

Why Papers Get Rejected & Strategies to Respond to Reviewers' Comments

Azman Hassan

**School of Chemical and Energy Engineering
Faculty of Engineering**

organised by

**Faculty of Engineering
14 & 15th January 2019**

With my students in 2012





Dr Azman Hassan

FOLLOW

Professor of Polymer Composites, [Universiti Teknologi Malaysia](#)
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Polymer Nanocomposites Graphene Polymer Blends Flame Retardancy Biocomposites

TITLE	CITED BY	YEAR
Potential materials for food packaging from nanoclay/natural fibres filled hybrid composites K Majeed, M Jawaid, A Hassan, AA Bakar, HPSA Khalil, AA Salema, ... Materials & Design 46, 391-410	246	2013
Isolation and characterization of microcrystalline cellulose from oil palm biomass residue MKM Haafiz, SJ Eichhorn, A Hassan, M Jawaid Carbohydrate polymers 93 (2), 628-634	182	2013
Effect of jute fibre loading on tensile and dynamic mechanical properties of oil palm epoxy composites M Jawaid, HPSA Khalil, A Hassan, R Dungani, A Hadiyane Composites Part B: Engineering 45 (1), 619-624	171	2013
Novel toughened poly(lactic acid) nanocomposite: mechanical, thermal and morphological properties H Balakrishnan, A Hassan, MU Wahit, AA Yussuf, SBA Razak Materials & Design 31 (7), 3289-3298	162	2010
Comparison of poly(lactic acid)/kenaf and poly(lactic acid)/rice husk composites: the influence of the natural fibers on the mechanical, thermal and biodegradability prop... AA Yussuf, I Massoumi, A Hassan Journal of Polymers and the Environment 18 (3), 422-429	144	2010
Properties of poly(lactic acid) composites reinforced with oil palm biomass microcrystalline cellulose MKM Haafiz, A Hassan, Z Zakaria, IM Inuwa, MS Islam, M Jawaid Carbohydrate polymers 98 (1), 139-145	118	2013
A review on oil palm empty fruit bunch fiber-reinforced polymer composite materials A Hassan, AA Salema, FN Ani, AA Bakar Polymer Composites 31 (12), 2079-2101	118	2010
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Effect of ammonium polyphosphate on flame retardancy, thermal stability and mechanical properties of alkali treated kenaf fiber filled PLA biocomposites F Shukor, A Hassan, MS Islam, M Mokhtar, M Hasan Materials & Design (1980-2015) 54, 425-429	104	2014
Morphology, thermal and mechanical behavior of polypropylene nanocomposites toughened with poly(ethylene-co-octene) JW Lim, A Hassan, AR Rahmat, MU Wahit Polymer international 55 (2), 204-215	80	2006
Mechanical and morphological properties of PP/NR/LLDPE ternary blend—effect of HVA-2 A Hassan, MU Wahit, CY Chee Polymer testing 22 (3), 281-290	78	2003

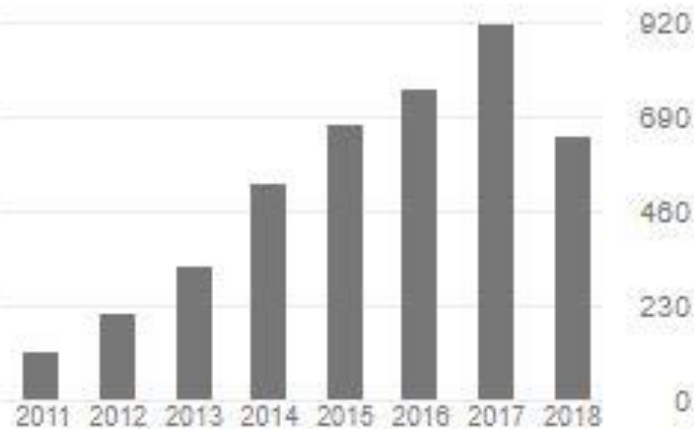
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Dielectric properties and microwave heating of oil palm biomass and biochar AA Salema, YK Yeow, K Ishaque, FN Ani, MT Atzal, A Hassan Industrial Crops and Products 50, 366-374	82	2013
Morphology, thermal and mechanical behavior of polypropylene nanocomposites toughened with poly(ethylene-co-octene) JW Lim, A Hassan, AR Rahmat, MU Wahit Polymer international 55 (2), 204-215	82	2006

