The Ideal Rejoinder

Reinforcing the worth of your application in one page or less

ARC Discovery Projects and Linkage Projects applicants are encouraged to prepare considered responses in their rejoinders to the assessors' reports. Rejoinders provide information for the Advisory Committee's benefit; the assessors do not see them. The respective EAC will read the rejoinders carefully, in conjunction with the assessor reports, and will make final determinations on scores and rankings.

Applications are sent to two readers and four international expert assessors.

Hopefully you will get at least one expert (different areas have different chances of getting "expert"), Readers are active Australian researchers

The International Experts: An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field. Niels Bohr (1885 - 1962)

Hopefully you get people who actually understand and appreciate what you are trying to do. If not, you have to make do with what you have and convince the panel that you know more about the area than the assessor.

Scores are not provided to applicants and are not particularly relevant

Scores are provided by the assessor for each criteria with a weighted average. Applicants don't see the scores so you have to deduce the strength of support from comments. As a general guide:
Outstanding - 90+
Excellent, Int competitive - 75-89

Rankings determine success and level of funding

The Committee develops its own rank with its own relative weighting of Readers and International Experts. Even knowing assessor scores would not indicate your final Committee Ranking. You need to focus on the words provided.

Three Golden Rules:

RULE 1: Read the reports
RULE 2: Read the reports
RULE 3: Read the reports

HINTS
Write one!

The rejoinder is your opportunity to address constructively and positively comments and criticisms made by assessors - use it! A rejoinder that effectively counters criticism/s raised in the reports can lead to the Committee viewing the application more favourably.

The Committee doesn’t automatically believe all comments, positive or negative

You have to back up the positive and defend the negative. The Committee will use the scores as a basis for ranking, but will ensure that each rank is warranted based on the comments. Excessively high scores will be downgraded unless thoroughly explained. Similarly, superlatives will not necessarily be taken at face value unless there is sufficient supporting text. Low scores will also only be accepted if supported by comments, so it is vital to address any negative comments.

Where the reports are especially positive, acknowledge this and indicate any work relevant to the proposed project undertaken since submitting the application, including papers published since submitting the application. Aim to reinforce to the Committee the support given by the assessors.

If assessors have made no criticisms and have been supportive, similarly indicate work undertaken and publications accepted since submitting the application, in order to encourage the Committee that the project is leading to the advancement of knowledge and is worthy of support.

If you get inflammatory remarks, write the first draft, then throw it away!

Get it out of your system! You have to make your response as objective as possible. Many of these people had a lot of applications to compare with. Think about why they might have written what they did - what is it in your application that evoked that reaction in them. Then defend it or revise it.

Remember: it is better to have a detailed less supportive assessment than an unsubstantiated supportive one

Conflicting assessments?

An assessor report that is markedly different for that application may be regarded by the Committee as being 'out of touch' - an applicant's rejoinder can support such a view when well argued.

Don’t question expertise of assessors simply because they don’t love your work

You have the right to question expertise, particularly of international experts, but be warned: applicants have been known to accuse people whose work they have repeatedly cited in their application as the world expert.
If the assessor seems to be outside his/her field or area of expertise or has misunderstood the project state how this is so in the rejoinder. Keep emotion out of responses. Address specific issues and make a reasoned response, citing references where possible.

Do not criticise an assessor's competence unless you can provide evidence.

If one person is genuinely out of sync...

If an assessor is out of sync - they may be right! Sometimes an apparently harsh criticism from one assessor can indicate that he/she was the only assessor to read the text of the application sufficiently carefully to spot a possible flaw.

If the rejoinder does not respond convincingly to such criticism, the Committee may wish to believe the assessor.

Try not to take comments personally

Generally speaking, assessors are not making a personal attack. In many cases they won't know you personally.

If there is evidence of true bias…

If you seriously think that any of the reports show marked antagonism or that someone has a genuine bias against you or your work, bring this to the Committee's attention and provide evidence.

You can request that the EAC disregard an assessment

You can make specific requests - eg "I request that assessor LPXXXX be disregarded", but you must present cogent, concise reasons in support of such requests, with reference to the application.

If the panel believes an assessor was unjust, it sometimes will take this into account without comment in the rejoinder. However, it is safer not to rely on this.

What to write

Acknowledge suggestions

It is always a good idea to try to assure the panel that you anticipated some of the comments.

Accept valid criticism

Acknowledge alternative approaches or new studies mentioned by assessors and outline how they are or are not relevant. If minor changes can be accommodated in the experimental design to enhance the project, do so and advise the Committee in the rejoinder.
Address all specific criticisms

Highlight criticisms for ease of reference and make sure you comment on ALL of them. If your rejoinder is to make a difference, you have to convince the committee that the assessors' fears are unfounded. Focus on those critical points that you perceive to have adversely affected the assessor's comments and scores.

Answer all questions

If there are specific questions, be sure to answer them. Consider yourself lucky to have something specific to address.

Approach comments seriously

Don't be flippant or cocky in your response. Amusing the EAC is one thing, but do not upset them or lose their respect.

Don’t repeat assessor comments

Repeating comments verbatim simply wastes space. Refer to the assessor number and the relevant section.

Be brief and succinct

Put criticisms in perspective: do not concentrate too much on minor or pedantic issues. Use your space wisely. Rejoinders should be brief and to the point. There is a limit of 5000 characters including spaces. Verbosity for its own sake is not well regarded.

Use plain English

Regardless of how jargon oriented a report may be, do not respond in a similar manner. Remember; do not direct your rejoinder to the assessor, but to the panel, not all of who may be experts in your field. As with the project summary in your original application, plain language is the order of the day.

Get feedback

It may not be easy with negative comments, but it does help to get someone else to read the assessor reports and your draft response and make suggestions - sometimes you get too close.

Make the format readable

GAMS may do strange things to formatting. Try to use headings with minimal formatting, and if you must use symbols, be sure that they translate into GAMS.