

How to rebuttal in HCI – 5 Practical Steps

ACM SwissCHI Workshops, Prof. Dr. Thiemo Wambsganss, Nov. 10th, 2025

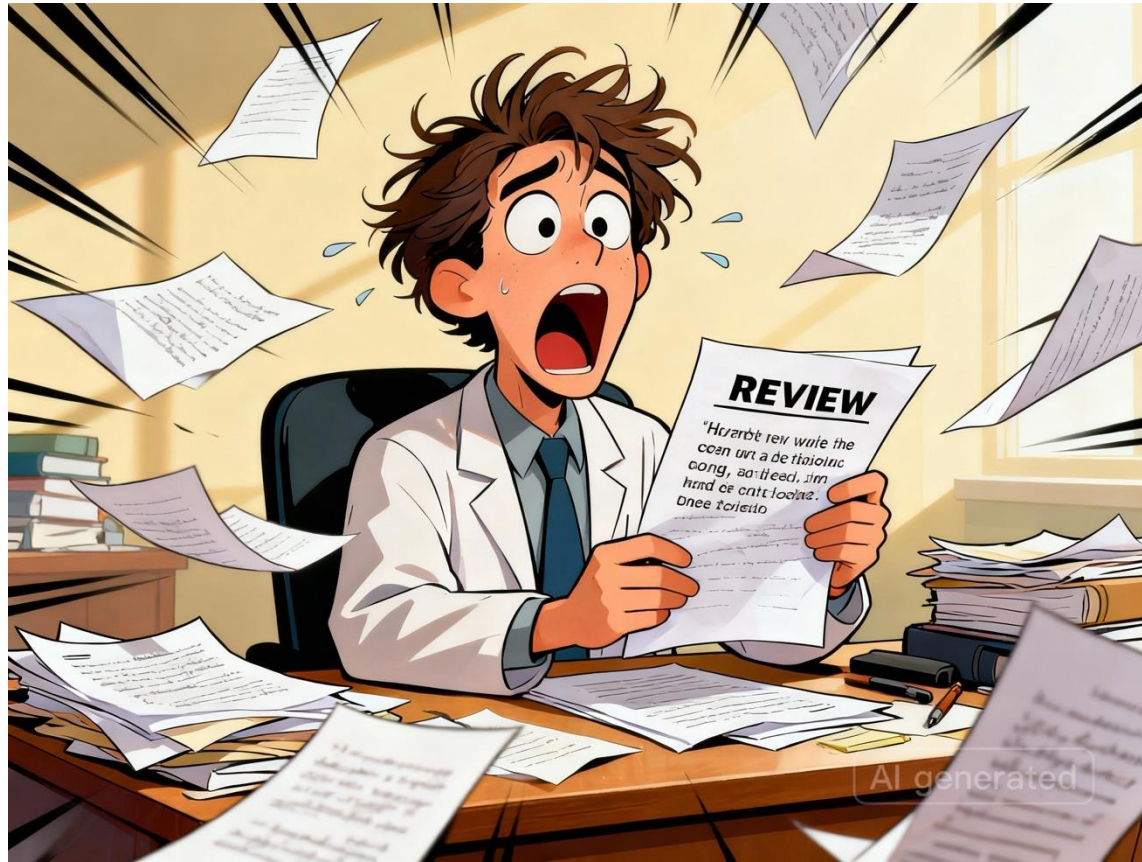
Based on Jeff's Rebuttal Guide, and Meredith Ringel Morris Thoughts

<https://jeffreybigham.com/blog/2019/jeffs-rebuttal-guide.html>

https://cs.stanford.edu/~merrie/merrie_rebuttal_tips.pdf

<https://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/chi/ResearchContributionTypes.pdf>

Rebuttals are your chance to respond to reviewers' feedback politely and persuasively to improve your paper's chances.



Step 1 and 2: Start and don't panic

▶ **Step 1 - Read Reviews, Then Sleep On It**

- Read reviews carefully but do not rush to respond.
- Expect emotions: frustration, anger are natural but wait to calm down.
- Reflection improves clarity and tone.