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Citations	4501	3860
h-index	33	30
i10-index	112	99

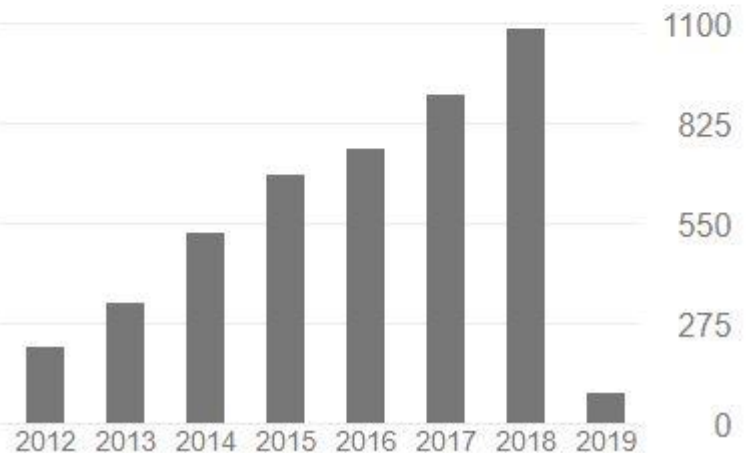


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	All	Since 2014
Citations	5013	4033
h-index	35	30
i10-index	120	100



Publications and Supervisions

No of Scopus Indexed papers	216
Scopus H-index	29
No of citations in Scopus	3523
Google Scholar H-index	35
No of citations in Google Scholar	5013
Postgraduates Supervision	Graduated 22 PhD & 35 Masters On-going 9 PhD & 2 Masters

Top Research Scientist Malaysia 2016

TUESDAY, AUGUST 16, 2016

*Sultan of Perak
Sultan Nazrin
Muizzuddin Shah
(right) presenting the
Top Research
Scientists Malaysia
award to Professor Dr
Azman Hassan from
Universiti Teknologi
Malaysia at the
Science for Peace
International
Conference in Kuala
Lumpur yesterday.
With them is Science,
Technology and
Innovation Minister
Datuk Seri Madius
Tangau. Pic by Mohd
Yusni Ariffin*



Objectives of my presentation

- To discuss the reasons for papers rejection.
- To explain the method in addressing reviewers' comments.
- To inspire the audience to be world class researchers



Writing journal papers is like running a marathon; training, planning, **learning specific skills**, endurance, perseverance and daily practice!



