

How to Publish and Flourish

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“Successful publication is more a matter of
planning and persistence than brilliance”

F. Mosteller

Choose a Target Journal

- Aim high, but be realistic
- Be aware of the relation between prestige and acceptance rate
- Consider review time and publication delay
- Assess compatibility:
 - Subject-matter and contributions of your work
 - Readership
 - Application area
 - Math level and degree of formalism
 - Typical article length

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“That isn’t a good journal; it’s a journal
that publishes some good papers”

D.R. Cox

Aim High

- The leading journals accept no more than 25% of submissions.
- However, not submitting to the top tier journals absolutely guarantees that your work won't appear in them
- You hope for an “accept,” but even a “reject” generally comes with very helpful feedback that will improve your work
- Improved review times have made aiming high more attractive
- The “halo effect” is an added inducement to aim high:

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The intention to submit to a top-tier journal improves your research and your manuscript

Scope out the Journal

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- **Submit the article you think should be published**
- Don't make the editor do your work for you
e.g., dont submit a manuscript with 15 figures

Submitting

- In your cover letter/email, affirm that all co-authors have approved the manuscript
- Communicate important organizational issues e.g., some proofs can be moved to an appendix (or back into the text)
- Submit supplementary material that is helpful, but not needed in the article (e.g., details that are not central to your goals)
- Unless you worry about an extreme conflict of interest, don't blacklist a referee
- Contact the editor if:
 - You don't receive an acknowledgement of receipt of the manuscript within 1 week
 - You have waited \approx 3 months for your review

Publish innovative methods and “practice worthy” articles that span the broad domain of Biometrics

TAL's view

Sections

- Methodology
- Practice
- Reader Reaction
- Letters to the Editor

Methodology Articles

- Focus on the development of new methods and results of use in the biological sciences
- Where possible, be made accessible to biologists and other subject-matter scientists by the inclusion of a introductory section outlining the application and scientific objectives on which the new methods focus
- Discussion of real data or settings that exemplify the issues being addressed
- Extensive mathematical derivations and proofs in an appendix or web supplement

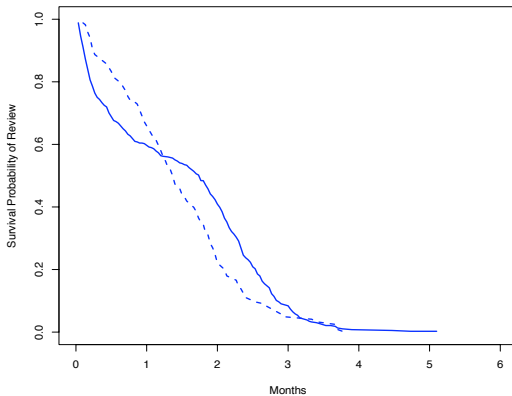
Practice Articles

- Demonstrate innovative applications of existing methods to areas in which such a method has not been previously employed. New insights or findings
- Creatively illustrate the proper use of different methods under various explicit/implicit assumptions. Clearer guidance and understanding of the use of different methods is offered.
- Propose innovative and practical data analysis strategies, based on a combination of experience, intuition, and methodological arguments.
- Re-examine from a new perspective statistical practices that are widely used in biometric applications, providing useful alternatives to the current standard

- The 591 new manuscript submissions came from 43 countries/districts
- 27% of new manuscripts were rejected by a co-Editor without external review (higher than the recent 21% rate)
- The overall acceptance rate continues to be around 25%
- Review times are very good, but the right-tail is still too long

Review Times

Biometrics Time to Review (3/1/08–2/28/09)
Solid=First Submission, Dashed=First Revision



Biometrics Review Process-1

- Manuscript submitted via email
- Executive Editor assigns manuscript to one of the three co-editors and co-editor handles it subsequently
- Co-editor reviews the submission to decide between:
 - Administrative reject either on own or with a quick check by an AE for a second opinion
 - Send to an AE for full review, with some guidance on issues, possibly with some suggested reviewers
- AE selects ≈ 2 reviewers with the appropriate skill sets, frequently including her/himself
- AE consolidates reviews and debriefs to the co-editor

Co-editor makes a judgement from all the evidence

- Reject with no encouragement to re-submit
- Revise and resubmit, with what is required (including length) and what is optional along with a prognosis
 - (Conditional) acceptance
 - “Not much to do” (do these and it will be accepted)
 - “A long way to go and no guarantees”
(you may well decide to submit to another journal)
 - Review of revision: Full review or review by co-editor and AE

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- Clarity, so that one revision will settle the issues
- Editorial office communicates with authors

Why Page Limits in the Electronic Age?

