

Getting the most out of the publishing process

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What is this session about

- ▶ Getting your work published in academic journals
 - ▶ what it means to publish
 - ▶ how does the process work
 - ▶ why publish
 - ▶ top tips for how to increase your chances of getting published
 - ▶ how and why to be a good referee
- ▶ The most important thing is doing high quality and interesting research
 - ▶ but I'm taking that as given

Why publish

- ▶ What is the point of trying to publish your work in academic journals?
 - ▶ peer-review improves the quality of your work
 - ▶ allows you to learn about the strengths and weaknesses in your work
 - ▶ may give you ideas of ways to extend or improve your work
 - ▶ vets papers, provides information on what are good papers to read
 - ▶ publications are (very) important for hiring and promotion decisions, for getting grant funding, for the university's funding, etc.
- ▶ Peer review publication is **complementary** to policy influence
 - ▶ important policy impact usually comes from work that is also rigorous academically
 - ▶ interacting with policy makers can help you understand what might be important contribution

Where is economics research published?

- ▶ Top 5
 - ▶ Econometrica
 - ▶ American Economic Review (AER)
 - ▶ Quarterly Journal of Economics (QJE)
 - ▶ Journal of Political Economics (JPE)
 - ▶ Review of Economic Studies (REStud)

Where is economics research published?

- ▶ Top 5
- ▶ Second tier general interest
 - ▶ Review of Economics and Statistics (REStat)
 - ▶ International Economic Review (IER)
 - ▶ Economic Journal (EJ)
 - ▶ Journal of the European Economic Association (JEEA)
 - ▶ American Economic Journals (AEJ)
 - ▶ Quantitative Economics (QE)

Where is economics research published?

- ▶ Top 5
- ▶ Second tier general interest
- ▶ Top field journals
 - ▶ Journal of Econometrics (JoE)
 - ▶ Journal of Labor Economics (JoLE)
 - ▶ Journal of Public Economics (JPubE)
 - ▶ Journal of Development Economics (JoD)
 - ▶ RAND
 - ▶ etc.
- ▶ third tier, other disciplines (marketing, health,...), etc.

Where should you aim to publish your research?

- ▶ Aim high
 - ▶ you definitely won't get published if you don't submit a paper
- ▶ But be realistic
 - ▶ what is the contribution of your paper?
 - ▶ who is going to want to read your paper?
 - ▶ what papers do you reference?
- ▶ Look at the journal you plan to submit to
 - ▶ what sort of papers does the journal publish?
 - ▶ what are the Editors' interests?
 - ▶ who are the Associate Editors?

How does the process work

- ▶ You submit your paper
- ▶ Editor has an initial skim read
 - ▶ decides whether to send to referees or screen/desk reject
 - ▶ screen reject is not a failure; it is efficient and saves you wasting time
 - ▶ if you don't ever get screen rejected you're not aiming high enough
- ▶ If paper sent to reviewers
 - ▶ sent to between 1-4 referees, their expertise will depend on the journal, the Editor, how you've positioned the paper
- ▶ Referees take between 1-6 months to return review; Editor takes between 1-5 months to reach a decision:
 - ▶ reject
 - ▶ revise and resubmit
 - ▶ accept or accept with revisions

What criteria will the Editor use?

- ▶ Importance of research question
 - ▶ who will want to read it? how does that compare to the readership of the journal?
- ▶ Clear presentation, well organised
 - ▶ is the message clear; is it easy to read
 - ▶ if readers don't understand what you are doing or what your message is don't blame them, it is almost certainly your fault for not explaining it clearly, your work should be transparent
 - ▶ writing economics is not like writing a murder mystery or a joke; don't save the punch line until the end, don't build suspense; just present it all clearly
- ▶ Novelty of your contribution
 - ▶ is the method new? is it an existing method applied in a new context or to new data?

Selling your idea

- ▶ Be succinct, write it well
 - ▶ if the Editors and referees enjoy reading the paper they are much more likely to be favourably inclined
- ▶ The Introduction
 - ▶ is the most important part, it is all some (most) people will read
 - ▶ state your contribution clearly in the first page
 - ▶ it should not be "how did you spend your time"
 - ▶ write, rewrite, rewrite, rewrite, rewrite, rewrite... the Introduction (don't be afraid to throw away a version that doesn't work and start again)
- ▶ Don't clutter up the paper
 - ▶ stick to your main message; use appendices if you need to

