How to Publish in a Top Journal
(I wish that I knew!)

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Top Journals

- What is a “top journal?” A “decent journal?”
  - Top 3 general?
  - Top 5 general (but are they general)?
- What about specialized journals?
  - Hierarchies in sub-fields:
    - Labor economics
    - Public economics
    - Monetary economics
- What about the Stengos et al recent-citation based rating system?
- The difficulty of getting published in Top, or even Decent journals
  - Acceptance rates at top general journals
  - Acceptance rates at top field journals
- Conclusion: Life is tough!
Topics to Work On

• What is source of ideas?
  • Athena from the head of Zeus? Danger of being removed from mainstream
  • A neat bit of data?
  • Reflection on the literature?
  • Reflection/comment on one paper?
  • More generally—don’t write comments—or things that can be viewed as comments

• Best topic: Whatever interests you
  • But keep the profession in mind
  • Think about how it fits in some literature
Should You Coauthor?

- **Pro**
  - Economies of scope
  - Fun
  - Mentoring—a two-way street

- **Con**
  - No extra rewards
How to Write It Up

• What is **THE** Question?
  • Can you describe (to yourself) what you have done that is new in \( \leq 2 \) sentences?
  • NOT: Joe did this, Al did that, and I’m doing this variation?
  • Novelty upon a base.
The Typical Outline for an Empirical Paper

• Typical outline:
  • Introduction
  • Theory—or theoretical basis
  • Data
  • Results
  • Tests and/or implications of results
  • Conclusions/implications

• “Introduction”
  • Not a literature review. It may cite things that motivate, but should never review them. Shouldn’t be a lit review at all, anywhere in paper. Cited papers fit in to illustrate only.
  • Is a statement of the problem, its background and importance.

• “Theory”
  • To show something new, not to show you can repeat others.
  • To derive or motivate your empirical work
  • To clarify your idea in readers’ minds
• Data
  • Lengthier if novel; shorter if data are well known (e.g., lengthy descriptions of PSID, NLSY)
  • Descriptive statistics—often can make main point here.
• Results
  • Shouldn’t be a “breathless romp through the data”
  • Unlike sex, foreplay shouldn’t be most of the duration—the results must be discussed at length
  • Stress/discuss the original; spend no time on standard results.
  • Results must be linked to theoretical derivation—and vice-versa.
• Tests and implications
  • Various tests for robustness of results—but only major ones. Minor checks go in footnotes.
  • Uses of the results—explicit applications to problems—e.g., simulating policy responses; analyzing implications for interesting phenomena.
Conclusions/implications

- NOT just a rehash of what you did. That should be \( \leq 2 \) paragraphs of a conclusion that is at least 3 paragraphs.
- Should put in context of literature—what you have added.
- Should say something about where one might go—but should be general; shouldn’t be modifications of yours.
- Policy implications ONLY if they are novel, relevant. Too often these are forced.
Alternatives to the Standard Outline

• Data and results can come before Theory to motivate new theoretical insights.

• Is a Theory section really necessary? At least a theoretical discussion is; better that than a phony theory.

• Again, NO LIT REVIEW
Writing English Properly

• Read D. McCloskey—but that is fairly high level.

• Why this matters?
  • Readers’ time is scarce
  • Readers infer substantive sloppiness from written sloppiness

• English is easy at one level, very difficult at another; and it can be bad at several levels
  • Lowest level—so bad that reader cannot infer what you are doing. Reader infers you do not know either.
  • Next level—repeated subject-verb disagreements, incorrect pluralization and possessives, etc.
  • Next level
    • Left-out articles—a common problem for Asian-language speakers, Russians.
    • Incorrect prepositions.
    • Incorrect gerunds and participial phrases
Solving English Problems

- What to do about the writing?
  - Get a native English speaker to read it *carefully* for you.
  - Always read word-for-word before sending it off.
  - Have your spouse/partner read it—if he/she can’t understand intro/concl, probably unclear.

- Publicity as an improving device
  - Use your PR office
    - This helps your University.
    - Your Dean loves it.
    - Enhances your usefulness to society
    - Provides a good check on your work—can you explain it to the press layperson?
Off to the Journal!

• How to choose a journal—a matching problem.
  • AR forecasts of their interests; but
    • Editors get tired of a subject
    • Reintroducing stuff related to what they had done, but haven’t for a while
    • Journal style—consider JPE, QJE, REStuds.
    • Importance of being familiar with editors’ interests
  • Honest evaluation of your own paper. Of course start high—but not all babies can become President!
What is scarce at journals?

- Refereeing time—of good referees.
- Journal Space
- Most important—editor’s time

What is being maximized?

- Journal fame/visibility
- Measured by work generated, citations given.
• Recentness of your own paper published there—so what?
• What about >1 submission at same place?
• How long—what should be in an appendix—or in unpublished appendices—or on Web?
• One-sided, normal fonts, double-spaced
Hearing from the journal

- Realistically chances are slim—but rejection doesn’t get easier with experience
- Rarity of outright acceptances, ubiquity of outright rejections
- JEP 1992 explains what to do about rejections, or almost rejections
Acceptances

- Yogi Berra—“it ain’t over ‘til it’s over!” But when it is positive:
  - Celebrate (and put on CV).
  - Don’t think about winner’s curse.
- How to know when it’s dead—when to “pull the plug”:
  - When you’ve tried all reasonable places.
  - When you’re down to journals that are “indecent.”
  - Compare marginal gain to opportunity cost—and both differ with experience and horizon.