- We still publish hard copy!
- Forces focus on factors of key importance
- Neither too short, nor too long
- Web supplements allow for the full details and additional examples, etc.
- We do not arbitrarily require shortening

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Evaluating a Manuscript

- All manuscripts
 - Well organized & written (prose, mathematics, tables, figures)
 - Clearly identified and achieved goals
 - Attention to the important details
 - Advice and generalizations
- Methods submissions
 - Innovative and important methods contribution
 - Appropriate mathematical/simulation evaluations
 - Informative example(s)
- Practice submissions
 - The application as the primary focus
 - Science/policy background provided
 - Validated methods, some validation/tuning in the manuscript
 - Show what the methods give you wrt alternatives

Your Publication Prospects

- If you aim high, expect rejections or substantial revisions
- Most papers are not accepted on the first submission
- Most are not published in their first journal
- Many journals, including *Biometrics* and *JASA*, have speeded up the administrative reject process so that authors can get the bad news quickly
- Generally, it is a waste of time and goodwill to fight a clear reject, even though (of course) the decision was ill-informed and arbitrary
- Use the relevant feedback to revise for another journal

Read and Understand the Reviews

- Generally, but not always, misunderstanding on the part of referees and editors is a valid comment on your writing rather than on their powers of understanding
- The editor should calibrate your prospects:
 - “Excellent prospect” “has possibilities” “long way to go”
 - “You will likely be better off trying another journal”
 - “Revision will be treated as a new submission”

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 - “I dont ever want to see this again!”
- Possibly, contact the editor to calibrate prospects

Carefully Consider Revisions

- You don't have to do everything the referees suggest
- But, you should deal with all suggestions
- You do need to do almost all that the editor suggests
- In a cover letter respond point by point to all reviewers' comments
 - Identify all modifications
 - Justify why you did not make some changes that had been requested or suggested
- Get revisions back in a timely manner
(If > 6 months, *Biometrics* will treat it as a new submission)

Effective Writing

- The Title as a mini-abstract
- The Abstract as a mini-article
- Both as “hooks”

The Title: A mini-abstract

DO

- Optimal Disclosure Strategy in Statistical Databases: Detering Tracker Attacks Through Additive Noise
- Interactive Tree-structured Regression via Hessian Principal Components
- Subsampling Callbacks to Improve Survey Efficiency

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- Interactive Tree-structured Regression via Hessian Principal Components
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DON'T

- Regression Analysis
- Tom Louis's thoughts while shaving

DON'T

- Chronologically describe your research process
- Attempt a suspense story
- Interlace what you might have done with what you did
(Save the “might haves” for the discussion)
- Feature heavy notation early or use notation and acronyms before they have been defined

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DO

- Recruit the reader
- Set signposts
- Use the sonata form:
 - Introduce themes (goals)
 - Develop them (elaborate/details)
 - Recapitulate (summary/implications)

Motivate & Develop

- Motivate your work, but dont give a tutorial
- Develop your approach, give results and discuss
- No formulas in the introduction or discussion
- Dont mix discussion with methods and results
- Make sure your notation is economical and clear
- The details really matter! The details of getting it right, not necessarily the gory details of your work

Scope, Organize, Practice

- Scope your manuscript:
 - Dont try for too much
 - But, dont prepare MPUs!
- Write to the right audience
- Cite the relevant literature
- Organize, edit, polish, but finish!
- Get comments on a semi-mature draft from colleagues and target readers
 - A few weeks delay can pay big dividends in improving your manuscript, in speeding the time to publication and in elevating your reputation
- Comment on the drafts of others
- Referee manuscripts!

Writing about Numbers

- Keep the presentation parallel and “graphic”:
 - Yes** “We found that 110 of the 200 male participants and 90 of the 200 female participants breathed in and out”
 - No** “We found that one hundred and ten of the 200 male Participants and 90 of the 200 female breathed in and out”
- Don't unnecessarily “memorialize” numbers:
 - No** Estimate: 10.7326_(1.2)
 - Yes** Estimate: 10.73_(1.20)
 - Yes** 95% CI: 8.3 10.7 13.1

Tables & Graphs

- Titles as declarative statements
- Stand alone captions
- Principles of clear table construction
(as graphical as possible)
- 2 significant digits, avoid memorializing numbers
- Column and row layout: heads, subheads
- Principles of graphics
- See Cleveland, Wainer, Tufte and many others

Prepare & Submit Excellent Manuscripts

- Effective communication takes planning, practice, patience, energy and time
- It is not and should not be treated as a bothersome detail
- It is an integral component of your research and helps make or break your reputation
- It should be taken very seriously and you should strive to get satisfaction from it

ENJOY!

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ENJOY COMMUNICATING
YOUR WORK TO OTHERS!