HOW TO PREPARE A WORLD CLASS PAPER FOR AN INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL

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Elsevier/IAAE Author Workshop
Beijing, 21/08/2009
Outline

• Choosing the right journal
• Writing a quality manuscript
• The review process
• Ethical issues
Choosing the Right Journal
Publish or perish

Funding Bodies

Grant Writing

Scientists / Clinicians

Journal Publication
What to publish?

• Journals seek papers that **advance knowledge and understanding**, by
  • Presenting new, original methods or results
  • Reviewing a field or summarising a particular topic in a way that rationalises published results or creates a new perspective on debates
  • Applying best available methods to a particular policy problem
Publishers want quality

**WANTED**
- Originality
- Advances in knowledge and understanding
- Appropriate methods and conclusions
- Readability
- Studies that meet ethical standards

**NOT WANTED**
- Duplications
- Reports of no scientific interest
- Work out of date
- Inappropriate methods or conclusions
- Studies with insufficient data
“Just because it has not been done before is no justification for doing it now.”

– Peter Attiwill, Editor-in-Chief, Forest Ecology and Management
Can I publish this?

- Have you done something new and interesting?
- Have you checked the latest results in the field?
- Have the findings been verified?
- Have the appropriate controls been performed?
- Do your findings tell a nice story or is the story incomplete?
- Is the work directly related to a current hot topic?
- Have you provided solutions to any difficult problems?

If all answers are “yes”, then start preparing your manuscript.
Criteria for Choosing a Journal

• Nature of the paper
• Impact factor
• Who reads the journal?
• Turnaround time
• Permitted paper lengths

✓ Look at papers in the journal to see if yours will fit
  – Sample issue available freely online
Food Policy is a multidisciplinary journal publishing original research and critical reviews on issues in the formulation, implementation and analysis of policies for the food sector in developing, transition and advanced economies. Policy issues relevant to the journal include:

- Food production, trade, marketing and consumption.
- Nutrition and health aspects of food systems.
- Food needs, entitlements, security and aid.
- Food safety and quality assurance.
- Technological and institutional innovation affecting food systems and access.

Conceptual and methodological articles should be written such that they are accessible to the journal's diverse international readership. All articles should make clear links into food policy debates of international interest.
Particular Reasons for Rejections

• No public policy story
  – Business marketing
  – Technical papers (e.g. testing new technologies)
  – “pre-policy” work

• No clear link or contribution to international debates
  – “not done here before”
  – Local worldview
  ➢ These papers are appropriate for national journals
Writing a Quality Manuscript
Illustrative Article Structure (Food Policy)

• Introduction
• Literature Review
• Data
• Methodology
• Results
• Policy Discussion
It should be clear from the introduction:

• What is the **policy issue** that the paper will address?
• Why is this issue **important** (across countries)?
• What is the **new understanding** that the paper will bring to this issue?
• How will it do this?
• Why is the chosen country case(s) or method appropriate for this purpose?

• Also, define any key or non-standard terms
The main purposes are to **locate** your study within existing knowledge and to show the **gap(s)** that your study aims to fill:

- **DON’T** write an extensive review of the field
- **DO** ensure that the literature cited is balanced, up to date and relevant
- **DON’T** cite disproportionately your own work or work that supports your findings while ignoring contradictory studies
- **DO** highlight the gaps in knowledge that you will seek to fill
- **DON’T** Describe methods, results or conclusions
Data

• What data were collected / used?
• How were they collected?
  – Methodology
  – Sampling (+ response rate)
• Critical assessment
  – Representativeness
  – Possible sources of bias
• Include survey instrument as an appendix to assist reviewers
Methodology

You should provide enough information for reviewers and readers to be able to know:

• Which model or method you used
• Possible weaknesses or limitations in your analysis

• **DON’T** explain an established methodology from scratch – simply supply a seminal or recent reference
• **DO** explain aspects that are critical in your context, e.g. where there might be endogeneity and how you tackled this
Results

Present the main findings that address the question outlined in the introduction

**DO**
- Use figures and tables to summarize data
- Show the results of statistical analysis
- Compare “like with like”

**DON’T**
- Duplicate data among tables, figures and text
- Use graphics to illustrate data that can easily be summarized with text
Describe

• How the results relate to the study’s aims and hypotheses
• How the findings relate to those of other studies
• All possible interpretations of your findings
• Limitations of the study
• Important questions that remain unanswered by the study
• What lessons policy makers should derive from the findings
Avoid

• Making “grand claims” that are not supported by the data
  Example: “This novel treatment will massively reduce the prevalence of malaria in developing countries”

• Introducing new results or terms

• Straying into policy discussions that the study sheds no direct light on
Abstract

The quality of an abstract will strongly influence the willingness of reviewers to review the paper and ultimately the interest of readers to read it.