The introduction

- ▶ say what your question is
- ▶ say why this question is important and interesting
- ▶ say what your contribution to debate is and how you do it
- ▶ summarize debate on this question in existing literature
 - ▶ don't just enumerate earlier articles and describe history of subject
 - ▶ tell (short) story about how ideas developed
 - ▶ make clear what gaps remain and where you contribute
- ▶ skip the details
- ▶ keep language plain
- ▶ don't include technical definitions

Writing a paper

- ▶ it isn't a linear process
 - ▶ you don't just do research and then "write up"; write a preliminary draft early, present it, discuss it, do more research, etc.
- ▶ don't be afraid to throw it all out if it isn't working
 - ▶ sometimes the research questions you start with aren't the ones that you end up answering
- ▶ it is your job to make what you do clear and convincing
 - ▶ it is not the reader's job to have to work hard to figure this out
 - ▶ be transparent, be clear, be convincing
- ▶ read papers in journals and think about how they are structured

How to figure out your contribution

- ▶ Work on the tweet version (140 characters)
- ▶ What do we know after reading your paper that we did not know before?
 - ▶ "Our contribution is..."
 - ▶ find out what others think is the contribution and how interest it is by talking to people and presenting the paper
 - ▶ try it out on your grandma, kids, neighbours, dog
 - ▶ meet seminar speakers and other visitors to your department, present your work as often as possible
- ▶ Write down comments that people give you and questions that they ask (they might be a referee)
 - ▶ go back over them when you are redrafting your paper and think about whether you have adequately addressed them

The basics of writing

- ▶ Don't plagiarise
- ▶ Reference appropriately and completely
 - ▶ your supervisor's and lecturers' work; your own work previous work
 - ▶ but not just that, important original sources and not just recent papers
 - ▶ almost never a good idea to cite negatively, put a positive spin on it
- ▶ Lay the paper out in a standard format
 - ▶ make it look like an academic paper
- ▶ Use proper grammar and proof-read the paper many times
 - ▶ active or passive voice ("We" not "I")
 - ▶ avoid adjectives, and never double adjectives ("very interesting")
 - ▶ talk to other people about the logistics (tex or word, use a bibliography manager, etc.)

The mechanics of publication

- ▶ You submit your paper
 - ▶ handy hint: before you submit a paper make sure you archive all data, programs, figures etc. so that you can recreate the paper and all results
- ▶ You get a response that says
 - ▶ we accept the paper for publication
 - ▶ we invite you to revise and resubmit, with referee reports
 - ▶ we reject but you could possibly resubmit, with referee reports
 - ▶ we reject, with referee reports
 - ▶ we screen reject, no referee reports

How to deal with an acceptance

- ▶ Celebrate!

How to deal with a revise and resubmit

- ▶ Celebrate! This is good news
- ▶ Read through the reports
 - ▶ put them down and walk away for a day or two before you do anything
- ▶ Go through **all** comments
 - ▶ make a plan for how to respond
 - ▶ consider which are most important and spend most time on them
 - ▶ pay particular attention to the Editor's letter
- ▶ Draft a detailed response
 - ▶ respond to each individual point, lay out your response clearly
 - ▶ if there is a comment you don't agree with try to be constructive but get your point across
- ▶ Never (or very rarely) complain to the Editor

How to deal with a reject

- ▶ Read through the reports
 - ▶ put them down and walk away for a day or two before you do anything
- ▶ Go through the comments as with a revise and resubmit and consider which you need to deal with; reassess your contribution and the appropriate journal
- ▶ Remember that when you submit your paper to another journal it is likely that the Editor will find out about its history
 - ▶ e.g. the Editor may send to the same referees
 - ▶ some journals allow you to submit past reports and how you have revised the paper; this can speed the process up; you should consider whether you should give the history of the paper in the cover letter - there are arguments for and against

How and why to write a referee report

- ▶ You will most likely get asked to referee a paper for a journal
- ▶ You should do it if you can (more on that in a minute)
 - ▶ it is a contribution to the public good
 - ▶ editors notice good referee reports
 - ▶ you usually learn from the process of writing a referee report and it helps make your papers better

What to do when you get a request

- ▶ Respond immediately (24 hours) saying you can not do a report if
 - ▶ you have a conflict of interest (co-author, anyone from the same institution, good friend, etc.)
 - ▶ you do not feel competent
 - ▶ you know you will be too busy to deliver
- ▶ if you decline suggest alternative referees if you can
- ▶ when you get a request scan the paper; read the abstract, introduction, conclusion
 - ▶ is there something interesting in the paper? do you want to read it? do you think it's important?
 - ▶ if you just don't know and don't want to invest in thinking about it, then decline to do the report immediately
 - ▶ if you feel like you know the literature and you don't think it's interesting, then write back very soon (within a week or so) with a short (one to two paragraph) report
 - ▶ if you are interested then you need to read the paper more carefully and write a detailed report

