



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 ≤ 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



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- 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 ≤ 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 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/concls, 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