**How many papers are you
expected to publish during your
PhD/masters ?**

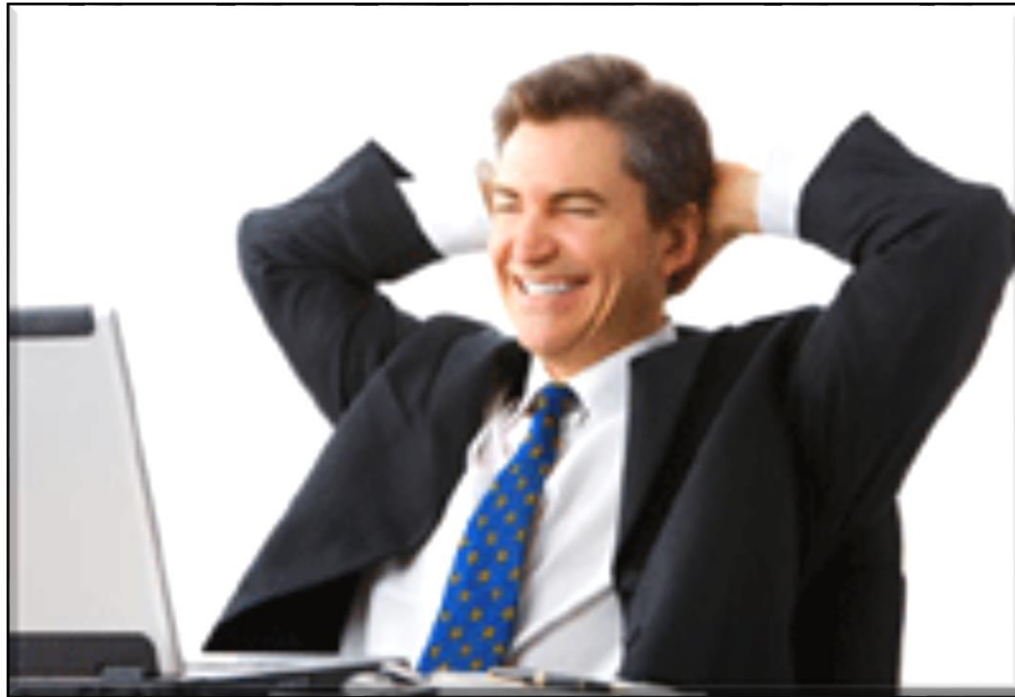


Submitting the paper

- Traditional submission (by mail)
- As e-mail attachment
- Via a journal online submission

Include a cover letter

What happens after you have submitted your manuscript to the journal?



The Peer Review Process

The Peer Review Process starts with the researcher . . .



The researcher writes a paper and submits it to the editor of a journal.



The editor determines whether the article is of sufficient quality and appropriate content. He will either reject or accept it. If he accepts the article, he gives it to the reviewers.



The editor receives the revised article and makes the final decision to publish or not, taking into consideration the reviewers's feedback.



**End Result:
Publication!**



These reviewers have specialized knowledge of the subject area and are often times researchers themselves.



They review the article for quality of research. Their goal is to find any gaps in reasoning and to ensure that nothing has been overlooked.



The article is returned to the editor along with a recommendation to either reject the article, revise it or accept it.



The article is returned to the researcher along with the reviewers's feedback and any requests for revision. She will have to revise the article and resubmit it.



What do the authors expect from the editors ?

I expect the editors to act professionally, and to appoint experts who are unbiased to review my papers.

I also expect the editors to make a fair decision based on the comments from the reviewers.

Dr M

I expect the editors to accept my papers, accept them as they are submitted and publish them promptly.

I also expect him to scrutinize all other papers with utmost care, especially those of my competitors.

Dr N

Purpose:

- To help the editor decide whether to publish the paper
- To help the authors improve the paper, whether or not the journal accepts it.

Ways peer reviewers are identified:

References, literature searching, editors' knowledge, databases, authors' suggestions

Review Process

- Reviewing process may takes from 1hr to 6 months
- One to four reviewers along with editorial comments
- Decision from Editor: Accept/reject/revise
- Proof preparation for checking by authors
- In press/queue/article in press
- Completion (vol, issue, page number, year)

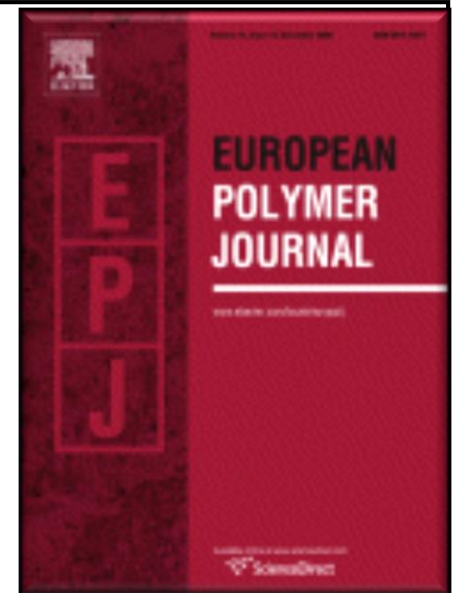
The editors and reviewers need to make recommendation whether your paper is acceptable:

- In its present form
- After a minor revision
- After a major revision
- Rejection with recommendation for submission.
- Rejection

1. Does the manuscript contain new and significant information to justify publication?
2. Is the problem significant and concisely stated?
3. Are the experimental and/or theoretical methods described comprehensively?
4. Are the interpretations and conclusions justified by the results?
5. Is the summary (abstract) concise?
6. Is the language acceptable?

