

TLC Manuscript Assessment Post-report: What next?

You will now have received your manuscript assessment report. Each writer will respond in his/her/their own way to the report, and it is important you have the time, space and freedom to do this. We do however have a few suggestions, based on two decades of preparing, sending and responding to assessments, about how you might go about the 'what next' stage.

Objective distance

In our 'What to Expect' document that we sent you earlier, we talked about the importance of establishing critical distance from your text. Now is the time to establish critical distance from the report itself, to facilitate the switch from reading-as-writer, to reading-as-reader. We recommend a first read-through, then putting the report aside for at least a few days, before coming back to it. You should find that you discover new nuances on the second and third reading. This also gives you time to work through the feedback on a subconscious level.

Planning your next steps

It may be useful to print the report out, and go through it with a highlighter or coloured pen, highlighting sections you feel resonate. You can then begin to examine these more critically. What stood out for you? Why? Does this mirror a suspicion you already had about the work, or does it represent a new challenge? Do you have any immediate reactions?

From here, you can begin to lay the foundations for a plan of attack with any re-drafting, or re-thinking, if necessary. You may wish to start a new document to do this, and jot down the key issues you intend to address, then establish the order in which you intend to address them. This stage is for identifying the problems within the text and considering how you might tackle them in a practical way. Sometimes the solutions present themselves during the process of editing, so don't worry too much if you don't have a complete step-by-step yet.

Report as starting-point, not end-point

Do see your report as a starting-point or jumping-off point; a way to embolden you to be a better critical reader of your own work, and supporting you in the development of your craft. You may wish to save a copy of your text, to practise any of the bigger changes, giving yourself the freedom and license to be rigorous. This way, you can always revert to the saved copy if you don't feel these edits work, but you can also challenge yourself creatively.

We imagine a manuscript assessment as a pivot; a moment in time with the potential to change the direction of your writing. You may find you agree with the suggestions made in your report, you may not. A sense of your own creative vision is essential, and it's a good sign if you are feeling resistant; this usually indicates that you have a clear sense of what you are trying to communicate. If the feedback suggests something isn't working, consider it an interrogation of the execution of your ideas, not necessarily the ideas themselves. How might you communicate this differently, deploying your skills as a writer to keep a reader engaged, at the level of the text (sentence, syntax, style) and story (plot, emotional resonance). We wish you luck in your writing journey, and thank you most sincerely for entrusting us with your writing.