**Crafting an Empirical Paper**

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1. The Purpose of an Empirical Paper
   1. To use data to help answer a research question of importance
   2. Key: data themselves seldom answer the questions that interest us (or our readers)
   3. An empirical paper **analyzes** data and **interprets** its meaning for us
2. Scientific Paper model pros and cons
   1. Helps with structure
   2. But social science research is ultimately making a case
      1. A scientific paper answers the question posed
      2. A social science paper follows that with answering the question: “so what?”
      3. The quality of your writing, including flow and logical progression, is crucial to a person learning from your paper. Tables aren’t enough.
3. Crafting the narrative
   1. You can describe a question very well yet fail to motivate it – always motivate! More than you think you need to!
   2. Think of the existing literature as a tapestry with missing threads…which threads are you adding and how will they help? Be explicit about your study’s contribution.
      1. Avoid the temptation to bash the existing literature to make your paper look better. That’s both mean and strategically foolish given peer review.
   3. Think about the best way to organize the empirical analysis to keep the reader with you
      1. Method, Data, Results?
      2. Data, Method, Results?
      3. Data, Method 1, Results 1, Method 2, Results 2, etc.
   4. It is crucial to think about flow of the argument, even with placement of supplementary “tests”
      1. It is helpful to think conceptually about tests under some umbrellas like “tests of identifying assumptions” (i.e. why should the reader believe your results are valid) and “tests of robustness” (i.e. how sensitive are your results to small tweaks in specification or sample).
      2. Will you explain and show tests of model assumptions before your results, or after?
      3. Will you describe methods of robustness checks before results to prep the reader (yes, I’ve thought of XYZ and I’ll check that), or is it better to keep the robustness check methods with the robustness checks themselves?
      4. If you are getting too bogged down with tests, what can you move to an appendix to avoid disrupting flow?
      5. Think of your audience – where will their natural skepticism lie? Try to preemptively address the problems you know you’d see if you were reading.
4. Know your audience
   1. Who are you trying to reach?
   2. If not exclusively an academic audience, how can you disseminate to non-academics?
   3. What is the standard structure for papers in the journals you find most related to your work and that you would consider submitting to? Be sure to check things like:
      1. Structure of abstract
      2. Length of manuscript
      3. Journal norms about “road map” or general template
      4. First person or other structure (no passive voice!)
5. Pitfalls in writing up results
   1. “It isn’t working” – remember, you need to start the project not knowing the answer to the question.
   2. Don’t write a sentence you can’t defend if it is pulled out and put in a headline.
   3. Statistical grammar tips
      1. “Significant” is already a word in English
      2. “Statistically significant” can only modify an estimate (not an effect)
      3. “Statistically insignificant effects” have to go
      4. We just don’t know the true effect
6. Don’t forget the policy implications!
   1. Try not to oversell (ex. *Evicted*) or set yourself up for unnecessary controversy (ex. recent COVID @ Sturgis paper)
   2. Revisit what your contribution can do to inform both existing and future policymaking above and beyond what was already known