Assessment

- **Originality**
- **Important Contribution**
- **Reliability of Results**
- **Critical Discussion**
- **Adequate References**



- Overall Review Manuscript Rating : (1-100)
- To what extent does the article meet this criterion?
 - ✓ Fails by a large amount
 - ✓ Fails by small amount
 - ✓ Succeeds by a small amount
 - ✓ Succeeds by a large amount

- The subject addressed in this article is worthy of investigation.
- The information presented was new.
- The conclusions were supported by the data.
- Is there any financial or other conflict of interest between your work and that of the authors?
- Please give a frank account of the strengths and weaknesses of the article
- Comments to Author

Dear Prof. Hassan,

Thank you for submitting your revised manuscript entitled "Heatsealability of Laminated Films with LLDPE and LDPE as sealant Materials in Bar Sealing Application" to the Journal of Applied Polymer Science. **It is a pleasure to accept your manuscript in its current form for publication.**

May I take this opportunity to thank you for contributing your work to our Journal.

Sincerely,

Prof. Eric Baer
Editor-in-Chief

Journal of Applied Polymer Science

Decision: Rejection

The manuscript apparently seems to correspond to the standard of scientific papers; however, a closer scrutiny reveals numerous deficiencies, which make it unacceptable for publication.

Apart from publishing another paper, I do not see the philosophy of the work, the message sent or any new information offered, which could be used by the scientific community or anyone in industrial practice.

Dear Prof. Hassan,

Your manuscript # APP-2009-03-0676 entitled "MECHANICAL, THERMAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL PROPERTIES OF POLYLACTIC ACID/LINEAR LOW DENSITY POLYETHYLENE BLENDS" which you submitted to the Journal of Applied Polymer Science, has been reviewed. I am sorry to inform you that based on the reviewers' comments, **I must ask you to revise and resubmit this manuscript before I can reach an editorial decision. The comments from reviewers are included at the bottom of this letter.**

Please note that resubmitting your manuscript does not guarantee eventual acceptance, and that your resubmission will be subject to re-review by the reviewers before a decision is rendered.

Why papers get rejected?

**What are the reasons an editor
or the referees reject a
manuscript**

Reasons for Rejection

- The reported work is outside the **scope** of the journal
- The paper does not contribute to new knowledge
- A contribution exists, but is not stated - the reviewer is left to determine the contribution themselves
- The paper has been carelessly prepared - figures/tables are not included, extra figures/tables.
- The paper has not been prepared according to journal's guidelines for presentation

Reasons for Rejection

- Objectives of paper are not clearly stated.
- The methodology is not described in sufficient detail.
- The number of experiment & sample size was inadequate.
- Lack of rigor in the argument that supports the claim
- The statistics are inadequate.
- The language is poor and informal
- Acronyms not defined.

Reasons for Rejection

- The data have been poorly interpreted
- The Introduction is inadequate
- The Introduction is adequate but lack relevancy, citations are out of date or too much general information
- Use extreme levels of self-citing
- Cite papers in foreign languages heavily

Reasons for Rejection

- Use a difference formatting style for every reference
- Many of the citations are not included in reference section
- Papers in Reference Section not mentioned in the text
- Too much citation from websites, newspapers and magazines.
- No recent citations – papers should be up to date
- No citations to the journal that the paper is being submitted.