▶ **Step 2 - Decide Whether to Write a Rebuttal**

- Very critical reviews (only one RR from an 1AC or 2AC): Sometimes best to move on rather than invest in rebuttal.
- Very positive reviews: Always write a brief rebuttal acknowledging feedback and planned improvements.
- => If you're in doubt, just write a rebuttal and try.

CHI2020 insights into rebuttals -<https://chi2020.acm.org/blog/chi-2020-the-effect-of-rebuttals/>



Step 3: Deciding on the right things - Re-Read & Prioritize Comments with your Co-Authors

- ▶ Don't decide alone. **Discuss the reviews**, the rebuttal strategy, and your understanding with your co-authors (or colleagues)! This is crucial to avoid misunderstandings!
- ▶ Priority order for addressing comments:
 1. **1AC concerns** - they lead the PC discussion
 2. **2AC comments** - ACs attend PC meetings
 3. **Issues raised by multiple reviewers** - if >1 confused, paper wasn't clear
 4. **Borderline reviewers, you can decide** - focus your effort here
- ▶ De-prioritize:
 - Small issues from high-scoring reviewers
 - Comments from extremely low-scoring reviewers unlikely to change

Step 4 - Organize Thematically

- ▶ **Structure matters—make it easy for reviewers to find their answers**

Group similar comments under clear headings

Use descriptive section headers

Indicate which reviewers each section addresses

- ▶ **Example headings:**

“Statistical Analysis (R1, R2, AC2)”

“Related Work (R1, R3, R4)”

“Study Design Clarifications (R2, AC1)”

- ▶ **Why this works:**

Reviewers can quickly scan for their concerns

Shows you're organized and thoughtful

Makes your rebuttal feel coherent, not defensive

Template and Examples by Jeff Bigham

<thanks reviewers!>

<quick summary of contribution, your most compelling one or two sentences>

<possibly supported by reviewer comments -- e.g., "R1 said this is the best paper ever">

<address major points, as part of a coherent story, esp put anything the ACs called out here... cite Rs who mentioned it (R1, R2)>

<address minor points, as many (all) that you can fit in the character limit>

<https://jeffreymbigham.com/blog/2019/jeffs-rebuttal-guide.html>

Step 5 Doing it right - Writing Your First Draft and Revise

▶ 1. Be Polite & Professional

- Thank reviewers briefly at start (don't overdo it)
- No anger, sarcasm, or condescension—ever
- Rude rebuttals have caused borderline papers to be rejected
- Take the high road even if reviewers were harsh, objections are possible! Be honest but polite.

▶ 2. Be Specific & Concrete

- Provide exact data: “The standard deviation was 8.2” not “We will add this”
- Use present tense: “We have edited Figure 2...” not “We will edit...”
- Include specific examples of new text you'll add

Step 5 Doing it right - Writing Your First Draft and Revise

- ▶ **3. Cite Reviewers Throughout “R3 asked about effect size...”**

- ▶ **4. Accept Limitations Where Appropriate**

Don't only refute everything—this lacks credibility

Acknowledge limitations thoughtfully shows maturity and builds trust

- ▶ **5. Frame Changes Positively**

“Revisions will strengthen the paper by...”

Not: “We will correct this terrible flaw”

End paragraphs and entire rebuttal on positive notes

- ▶ **6. Address Major Points First, Then Minor**

Tell a coherent story for major issues

Fit as many minor points as space allows

Additional Tips

- ▶ **Start positive:** Thank reviewers, then quickly summarize your key contribution with positive reviewer quotes: “R1 said positive comment“
- ▶ If contribution questioned, reference **Jake Wobbrock’s “Contributions in HCI”***
- ▶ Use **reviewers’ exact words** and reference in your structure
- ▶ Work with **original comments/reviews** in your rebuttal to remember the “source“
- ▶ **Again:** focus on ACs!-> they will make a case for you or not
- ▶ Keep the 5000 characters in mind. Techniques to **shorten:**

Passive → Active voice, “For instance” → “e.g.,” “In other words” → “i.e.,” “Previous work” → “prior work”, “#AC” or “AC1” → “#R” or “R1”, “And/But” → semicolons (;), Cut long sentences into two (saves connector words), Create abbreviations for long terms, Use reference from submitted paper e.g., [10], provide link for new once

*<https://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/chi/ResearchContributionTypes.pdf>

Good luck!

