

# ARC Rejoinders – UQ Tip Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions





The advice provided in this Tip Sheet and FAQ is based on ARC guidance and advice from UQs past and present members of the ARC College of Experts – academics who have firsthand experience sitting on the Selection Advisory Committees that consider all application information, assessor reports and rejoinder statements in determining the final list for recommendation to the ARC CEO and the Minister.

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## Accessing your Rejoinder

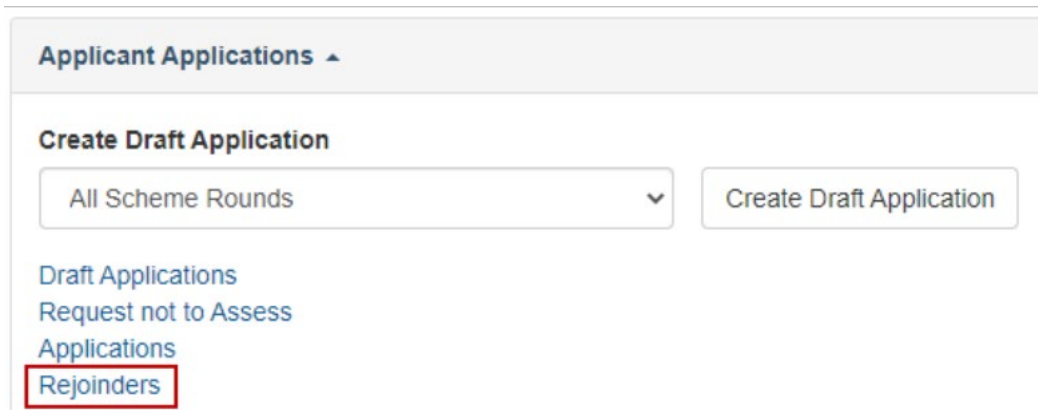
Your assessments and rejoinder are located in the ARC RMS system (<https://rms.arc.gov.au>).

To access your rejoinder:

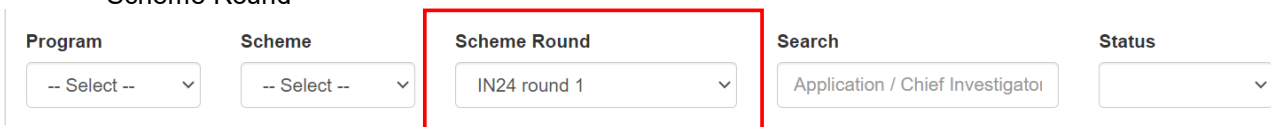
1. Log onto ARC RMS using your Email, Password and 2-Factor Authentication
2. Navigate to the RMS Action Centre:
  - a. Click "RMS" in the website header to navigate to the Action Centre
  - b. You will know you are in the Action Centre when it appears in the header



3. Select the 'Rejoinders' link from the Action Centre



4. On the 'Rejoinders' tab select the relevant round (e.g. FT22 Round 1) from the dropdown list for 'Scheme Round'



5. Click 'edit'

Application	Title	Chief Investigator	Status
IDXXXXXXXXXX	Sample Application Title	Sample User	Draft <span style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 2px;">Edit</span>



6. This page will contain a summary of information on the application, and your de-identified assessments. To view the assessment text, click on the Assessor identifier.

[Action Centre](#) / [Manage Rejoinders](#) / [Edit Rejoinder](#)

Application	IDXXXXXXXXXX
Application Title	Sample Application Title
Application Summary	Sample Application Summary
Admin Organisation	Sample Organisation
Lead Chief Investigator	Sample User

Assessment Information

Assessor - A

Assessor - B

## Submission for Research Office review

- You can find the internal deadline on the relevant UQ scheme website.
- When you have drafted your rejoinder, at the bottom of the page click 'Submit to Research Office'.

### Rejoinder

Paste your rejoinder text [here](#)

30 characters. 5000 characters maximum.

Save

Close

Submit to Research Office

## Research Office Review

- Once the rejoinder is submitted to RO, we will assume that the rejoinder is final and ready for submission to the ARC.