Reasons for Rejection

- The analysis is weak.
- The paper does not meet established ethical standards
- The paper is over the journal's word limit.
- Editors and reviewers lack in professionalism
- The paper cannot compete with the high quality of other papers submitted to the journal.

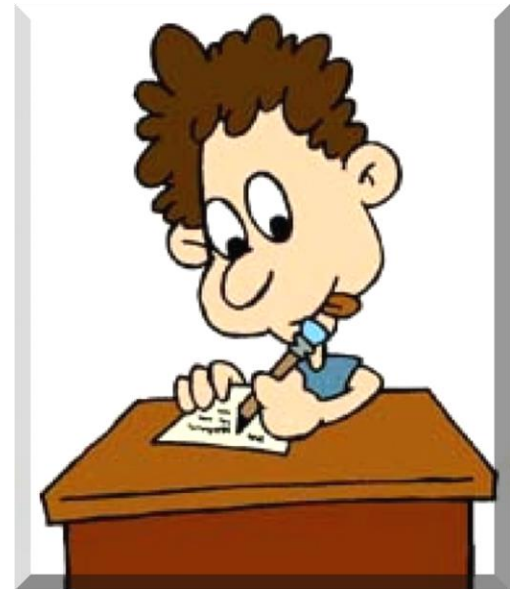
Reasons for Rejection

- Wrong choice of reviewers
- The name of the Editor-in-Chief wrong – or get it right but misspell it, in the cover letter
- Mention different journal in the cover letter

Strategies to publish in high impact journals

- Title: interesting and new.
- Relevant literature – why this research is important and what is the missing information.
- Presents new knowledge (novelty) and original.
- Methodology clearly explained.
- Professional presentation and followed guidelines to authors.
- Fall under fields(s) prescribed by the journal.
- **Good strategy in revising manuscript**
- Good English: clarity

How to address reviewers' comments in revised manuscript?



Addressing reviewers' comments in revised manuscript

- Not being outrightly rejected is an achievement.
- Have a realistic look at how the reviewer's request can be met.
- Use the reviewer's comments even if your paper is rejected
- Revise and submit promptly.
- Include a letter saying what revisions have been made
- Make a point-by-point response to reviews
- Do not feel obliged to accept everything the reviewer says
- Be helpful and polite – but not over-polite
- Highlight the revisions in the revised manuscript

Addressing reviewers' comments in revised manuscript

- Make sure you address everything.
- If you are asked to do more experiment, try to do it. If you cannot, provide a good explanation.
- Do remember that each reviewer sees all comments and your replies. Be equally respectful to all.
- In the case where more than one referee has raised the same concern, it is best to cite : see response to point 2 from reviewer 1, for example.
- Never accuse the reviewers of bias and incompetence .. (Example: Review 2 is lacking of expertise and completely misses the point)

1. Use the reviewer comments even if your paper is rejected

If it is rejected; at least get some feedback from the reviewers. Check through the reviewer comments carefully for things you can do to improve your paper before you send it to the next journal

2. Be polite – but not over-polite

It is important to address the reviewers in a polite manner, even if you totally disagree with their comments.

However, you should not be over-polite

3. Don't feel obliged to accept everything the reviewer says

Responding to reviewer comments is a balance between pleasing the reviewer and having the paper you want.

If you strongly disagree with something a reviewer says you should say so, explaining courteously and with good reasoning why (flat rejection of a comment will not be well received).

4. What to do when two reviewers ask for opposite things

Reviewer 1 feels that the Introduction lacks detail. Reviewer 2 on the other hand thinks it is too long.

What to do? In such instances it is best to ask the editor for advice.

5. Make sure you address everything

Before you submit your responses to the reviewer comments make sure you have addressed **E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G! Nothing annoyed me more as a peer reviewer than authors not responding to my comments**

6. Dealing with comments you don't understand

Explain to the reviewer that you don't understand what they mean. At the same time, it is worth writing responses based on what you suspect the reviewer may be getting at:

I am afraid that I am unclear as to the point you are making. If you are saying that the sample was too small, I would respond that [...]. If instead you feel that the outcome measure was flawed, I would argue that [...].