A good abstract:

• Is brief and specific
• Accurately conveys what readers can expect from the paper
• Uses no technical jargon and cites no references
• Is written in good English

Use the abstract to “sell” your article
Format

• Consult and apply the list of guidelines in the “Guide for Authors”
  – This will save time for you, the editor and the production team
• Ensure that you adhere to the correct:
  – Word limits
  – Reference format
  – Presentation of figures and tables
  – Layout (e.g. line spacing, section headings)
• Failure to do so shows a lack of respect
Poor English annoys reviewers. It wastes their time, the time of editors and of the production team – if the paper gets that far!

- Always read your paper through in full before you submit
- If English is not your first language, get a colleague or friend to edit your manuscript before you submit it
- Specialist scientific editing services are commercially available: rates start from $8 per page

More information can be found on the Elsevier website at: http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/authorsview.authors/languagepolishing
The Review Process
Don’t submit your first draft to a journal!

- Get “friendly” comments from colleagues (and co-authors!) before you submit
- Test the paper out at workshops to see what response it gets there
Editorial Decisions

- Send for Review
  - Accept as is
  - Minor Revisions
  - Major Revisions
  - Submit a shorter paper
  - Reject

- Reject without Formal Review
Responding to Revisions

Carefully study the reviewers’ comments and prepare a detailed letter of response

• Respond to all points
• If you disagree with a reviewer, provide a polite rebuttal, explaining your reasons

Perform additional calculations, re-run models or consult additional references if requested
  – these usually serve to make the final paper stronger
Accepting Rejection

Don’t take it personally!

• Only c.25% of papers are accepted
• Try to understand why the paper has been rejected
• Evaluate honestly – will your paper meet the requirements of another journal with the addition of more data or other changes as suggested by the referees?
• There can occasionally be an element of bad luck!
Ethical Issues
Unethical behaviour

Unethical behavior includes:

- Multiple submissions
- Redundant publications
- Plagiarism
- Data fabrication and falsification
- Improper use of human subjects and animals in research
- Improper author contribution
Only submit a paper to ONE journal at a time!

International ethics standards prohibit multiple simultaneous submissions, and editors DO find out!

“We have thrown out a paper when an author was caught doing this. I believe that the other journal did the same thing”

James C. Hower, Editor, *International Journal of Coal Geology*
Redundant publication

An author should not submit for consideration in another journal a previously published paper

- Multiple papers from a larger study are OK, but ensure that each makes a clear and distinct contribution
- Developing earlier work: make new contribution clear
- Re-publishing paper from another language: may be OK, but there must be full and prominent disclosure of its original source at the time of submission
- Working papers, conference proceedings, book chapters: check with editor
Plagiarism

“Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit, including those obtained through confidential review of others’ research proposals and manuscripts”

Federal Office of Science and Technology Policy, 1999
“Presenting the data or interpretations of others without crediting them, and thereby gaining for yourself the rewards earned by others, is theft, and it eliminates the motivation of working scientists to generate new data and interpretations”

Bruce Railsback, Professor, Department of Geology, University of Georgia

For more information on plagiarism and self-plagiarism, please see: http://facpub.stjohns.edu/~roigm/plagiarism/
Plagiarism is a serious offence that could lead to paper rejection, academic charges and termination of employment. It will seriously affect your scientific reputation.

DON’T DO IT!

Unacceptable paraphrasing, even with correct citation, is considered plagiarism.
Paraphrasing

• Original (Gratz, 1982):
  Bilateral vagotomy resulted in an increase in tidal volume but a depression in respiratory frequency such that total ventilation did not change.

• Restatement 1:
  Gratz (1982) showed that bilateral vagotomy resulted in an increase in tidal volume but a depression in respiratory frequency such that total ventilation did not change.

Ronald K. Gratz. *Using Other's Words and Ideas.*
Department of Biological Sciences, Michigan Technological University
• Original (Buchanan, 1996):
What makes intentionally killing a human being a moral wrong for which the killer is to be condemned is that the killer did this morally bad thing not inadvertently or even negligently, but with a conscious purpose – with eyes open and a will directed toward that very object.

• Restatement 2:
Buchanan (1996) states that we condemn a person who intentionally kills a human being because he did a "morally bad thing" not through negligence or accident but with open eyes and a direct will to take that life.
Data fabrication and falsification

• Fabrication is making up data or results, and recording or reporting them
• Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, processes; or changing / omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record

“The most dangerous of all falsehoods is a slightly distorted truth”

G.C. Lichtenberg (1742–1799)
Unethical research

- Experiments on human subjects or animals should follow related ethical standards, namely, the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000 (5)

- If doubt exists concerning the compliance of the research with the Helsinki Declaration, authors must explain the rationale for their approach and demonstrate approval from the institutional review body
Improper author contribution

Authorship credit should be based on

1. Substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data
2. Drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content
3. Final approval of the version to be published

Authors should meet conditions 1, 2, and 3. Those who have participated in certain substantive aspects of the research project should be acknowledged or listed as contributors. Check the Guide for Authors and ICMJE guidelines: http://www.icmje.org/
Based on a presentation created by Mingxin Zhou, Publishing Support Coordinator, Elsevier

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