

Thoughts on Publication Process: Initial Submission

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What makes a good paper? Content

1. Write good papers

a. Strong content

- Good idea: \$1,000,000,000 question... (read broadly, discuss ideas with colleagues you trust, go to conferences)
- Important question: Old versus new questions? Is there a premium for novelty? Probably yes
- Execution:
Well-executed, Novelty in data or method, Occam's razor

What makes a good paper? Communication

1. Write good papers, cont'd

b. Clear communication:

- Strong motivation, what is new?, concise super-polished introduction (more on this below), well-organized structure, avoid English mistakes, not too long, strive for clarity, brevity and simplicity
- Possibly think about journal at the writing stage (more on this below)
- Trade-off: It takes time...don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good

Detour: The Introduction formula

- <http://blogs.ubc.ca/khead/research/research-advice/formula>
- **Hook:** Why is it interesting?
 - Y matters
 - Y is puzzling
 - Y is controversial
 - Y is big or common
- **Question:** Tell the reader what your paper does
- **Antecedents:** How does your work fit within the context of prior work? Is prior work somewhat incomplete? Are there any substantive gaps in prior work?
- **Value-Added:** What is the contribution of your paper relative to existing work and why is it important?

What makes a good paper? Dissemination and journal fit

2. Present papers and circulate them to get feedback →

better paper, anticipate possible reviewers' concerns, network

3. Submit to journal

a. Check journal's aims and scope, related work, editorial board, discuss with colleagues

b. Choose best journal given constraints and feedback

c. If time pressure, balance prob of rejection with expected time to decision

Useful website

<https://sites.google.com/site/mkudamatsu/tips4economists>

Useful tips on:

Choosing a research topic

Presentation of your work

Writing a paper

How to write a referee report, etc.



ESA Mentoring Meeting

Navigating publishing

Handling papers

Marie Claire Villeval

Boston, June 15, 2022

How do editors handle papers?

- **Step 1. Assignment of the paper to an editor**
According to the journal, random assignment, assignment to the expert editor of the field in the board, or to the editor you were asked to suggest
- **Step 2. Editor's decision #1**
 - Pre-screening
 - Desk rejects or sends out the paper to an Associate Editor or reviewers
- **Step 3. Editor's decision #2**
 - Selecting reviewers (2 or 3)
- **Step 4. Editor's decision #3**
 - Based on the AE's recommendation, the reviewers' reports and own reading
 - Decision to reject the paper or invite a R&R (Reject & Resubmit is rare)
- **Step 5. Editor's decision #4**
 - Final acceptance or rejection after 1, 2, 3 rounds of revision

How do editors handle papers?

- Desk rejections:
 - Frequent: 40-50% in top journals
 - Don't be upset or feel insulted! Keep trying!
 - They save the time of authors and reviewers when there is not enough hope for final acceptance
 - But it is also a noisy process! This is why an editor can ask the advice of a co-editor or associate editor
- Desk rejections: Why?
 - Non-compliance with the scopes and rules of the journal (use of deception, lack of incentives, ...)
 - Limited contribution, insufficient novelty (relative to the journal standing)
 - Too narrow and specialized research question
 - Dated or obviously biased review of the literature
 - Flaws in the experimental design or in the data analysis
 - Poor writing

How do editors handle papers?

- How to reduce the risk of being desk rejected?
 - Target the right journal
 - Before submitting, read the aims & scopes of the journal
 - Check what the journal has published recently in the same domain
 - Look at editors' profile and tastes
 - Use “Customers’ feedback”
 - Present the paper as much as possible in conferences and seminars and submit a polished paper
 - Pay particular attention to the abstract and introduction
 - Identify clearly the research question and its concrete reality
 - Explicit the novelty and the contributions
 - Don't give too many details on the theory or design
 - Show the main findings and implications: it is not a crime novel!

How do editors handle papers?

- How to reduce the risk of being desk rejected:
 - Whet the reader's appetite!
 - Ask friends, mentors, colleagues, to read at least the abstract and intro
 - Is the Big Picture clear enough?
 - Put yourself in the shoes of the reader
 - Don't use jargon and have your paper edited!
 - Cover letter
 - Not always necessary
 - Do not repeat the abstract of the paper in the cover letter; emphasize its novelty and contributions

How do editors choose reviewers?