7. Show equal respect to all reviewers

**How should we respond if we are asked
to do more experimental work ?**

Dear Professor Barry Haworth,

We first gratefully thank you for accepting our manuscript (#APP-2007-02-0609) entitled “Interface and mechanical properties of peroxide cured silicate nanofiber/rubber composites ”, and two reviewers for good suggestion as well. We also feel terribly sorry to submit the revised manuscript so late.

Based on two reviewer’s comments, some changes including English improvements and supplements have been done in the revised manuscript, in which the fonts were highlighted with red color. Another twelve references were added. We think it is more understandable and more explicit, compared with the old manuscript.

Addressing reviewers' comments in revised manuscript

- When you rewrite the paper, please improve the English expression thoroughly, and follow **STRICTLY** the format described in the Instructions to authors of the journals:
- The English has been checked and improved thoroughly.
- The revised manuscript been prepared according to the journal format.

- A suggestion is to add “the Malaysian” in the title, i.e. **END USE ENERGY ANALYSIS IN “THE MALAYSIAN” INDUSTRIAL SECTOR**
- “THE MALAYSIAN” has been added in revised title of the manuscript.

How to Deal with comments you don't understand ?

Explain to the reviewer that you don't understand what they mean.

At the same time, it is worth writing responses based on what you suspect the reviewer may be getting at:

I am afraid that I am unclear as to the point you are making. If you are saying that the sample was too small, I would respond that [...]. If instead you feel that the outcome measure was flawed, I would argue that [...].

What is the best response to a reviewer's comments which you disagree without offending the reviewers?

First of all, one must consider the fact that the reviewer did it for free. Basically, though he partly did away your work, **analysing your results and trying to help you in improving them.**

The best thing that one can do under the circumstances mentioned in the above question is first of all **to return thanks to the reviewer, because that person has given a valuable feedback, although it is negative.**

We, as academicians, must learn to **receive feedback and to use it in a wise manner, because** feedback means taking our work into consideration.

Dear Prof. Sergei Nazarenko,

We are very grateful for the review on our revised manuscript entitle “Influence of Rubber Contents on Mechanical, Thermal and Morphological Behavior of Natural Rubber Toughened Poly(lactic Acid)/Multi-walled Carbon Nanotube Nanocomposites” (manuscript # APP-2015-10-3459).

Careful revision was made to our manuscript based on all comments from both reviewers. All changes and addition of new text made to the previous manuscript were marked in red coloured fonts. Enclosed are the responses towards the comments from reviewer.

We hope that this revision meet with reviewers’ approval and to the standard of your journal.

Thank you and we await your review for our revised manuscript.
Sincerely

Dr Agus Arsad

Comments from Review 1

1. **Comment:** The problem is not significant and concisely stated.

Response: In the original manuscript, the problem statement was mentioned in the last paragraph of the introduction. We have revisited that paragraph, an improved statement on research gap were added to better illustrate the problem statement of our work.

2. **Comment:** The experimental and theoretical methods are not described comprehensively.

Response: Thank you for this comment. We have gone through the methodological section, and included few more information and theories in certain parts of our experimental methods. We hope the additional explanations are sufficiently improving this particular section.

3. **Comment:** The interpretations and conclusions do not match with the results.

Response: We appreciate this comment. We have recognized certain ambiguity in the interpretation of the results, which require further clarification. Some adjustments were made in the text to for better interpretation and concise conclusions of our results.

4 . **Comment:** Paper Size is too long.

Response: We thank the reviewer for this comment, however we believe the length of this paper is unavoidable due to the various investigations carried out in this study. All of these investigations are interrelated and important towards achieving the objective of this study.