- The research office will review your rejoinder
  - If no suggestions are identified, we will queue your rejoinder for submission to the ARC.
    - We will always let you know when your rejoinder is queued for submission
  - If suggestions are identified:
    - We will de-submit the rejoinder back to you with a due date to return the rejoinder for re-review
    - When you have made the changes, click 'Submit to RO' again
    - We will conduct a final check and queue your rejoinder of submission to the ARC

## Submission to the ARC

- Only the Research Office can submit your rejoinder to the ARC.
- We will always let you know when your application is in the queue for submission.

## Requesting the ARC to review an Assessment

If you identify an assessment that contains inappropriate elements you may wish to have this reviewed by the ARC. If you believe you have an assessment that meets one of these criteria, contact the Research Office as soon as possible.

### *Criteria for ARC review*

The ARC will only review assessments based on the following criteria:

- Defamatory comment/s
- Evidence of assessor conflict
- Discriminatory/biased comments
- Brief assessment text (fewer than 50 words)
- Scores included within the assessment text.
- Assessment text does not match with application.
- Comments in the assessment regarding application eligibility
- Comments in the assessment regarding the National Interest Test statement
- Comments in the assessment regarding Research Output display errors

### *Potential Outcomes*

The ARC apply these criteria strictly, and it is at their absolute discretion which course of action will be undertaken, including:

- Determining that no change is required
- Requesting the assessor to amend assessment text—the ARC will attempt to contact the detailed assessor and ask that they modify the assessment text.
  - It is important to consider that the score the assessor provided will not be changed, and the applicant will not have an opportunity to defend their application against the original text.
  - If the assessment text cannot be amended by an assessor, the ARC will decide whether the assessment should remain or should be removed from the peer review process
- Removing the assessment – the full assessment, and the assessors score will be removed.
  - This is the least likely course of action.

If you are requesting assessment review, we suggest preparing multiple versions of your rejoinder. The ARC may take days to reach a decision.

### *Process*

- Only the Research Office can submit Assessment Review requests to the ARC.



- Requests must be received by the ARC within 3 working days after opening of the rejoinder period for all schemes.
- The form for completion is available here:  
[https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.arc.gov.au%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fassessment\\_review\\_form.docx%3Ftoken%3DeyUvGKd5&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.arc.gov.au%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fassessment_review_form.docx%3Ftoken%3DeyUvGKd5&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)
- Contact the Research Office as soon as possible

## Writing your rejoinder

### ARC Requirements

- Rejoinders should be clear and concise
- Rejoinder must not exceed 5,000 characters (including spaces). Note, the ARC RMS character count does sometimes differ slightly to the Microsoft word character count. Ensure you check your response in RMS.
- The ARC provides guidance that new information should **NOT** be included in a rejoinder. This includes:
  - New research results/methods
  - New track-record information (awards, appointments or publications which may have occurred since submission)
  - Information that was left out of or incorrectly entered in the proposal.
  - Information relevant to scheme round eligibility (even if responding to an assessor) should not be included (this is assessed by ARC separately).
  - Messages to the ARC should not be included (these are not seen by ARC staff).

### Tips on Content/ Common Pitfalls

- When quoting your assessors, please use their words verbatim, with no changes. You may indicate typos/errors in the assessors comments with “(Sic)”.
- Ensure that any paraphrasing retains the intent of the assessor’s original comment.
- Look at assessor comments as a whole, i.e. “Contrary to [A]’s claim the project is not innovative, the other assessors regard the project as ‘visionary’ [B] and ‘breathtaking in its goals’ [C]”.
- Ensure the tone of your rejoinder is appropriate. Focus on the issues raised, not your perception of what may have led to the comment and try not to respond with a defensive tone.

## Contact information

Should you require any assistance with your rejoinder, please contact the UQ Research Office.

- For Discovery schemes please contact the [ARC Discovery](#) team.
  - ARC Discovery Projects (DP)
  - ARC Discovery Indigenous (IN)
  - ARC Australian Laureate Fellowships (FL)
  - ARC Future Fellowships (FT)
  - ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DE)
- For Linkage schemes please contact the [ARC Linkage](#) team.
  - ARC Linkage Projects (LP)
  - ARC Linkage Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities (LE)
  - ARC Industrial Transformations Research Program



## Frequently Asked Questions

### What exactly is a rejoinder?

After applicants to an ARC scheme have submitted their proposal, between one and six assessors review the proposal and provide comments against the selection criteria. The rejoinder is the applicant's chance to respond to those comments.