- Expertise
 - Individual competence
 - Diversity of expertise (theory/experiments/econometrics/topic)
 - Avoiding conflicts of interest

- Experience
 - Mix of junior and senior reviewers
 - Regional and gender diversity
 - Past experience on the quality of reviewing (punctuality, depth of reasoning, empathy, willingness to help the authors and not to substitute to them)

How do editors choose reviewers?

- Help the editor select the best reviewers for your paper
 - Acknowledgements?
 - Reference list
 - Prominence in the literature review

- Should authors suggest names?
 - No, it is generally ignored
 - Possible if you are working on a very specific topic/method/technique
 - Compulsory in some journals: don't waste opportunities
 - Opposed reviewers: Avoid!

- Become a reviewer yourself!
 - Signal yourself
 - The best way to learn about typical mistakes

Ethics in editing and appeals

- Ethics

- Avoiding conflicts of interests
- Showing respect
 - As reviewers, never be aggressive or insulting
 - Editors **MUST** block insulting reports and be empathetic with the authors
 - Editors should commit to not sit too long on papers

Ethics in editing and appeals

- When to enquire?
 - It's OK to write to the journal if you do not hear back a few weeks after the reviewers' reports have been submitted

- When to appeal a rejection decision?
 - 95% of the time, it will not change the editor' decision...
 - But if there is something factually wrong in the reviewer's or editor's report, you can signal it
 - After a rejection, a paper cannot be resubmitted, except if explicitly mentioned in the rejection letter

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Revise &
Resubmit

- Rejoice!

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- **Short, clear reply to editor summarizing major changes.**

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- Fair warning: Not all referees and editors are aware that the first two are myths.

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- Be polite. Be clear. Be brief.
- After you have addressed all issues, re-edit the paper for consistency.

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- **Related: If they ask for details that don't need to be in paper, put them in the reply.**

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- Be sure to address core of both directly. Note disagreement in reply.

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- Over deliver. Do more than reports ask for.
- Be polite and respectful.
- **Be charitable.**

Dealing with Rejections

Tom Wilkening

University of Melbourne

ESA, June 2022

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 - ▶ Over responding and revising a paper towards the idiosyncratic tastes of a single referee.
 - ▶ Under responding to reports by blaming the reviewers.

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- ▶ To keep a career on track, it is important to create a structure that can return papers to another journal quickly.
- ▶ Some suggestions:
 - ▶ Have a resubmission plan and agree to it with co-authors.
 - ▶ Process your emotions before reading the reports too carefully.
 - ▶ When calm, decode reports carefully and try to distinguish the signal from the noise.

Revising

- ▶ Start in a similar way as you would with a R&R:
 - ▶ Fix mistakes and add citations
 - ▶ Identify what the reviewers misunderstood and try to improve clarity
 - ▶ Address all first-order issues that can be solved (or clarify the project's scope)
 - ▶ Have others read your rejection letters to get a second signal of what is important.

Revising II

- ▶ Then, take the opportunity to reflect:
 - ▶ Was your paper sent to the reviewers in the right area? Why not?
 - ▶ Was the contribution clear?
 - ▶ Did I find the best way of presenting my main results?
 - ▶ Did the referee find it easy to parse my paper? Is it skimmable?
- ▶ Recognize that reviews carry both signals and noise
 - ▶ Don't over interpret a single review.
 - ▶ Avoid adding defensive sentences.

Send it back out

- ▶ Be a (slightly optimistic) Bayesian based on the quality of the revised draft.
- ▶ If the draft has improved, you can sometimes send it to a better place.
- ▶ Modify the paper so that it is within the scope of the new journal, but avoid strained motivations.
- ▶ Make resubmission a priority.

Use rejections to improve as a researcher

- ▶ Writing strong papers is a learned skill, not an innate ability.
 - ▶ Identify the parts of your papers that tend to be weak and try to improve them.
 - ▶ Ask for focused feedback from peers and mentors.
 - ▶ Find co-authors who are complements, but don't forget to learn from them.