Judging the contribution

- ▶ You need to take a view on
 - ▶ does the paper address an interesting question (if everyone was executed perfectly would you be interested in reading it)
 - ▶ does it make an important contribution to the literature (have other papers done the same thing before?)
 - ▶ is the analysis well executed? are there any mistakes? is the identification strategy sound?
 - ▶ is the paper well written? is it easy to read and understand?
- ▶ Whether the paper merits publication in a specific journal will depend on the journal; for a top 5 the contribution needs to be something we didn't know and pretty much any economist would be interested in knowing; for a top field the contribution needs to be something we didn't know and any economist working in that field would be interested in knowing; etc.

The style of the cover letter

- ▶ Your job is to advise the editor, the editor makes the decision
- ▶ Make a clear recommendation for: definitely reject, reject, weak R&R, strong R&R, accept with minor revisions, accept; but this is the editor's decision, so it's much more important that you write a good report
- ▶ keep it short
- ▶ if you're not sure then try and say what you are sure about in your cover letter (but be confident in your views, don't come across as wishy-washy); you can refer to other journals if you're more confident about whether the paper is acceptable for them (e.g. if a paper that makes a similar contribution has recently been published in another journal)

The style of the report

- ▶ referee reports are an anonymous report for the author
- ▶ they should be constructive
- ▶ it is more important to write a good quality report than to just write a report
- ▶ remember, it is the authors paper, not yours; judge the paper on its merits, don't rewrite the paper according to your tastes or interests
- ▶ if you think the paper is clearly not acceptable then write a short report stating why; the report does not need to say everything that is wrong, just give enough evidence for rejection; e.g. the contribution is clearly below what I would expect for the journal, or the identification strategy is clearly not valid, here is why, or this idea has been published in a paper (give ref) that the authors do not cite

A detailed report should

- ▶ summarise what the paper does and what contribution it makes (stating the contribution is the most important part),
- ▶ major comments, numbered (so the authors can clearly respond)
- ▶ minor comments (numbered separately)

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- ▶ summarise what the paper does and what contribution it makes (stating the contribution is the most important part),
- ▶ major comments, numbered (so the authors can clearly respond)
 - ▶ changes you think are necessary before the paper could be published; there should be relatively few of these (up to say 5 or 6 max)
 - ▶ these need to be all of the comments (i.e. if the authors did all this and did it well then you would recommend accepting the paper)
 - ▶ these comments should be things that are feasible (that the authors can realistically do with some effort, this can be considerable effort)
 - ▶ if you think they are not feasible then you should reject the paper
 - ▶ be as constructive and precise as you can, without being too prescriptive (you are not a coauthor on the paper); phrase your comments in a nice way, don't be nasty, but do be clear
- ▶ minor comments (numbered separately)

A detailed report should

- ▶ summarise what the paper does and what contribution it makes (stating the contribution is the most important part),
- ▶ major comments, numbered (so the authors can clearly respond)
- ▶ minor comments (numbered separately)
 - ▶ detailed and specific comments that are either small things (typos)
 - ▶ you don't have to list all of them, but if there are grammatical errors or other errors that you noticed then point them out
 - ▶ if there are many then list a few and say there are many others and the authors need to do a better job of proof reading, notes to tables are not clear, optional things

Some other comments

- ▶ How long should it take?
 - ▶ around a full day; it's a good investment in getting to know the literature; but don't agree to do it if you're not going to spend the time
- ▶ Editors notice people who write good reports; some journals explicitly monitor and rank young referees
- ▶ Do NOT base your views on the reputation or experience of the authors (if anything be more forgiving of young authors than more senior ones)
- ▶ If the editor takes a different decision to the one you recommended don't worry about it, they have a lot more information than you do

Final comments

- ▶ Remember, this is what research is all about
 - ▶ to keep learning!
- ▶ Treat the process as a learning opportunity
 - ▶ use it constructively
 - ▶ don't treat academic publication and policy work as separate things, they are all part of the same process
 - ▶ think how nice the referees have been to spend time reading your paper, what do they get out of it? you get a better paper!
- ▶ Don't get disheartened
 - ▶ everyone gets rejected, a lot!
 - ▶ talk to colleagues about it
- ▶ You need to have thick skin
 - ▶ but remember, the referees are criticising your paper, not you