The rejoinder (the applicants response), along with the assessor comments, the assessors scores (not visible to the applicant), and the submitted application will be considered by a panel of experts (the Selection Advisory Committee) who will make a final recommendation to the ARC CEO and the Minister.

For a more detailed explanation of the assessment process, see the question below.

### How does the ARC assessment process work? Where does my rejoinder factor in?

The ARCs assessment process involves a few different steps (detailed below, and diagram provided in [Appendix One](#)). Your rejoinder factors into the final steps; it can influence the scores your general assessors provide (5), which will in turn influence your ranking (6). If your application is discussed by the Selection Advisory Committee (7), they will likely discuss your rejoinder as part of their deliberations.

1. Assigning your application:
  - The responsible Executive Director assigns at least two 'general assessors'
  - One of these general assessors is assigned as Carriage 1 (lead carriage). This person will be responsible for leading the discussion on your application at the selection meeting.
  - Your Carriage 1 will assign Detailed assessors (usually 2-5)
2. General assessors preliminary assessment
  - General assessors are asked to undertake a preliminary scoring
3. Detailed assessments:
  - Your detailed assessors each score your application on an A-E scale against each of the selection criteria. You will not see these scores.
  - Your detailed assessors also provided written comments – these comments are the ones you will respond to in your rejoinder.
4. Rejoinder
  - Applicants are given the chance to respond to the detailed assessors written comments, to clarify any misunderstandings or differences of opinion about perceived weaknesses in the application.
5. General Assessments
  - General Assessor are provided with the detailed assessors comments and scores, and the rejoinder. They consider these, and provide their final scores.
  - For most schemes, General Assessors are expected to discuss their assessment with the other General Assessor/s assigned to a given application before they finalise and submit scores to the ARC
6. Ranking
  - Using each Assessors A-E scores for each criterion, a 'Proposal Score' is calculated taking into account the weighting of each criterion



- The median of the average of the General ratings and the average of the Detailed ratings provides a final single value – the overall application score
- For some schemes, the General Assessor's raw scores are normalised to redistribute all of the assessments provided by a General Assessor across the full spectrum of scores
- Applications are ranked using the overall application score

#### 7. Selection Meetings

- The Selection Advisory Committee (SAC), made up of the General Assessors including your carriage, attend selection meetings to discuss and recommend the highest quality applications
- Rankings will enable applications to be placed within three bands: highly ranked, uncertain, and lowly ranked.
- The SAC will discuss applications whose ranking fell in the 'uncertain band'. They may also discuss some applications that fell into the 'lowly ranked' band, if those applications received disparate scores from their assessors that may warrant a closer look.

### How much influence will my rejoinder actually have?

All College of Experts members we have spoken to agree that the rejoinder can make a real and significant difference. For example:

- **It can influence how your applications is viewed:** The College see the rejoinders and assessments at the same time. Your response, which is read immediately, can shape how your application is viewed.
- **It may be spoken about at the meeting:** The committee will speak about: the rankings, how they interpret your rejoinder, how you dealt with negative/disparate comments etc.
- **It may influence ranking:** The detailed assessors scores are not the only scores that determine your applications rank. Your general assessors will provide initial scores when they first see your application, and then revisit these once they have seen the detailed assessors comments and your rejoinder response – your rejoinder can impact the final score of your general assessors, and therefore your final ranking.

### What should the tone of my rejoinder be?

There are a few important things to remember here.

- The detailed assessors who wrote your reviews will never see your rejoinder, you are addressing this to the next group of people who will see your application (the college).
  - Respond positively, do not come across as argumentative or arrogant. Use facts and evidence rather than opinions or emotive language.
- The college may be reading over 100 applications and rejoinders, so it is important to make it as easy as possible for them to digest your response.
  - Organise in clear themes, using subheadings if possible
  - Be concise
  - Link clearly back to the comment/query you are responding to
- The college members are very unlikely to be experts in your field
  - Write so a non-expert can easily understand





## How should I format my rejoinder?

- When drafting your rejoinder, keep in mind that the committee could be reading 100+ of these. Give the committee the best chance of understanding your application and rejoinder, by being clear and succinct.
- Subheadings: RMS does not allow for formatting, so we strongly recommend use of sub-headings (all caps and white space can be helpful to differentiate sections). Grouping responses: there is no one set format for what subheadings to use, and how to group assessments. Use your characters wisely – what can you bundle together? Line up your assessments and see what themes you can identify.
  - o By selection criteria: this is the most commonly used format and allows you to position assessors against each other within each criteria if relevant.
  - o By assessor: this can be useful if there is limited cross-over between assessors.
  - o Other themes: if there are other clear themes in the assessor comments, you could use those.
- It is common for assessors to be referred to with “[ ]” as signposts (i.e: “[A]”, “[B]” and “[C]”).