Highlight the corrections that we have made

INTRODUCTION¶

¶

Non-biodegradable plastic wastes have caused serious environmental pollution problems. Therefore, there is a strong research interest in the development of biodegradable polymeric materials from renewable resources in order to reduce plastics waste pollution and consumption of petroleum-based polymers.¹ Among the commercially available bio-based polymers, poly(lactic acid) (PLA) is one of the most widely explored in recent years.²⁻⁴ PLA is an aliphatic polyester produced by polymerization of lactic acid, which can be obtained from fermentation of agricultural residue such as corn starch.⁵ Rapid progress in research and development has enabled large scale production of PLA with good mechanical properties comparable to commercial polymers such as polyethyleneterephthalate (PET).²⁻⁴ Although PLA possesses good tensile strength and elastic modulus, the elongation at break and impact strength are relatively poor. This brittle characteristics of PLA is considered as the main drawback which limited its application in the areas that requires high toughness.^{2-4, 6}¶

¶

To further enhance the mechanical strength of PLA, one of the most promising strategies is through the incorporation of nanofillers such as carbon nanotubes (CNT),⁷⁻¹¹ graphene,¹² montmorillonite,¹⁴⁻¹⁶ and halloysite nanotubes¹⁸ to form polymer nanocomposites. Among these nanocomposites, (PLA/CNT) nanocomposites have attracted the widest interest among researchers due to tremendous improvement displayed in the mechanical, thermal and electrical properties as compared to neat PLA.⁷⁻¹¹ With its Young's modulus of greater than 1 TPa and possessing a density of as low as 1.3 g/cm³, CNT may be considered as the ultimate

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The English has been checked and improved thoroughly. The revised manuscript has been prepared according to the journal format.

- A suggestion is to add “the Malaysian” in the title, i.e. **END USE ENERGY ANALYSIS IN “THE MALAYSIAN” INDUSTRIAL SECTOR**

“THE MALAYSIAN” has been added in revised title of the manuscript.

Addressing reviewers' comments in revised manuscript

- I suggest, however that the authors consider the following comments if possible:

It would be good to calculate expected GHG emissions reduction in tons for the potential savings in energy using standard emissions factors.

Emission reductions associated with the energy savings have been estimated and presented in Table 8. Details of estimation formulation have been added in Section 2.5.2.

Explain why these two polymers were selected for the study. Is there any expected difference between these two polymers in terms of the effect of phosphor?

- The criterion for choice of polymer type was to have a readily available and environmentally stable semicrystalline (LDPE) and an amorphous (PMMA) polymer respectively. Some semicrystalline polymers are known to undergo strain-related deformations that are likely to facilitate the occurrence of phosphorescence, hence the choice of LDPE, while PMMA was more or less a control parameter.
- The above explanation has been appropriately included in the Introduction Section.

Reviewer Comment:

“The method/device/paradigm the authors propose is clearly wrong”

How NOT to Respond:

X “Yes, we know. We thought we could still get a paper out of it. Sorry.”

Correct Response:

√ “The viewer raises an interesting concern. However, as the focus of the work is exploratory and not performance-based, validation was not found to be of critical importance to the contribution of the paper.”

Reviewer Comment:

“The authors fail to reference the work of Smith et al., who solved the same problem 20 years ago”

How NOT to Respond:

X “Huh. We didn’t think anybody had read that. Actually, their solution is better than ours.”

Correct Response:

√ “The reviewer raises an interesting concern. However, our work is based on completely different first principles (we use different variable names), and has a much more attractive graphical user interface.”

Reviewer Comment:

“This paper is poorly written and scientifically unsound. I do not recommend it for publication.”

How NOT to Respond:

X “You #&@*% reviewer! I know who you are! I’m gonna get you when it’s my turn to review.”

Correct Response:

√ “The reviewer raises an interesting concern. However we feel the reviewer did not fully comprehend the scope of the work, misjudged the results based on incorrect assumptions.”

