “wavelength” as shown here:



When the paper came back, the referee rightfully criticized that both the lower and upper abscissa were on a *linear* scale and rejected the paper! I had not noticed the problem when the paper was sent out. Both scales cannot be linear as the quantities are related by $E = hc/\lambda$. An approximately linear relationship is correct for small energy intervals, however, not for large intervals. Recall $(1 + \Delta x)^{-1} \approx 1 - \Delta x$, which is valid for $\Delta x \ll 1$.

Mistakes like the ones described above, can happen to everyone. And both students to whom these mistakes happened were outstanding – they received their Ph. D. degrees with honors. Let’s learn from these examples. A paper should be in *perfect shape* when submitted for publication.