## Should my rejoinder response be weighted against the selection criteria?

The most important consideration is where the most comments are raised, i.e., don't waste space on reiterating good track record comments if there are serious questions around feasibility.

## What exactly is new information?

Rejoinders should draw only on information provided in the application. The following are examples of what would be considered new information:

- New research results/methods (e.g. Since the time of application, we have decided to incorporate X method)
- New additions to your track-record: awards, publications, appointments (e.g.. Since the proposal I have published X papers)
- Information that was left out of or incorrectly entered in the proposal (e.g. It was not mentioned in the proposal; however, we will be incorporating X methodology)

Whilst the inclusion of new information (e.g. papers published since submission, newly published methods, new collaborators added, awards received since submission) is not permitted, responding to general or rhetorical questions by the assessors may require discussion of topics or information outside the original proposal – this is acceptable but should ideally be succinct (Q: had you considered methodology X? A: X isn't appropriate because of Y and because of this we chose method Z).



## The assessor asked a specific question that would require new information. What should I do?

First consider whether it is a genuine concern. If it is a minor comment that would require new information to respond, you may choose to not respond to this comment in your rejoinder.

Second, think about why you did not include that information in your application.

- If it was tangential, accept and acknowledge the question and move on. E.g. “This is an excellent question; however it is out of scope of our project which will focus on X”.
- Responding to genuine questions by the assessors may require discussion of topics or information outside the original proposal – this is acceptable. Remember you cannot extend the argument of your application into the rejoinder. However, you can respond to the assessor’s direct question with a concise, nuanced response. Reference the information you did provide in your application if you can. You can furnish your rejoinder with information that you cited but did not elaborate on.

## What should I do if my assessments are very disparate?

This is very common. There are a few contextual considerations here. Firstly, RMS will flag disparate scores. If your proposal falls into the lowly ranked range that usually wouldn’t be discussed by the committee, but it is flagged as having disparate scores, it may still be discussed. Secondly, you can trust that the committee members are picking up disparate comments and considering them appropriately; for example, does the one very negative assessor simply have a different theoretical standpoint.

With that in mind, to respond to these comments, focus on the concerns of the negative reviewer, using the evidence available to you. Position the negative assessors comments against the positive assessors comments. Highlight inconsistencies in interpretation and demonstrate that there is no consensus. E.g.

- Assessor A comment that <...>. None of the other assessors share this concern. <facts from the proposal to refute the As comment>
- Assessor B raises concerns regarding <...>. In direct contrast, C stated <...>

## I received a very negative review, does this mean my proposal won’t be successful?

A seemingly negative review may not be indicative of how the assessors have scored your proposal. For example, UQ’s College of Experts members have found that sometimes a review that appears negative is from an assessor very familiar with your area who is interested/invested and is drilling down into your proposal in more detail than another assessor might. They might be teasing out the details and trying to give you the opportunity to provide a robust response.

Even if an assessor’s review seems negative, your application may be ranked in a way where it falls into the uncertain range to be discussed by the Selection Advisory Committee – this is where your rejoinder can influence your proposal’s ranking. RMS will flag any disparate negative reviews for discussion by the committee. Additionally, the carriages also have the chance to bring proposals out of the lowly ranked zone for discussion by the committee if they believe one assessor’s comments/scores to be disproportionate.

## If my assessments are all positive, should I still provide a response? How long should it be?

We recommend that you still use the opportunity you have been provided. It is important to be mindful that assessor’s comments do not always align with application scores. Be wary of “it was good”, “it was sufficient” “it was as expected” etc. these are not negative comments, but they are not necessarily positive comments



either – why wasn't it “exceptional”? Your rejoinder provides the chance for you to frame your application in the eyes of the Selection Advisory Committee. Give the greatest hits from the assessments to establish that your work is outstanding.

Read the positive comments very carefully. If a few things have been raised by assessors and they haven't been given due diligence and attention in your rejoinder, it may paint your application in a poor light. However, keep your response proportionate to the comments provided, do not respond at length to a minor comment because you are filling space – this might inflate the comments importance.