	1 st Reviewer's comments	Our response
1.1	There are a number of obvious outcomes in this kind of work, and they are implied in the writing, but the main outcomes (likely development of hypertension, development of abnormal albuminuria, development of proteinuria, death) are not explicitly defined.	We agree with the Reviewer and have defined the main outcomes. The revised paper now reads as follows (page 2, 2 nd para.): "In particular the study is designed to prospectively quantify the risks to donors after living kidney donation such as the development of hypertension, albuminuria, renal failure and psychological diseases and to assist in the management of individual donors at an early stage if such complications occur."
1.2	Terrific work, raised my awareness of barriers to live donation in Switzerland, and an excellent response to a complex medico-societal problem. Congratulations on the work so far and a great idea to publish your protocol. Here are some suggestions for the manuscript, * marks those that I thought more important.	Thank you very much. No reply required.
1.3	P3 line 21 could you clarify how 'missed donor' is defined in these studies?	We agree that the term "missed donor" is confusing. We have corrected the sentence which reads now: "In these studies the percent of donors without follow up data ranged from 21% ^{2 3} to 31% ⁴ , to 42% ^{5 6} up to 77% ⁷ ."

A letter from a frustrated author of a journal paper

Dear Sir, Madame, or Other,

Enclosed is our latest version of Ms. #1996-02-22-RRRR that is **re-re-re-revised revision** of our paper. Choke on it.

We have again rewritten the entire manuscript from start to finish. We even changed the g-d-running head!. **Hopefully, we have suffered enough now to satisfy even you and bloodthirsty reviewers.**

I shall skip the usual **point-by-point description** of every single change we made in response to the critiques.

After all, it is fairly clear that your anonymous reviewers are less interested in the details of scientific procedure than in working out their personality problems and sexual frustrations by seeking some kind of demented glee in the sadistic and arbitrary exercise of tyrannical power over helpless authors like ourselves who happen to fall into their clutches..

- We do understand that, in view of misanthropic psychopaths you have on your editorial board, you need to keep sending them paper, for if they were not reviewing the manuscripts they would probably be out mugging little old ladies or clubbing baby seals to death.
- Still, from this batch of reviewer, **C was clearly the most hostile**, and we request that you not ask him to review this revision.
- Indeed, we have mailed letter bombs to four or five people we suspected of being reviewer C, so if you send the manuscript back to them, the review process could be unduly delayed.

- Some of the reviewer comments we could not do anything about. For example, if (as C suggested) several of my recent ancestors were indeed drawn from other species, it is too late to change that.
- Other suggestions were implemented, however, and the paper has been improved and benefited.
- Plus you suggested that we shorten the manuscript by five pages, and we were able to accomplish this very effectively by altering the margin and printing the paper in a different font with a smaller typeface. **We agree with you that the paper is much better this way**

How to Publish High Impact Publications?

- Title: interesting and new.
- Relevant literature – why this research is important and what is the missing information.
- **Presents new knowledge (novelty) and original.**
- Methodology clearly explained.
- Professional presentation (Graphs and Tables)
- Followed guidelines to authors.
- Fall under fields(s) prescribed by the journal.
- Good strategy in revising manuscript
- Good English: clarity and style
- **Work in a team (Student, supervisor, co-supervisor and postdoc)**

Team working in action !!



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Article

Influence of rubber content on mechanical, thermal, and morphological behavior of natural rubber toughened poly(lactic acid)-multiwalled carbon nanotube nanocomposites

Mohd Shaiful Zaidi Mat Desa, Azman Hassan, Agus Arsad , Reza Arjmandi, Nor Nisa Balqis Mohammad

First published: 30 August 2016 [Full publication history](#)

DOI: 10.1002/app.44344 [View/save citation](#)

Cited by: 0 articles  [Citation tools](#)



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Volume 133, Issue 48
December 20, 2016

Strategies to Increase Citations

- Use of Professional Social Network such as Researchgate & LinkedIn.
- Publish in top and relevant journals.
- Do research in current interesting area
- Interesting title and relevant keywords.
- Self-citations (but not excessive)
- Presenting papers in Conference
- Personal contact; send PdF of your published papers
- Write review papers and include your publications

Thank you for your time



Libyan Macromolecular Institute, Tripoli (2009)