Checklist for writing effective Stat-ML rebuttals

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Some personal suggestions (via accumulated wisdom) for my own students.

- **Tone: courteous, respectful.** Whether you agree or disagree with the reviewers (opinions, constructive ideas, technical crticism), remain courteous and respectful in your language. Sarcasm/rudeness can only hurt. Thank the reviewers for good ideas or positive reception, but there is no point in overly praising the reviewers.
- **Agree when you can, disagree only if you must.** Reviewers suggestions may contradict your own perspective and often even other reviewers'. It is best to simply agree on relatively minor/straightforward changes. Otherwise, find a middle ground and make partial changes. A disagreement is warranted if the reviewer is simply wrong (rare), or you disagree *heavily* and can *justify why*. (maybe a 75-20-5% split?)
- **Organize the rebuttal by reviewer.** First discuss common concerns and changes made to address them. Then have a point-by-point rebuttal for each substantial comment by each reviewer. For minor comments, one can just add a line such as "The proposed references have been cited and the typos corrected.".

Journal rebuttals: reviewers can see, and comment on, the concrete changes you have implemented.

- **Timeframe.** 1-2 months for a minor revision, 3-4 months for a major revision would be reasonable.
- **Length.** For a minor revision, the rebuttal document could be 1-3 pages long. For a major revision, rebuttals that 4-9 pages long are not uncommon. The shorter the better, as long as all points are addressed.
- **Tradeoffs.** Shorter rebuttals are easier+faster for reviewers to process. But if it is too short, they may think that your revision was not serious. If it is too long, you may get another major revision because there may be enough things in your rebuttal itself to disagree with or clarify further. Strike a balance and stay on point.
- **Paraphrase.** To remind the reviewer about the crux of their point (which they may forget by the time you rebut), quote directly from their review in an itemized fashion, but consider shortening longer comments using "..." and (accurate) paraphrasing. Use a different font style (indentation/color/italics) for the paraphrased comment and your crisp rebuttal to the comment, to make for easier skimming through the rebuttal.
- **Color.** Make minor changes to the paper in normal font without pointing to them in the rebuttal (unnecessary distraction). Make major changes (paragraphs of commentary, assumptions, new claims) in a blue font to draw reviewers' eyes towards how you addressed their concerns, and refer to the relevant section/theorem/figure explicitly in the rebuttal (package xref). Then they do not have to read the whole paper from scratch.
- **How much color?** If half the paper is blue, that may be too much even for a major revision, (the reviewer may feel that this is a whole new paper). If there are only 1-2 pages in blue, that's probably too little for a major revision (may come across as casual). Strike a balance: possibly 5 pages of blue (spread out over 25-30 pages) may indicate your seriousness without reflecting a complete overhaul (unless that was requested).

Conference rebuttals: reviewers cannot see if you have fulfilled promised changes (or hold you to your word) and you often have to rebut in a text box without Tex support and with limited space (prehistoric!).

- **Timeframe.** Usually one week. Get started immediately by copying all comments into a Google doc (to help with word count). Lots of minimalistic paraphrasing and wordsmithing will be needed (for space).
- **Technical details.** Often, getting overly technical (in non-latex text boxes) can be counterproductive. Stick to technical details that matter most, and summarize ones that matter less. Eg: "Since Theorem X does not apply at non-finite stopping times, one can construct...".
- **Non-technical details.** Since reviewers cannot see your changes, try to be specific about what you did and where. Eg: "We have now added a counterexample directly after Lemma 1...".
- **Simulations/real-data.** If you performed additional experiments on request, describe these in enough detail to instil confidence that the competitors were taken seriously, and summarize (hopefully interesting) results.