Keep it short and sweet. If all your comments are positive, you likely do not need to utilise the full number of characters available to you.

### Should I emphasise the positive comments in my rejoinder? How much space should I spend on this?

A concise summary of positives is suggested at the outset because your rejoinder is not just about responding to assessors. Taking the chance to briefly summarise your “greatest hits” at the start of your rejoinder can inform the committee about how you will address the assessor's comments.

Positive comments can also be a good tool to respond to negative comments; for example, playing two assessors off one another.

However, be mindful that re-stating positive comments should not be overused. The Selection Advisory Committee will be reading the Assessors comments themselves. Use your limited space wisely to respond to assessors questions and concerns.

### How do I respond to an assessor who has made a mistake in their review?

It is okay to point out where an assessor has made an error. When conceptualising your response, first consider why the assessor may have made the mistake.

- Did they simply misread? In this case, respond using the evidence base available to you: the other assessors and your application. E.g. “Assessor A suggest X wasn't covered. This was detailed on page X of the application”
- Was your application actually ambiguous? If it was, use your rejoinder to provide the clarifications needed.

Avoid confrontational language (“the assessor did not read this properly”), and do not assume the assessor's intention. Assessors are reading a lot of applications, so it is easy for them to misread. It also may be that they are not an expert in your field and so have misunderstood. UQs College of Experts members have reinforced many times that the committee prefers rejoinders to respond positively, and factually using evidence. Refer back to the application for evidence that supports your response if you can.

### How should I answer questions about my budget?

Firstly, it is important to view any budgetary questions with the context that the committee does not consider budgets until they have decided a project will be funded.

A specific minor budget question (e.g., your priced a piece of equipment at \$1,000 at the time of application, and the assessor has pointed out that piece of equipment is not \$1,000) doesn't necessarily require a response, and if you do respond you can keep it very brief.

If the question about your budget could speak to feasibility of the proposal (e.g., the assessor states that you did not budget for a key item they believe you need to complete the project), then you should answer it appropriately.



## How should I answer a concern that I don't have preliminary data?

Use the evidence available to you rather than making general claims. For example, can you point to similar projects you have led that you spoke about in your ROPE? Can you back up your claims with publications you referenced in your proposal? You can also consider reinforcing that if it doesn't turn out exactly as planned, your project will still deliver a meaningful result.

## One of my assessors commented on my eligibility, how should I answer this?

Rejoinders should not include any information relevant to scheme round eligibility. Eligibility issues are dealt with in a process separate to and independent of the peer review process. If your assessor has raised eligibility issues, you can leave this out of your rejoinder response.

## An assessor thinks my project is too ambitious, how do I respond?

Reinforce that you have given appropriate consideration to feasibility and the timeline. Point to previous projects you reference in your ROPE that were successfully completed on time.

## My assessor has asked why I didn't use a certain method, how can I answer this?

Firstly, consider why you didn't use that method. This could be a simple one-line response "X method raised by [C] is not suitable in this context because....".

There are multiple ways to tackle most problems, so justify why you selected the approach that you did. What distinct problems are you addressing that require your specific chosen approach?

## How should I respond to "It would have been nice to see..." questions?

You only have limited characters in your rejoinder. You do not have a chance to revise your application, so you don't necessarily need to respond to these comments. Instead, focus on genuine criticisms/questions.

If you are responding, first consider why you did not include that element.

- Was it out of scope? If so, you can state that e.g. "We agree this would be interesting; however, it is out of scope of our project."
- Did you choose an alternative? Justify why your selected alternative is more appropriate for your project.

## An Assessor said I didn't cover something in my application, but I did cover it. How should I respond?

It is okay to point out where an assessor has missed something. When conceptualising your response, first consider whether the assessor missed something that was obviously included in sufficient detail, or whether there was some ambiguity or more detailed could have been provided.

- If the information was clearly there, your response can be brief, pointing back to the section/page number in your application that covered that aspect
- Was your application ambiguous or lacking detail? If it was, use your rejoinder to provide the clarifications needed.



Avoid confrontational language (“the assessor did not read this properly”). Assessors are reading a lot of applications, so it is easy for them to miss something. UQs College of Experts members have reinforced many times that the committee prefers rejoinders to respond positively, and factually using evidence.



### Appendix One: ARC selection process

