

Doing Applied Research

MIXTAPE TRACK



Section 4. The publication process:
Submitting to journals

The Publication Process



Submitting to Journals

- Where should I send my paper!?
 - I had NO CLUE what to do my first few times as a grad student!
- If you become a master of the specific literature (as we discussed earlier), the set of relevant journals will be clear early on
 - For each project, I comb through my literature-review binder to figure out where I should submit my paper
- How high should I aim?
 - My first shot is generally a reach. If I think a paper has a reasonable shot at, say, publishing in *AEJ: Applied* or *AEJ: Policy* (top-10 journals in economics), then I'll probably send to a top-5 first.
 - If I think a paper has no shot, I don't waste my time.
 - Remember, some economics journals are notoriously slow at providing a first-round decision.
 - Do your homework before you submit if you are in a time crunch.
 - E.g., if you are weighing submitting to an *AEJ* vs. *RESTAT* and decision time matters, submit to an *AEJ*.
 - Often, journals will publish average decision times on their websites. If they don't, ask around...some journals have reputations that are generally known.
 - My general rule is to think about 3 tiers of journals for any specific paper:
 - (i) Journals that are a reach, but not wildly unreasonable (take a shot or two at these journals)
 - (ii) Journals where I think the paper has a good shot (take two or three shots at these journals)
 - (iii) A large set of "backup" options (just keep trying until something sticks)

The Publication Process



Take the following example...

- “The Effects of Becoming a Physician on Prescription Drug Use and Mental Health Treatment” by Mark Anderson, Ron Diris, Raymond Montizaan, and Dan Rees
 - Bullet-proof causal identification based on a lottery that determined admissions into Dutch medical schools
 - *But*, we cannot identify the mechanism (burnout/stress vs. access)
 - Given the lack of mechanism, we knew we would be wasting our time at a top-5 or at the *AEJs*.
 - Reach journals: *Economic Journal* and *Review of Economics and Statistics*
 - Sent to referees at both journals...clear reject recommendations b/c we cannot address mechanisms
 - No reason wasting our time further at places like *JEEA*, *JPubE*, etc.
 - Currently sitting at *Journal of Health Economics*, where we think paper has a good shot
 - If rejected at the *JHE*, we will drop down to second-tier field journals

The Publication Process



Journal rankings

- Much of the above assumes some working knowledge of journal rankings. But, what if you are completely new to this game?
- Here are some journal rankings that I use:
 - Combes and Linnemar (2010) (https://econ.tepper.cmu.edu/barnett/journal_ranking_2010.pdf)
 - Construct an index to rank 304 journals in economics for which citation counts exist.
 - Index combines citation indices, field of specialization normalized indices, and an h-index based on Google Scholar citations.
 - A bit old now (i.e., does not have the *AEJs* ranked)
 - Ham et al. (2021) (https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3606030)
 - Newer (i.e., includes the *AEJs*)
 - Provides a number of different types of rankings based on different methods
 - Only lists 100 economics journals
- Many journal rankings do not pass the “sniff test.” I don’t look at those.
 - For example, Mixon and Upadhyaya (2022) (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13504851.2020.1861198?journalCode=rael20>)
 - *J of Happiness Studies* (!?) > *J of Health Economics*



The Publication Process

Journal rankings

- Importantly, ask colleagues who have been at the publishing game for awhile, especially those who are in your field.
 - Journal reputation by word-of-mouth is very important within economics
- Ask senior colleagues in your department if your Promotion & Tenure Committee uses a particular ranking when making decisions
 - I've heard of some particularly weird rankings used by departments. Do not get 5 years into your tenure-track and be caught off guard by this!
- Publishing in the top journals in your field vs. 2nd/3rd tier general interest journals that may be “ranked” higher
 - A labor economist may prefer publishing in *J of Labor Economics* over *Economic Journal*, despite the fact that some journal rankings list *EJ* higher
 - A health economist may prefer publishing in *American J of Health Economics* over *Economic Inquiry*, despite the fact that some journal rankings list *EI* higher

The Publication Process



Time-to-decision varies across economics journals

- When trying to publish before going on the job market or while on the tenure track, this should be taken into consideration when possible.
 - (i) Bad outcome: your paper sits with an editor for 3 months and is desk rejected
 - (ii) Worse outcome: your paper sits at a journal for a year and is rejected with referee reports
 - (iii) The worst outcome: you spend years on multiple rounds of RRs and your paper is eventually rejected
- Do your homework before submitting! Many journals publish time-to-decision statistics. Here are some examples of turnaround times (https://jcsuarez.shinyapps.io/journal_turnaround_app/):

Journal	Desk rejections (%)	Expected wait time conditional on referee review (days)	Median wait time conditional on referee review (days)
<i>Quarterly J of Economics</i>	66	45	41
<i>American Economic Review</i>	46	92	79
<i>J of Political Economy</i>	49	120	92
<i>AEJ: Applied</i>	45	82	81
<i>AEJ: Micro</i>	38	135	120
<i>Economic Journal</i>	55	107	92

The Publication Process



Journal impact factors: What is it and should I care?

- The number of citations received by the average article published in the last 2 years
 - IFs of various sorts are calculated (e.g., 2-year vs. 5-year IFs)
- Within economics, it can be important but reputation matters more.
 - *J of Human Resources* (IF = 5.8) vs. *Econometrica* (IF = 5.8)
 - Same impact factor, but *Econometrica* is a “top-5”
 - *Health Economics* has a higher impact factor than *Journal of Public Economics*
 - *JPubE* “counts” WAY more in the profession than an *HE*.
 - You won’t get tenure at Montana State U. if your best publication is an *HE*.
- The only time I really pay attention to IFs, is when I’m submitting papers to non-economics journals (esp. medical journals)
 - IFs matter a lot more for these disciplines
 - Sometimes my decision to submit a paper to medical journal X vs. medical journal Y will be made solely on the IF.



Q&A (\approx 15 minutes)

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Section 4. The publication process:
You have referee reports. Now what?



You have referee reports. Now what?

- Rejection
 - Do not email the editor. The editor does not want or expect an email acknowledging the rejection.
 - Wait a few days before emailing the editor. Appeals can occasionally elicit a response and reassessment. Some journals have a formal appeals process.
 - Think about revising the paper. If the reports sound similar (if the same issue is raised by each and every referee), then do your very best to revise the paper.
 - Look for easily addressed comments. There is some chance that you will draw the same referee at the next journal to which you submit.
 - Referees do not have to recuse themselves if they've provided comments on your paper to another journal. If your research question is narrow, there is a good chance that you will draw the same referee again and again.



- Congratulations! You have an R&R
 - Do not email the editor. The editor does not want or expect an email acknowledging the decision.
 - If you hit a roadblock in the revision process, you might consider emailing the editor. Read the decision letter carefully.
 - I will often explicitly invite authors to contact me if they run into a roadblock
 - A good editor will give you direction. She will tell you what to focus on and clearly point you to the most pressing issues.
 - Other editors will not give you any direction. They will likely leave the final decision to the referees. If this is the case, then you are engaging directly with the referees and the editor is, in all likelihood, going to blindly follow their recommendations.
 - To resubmit, you'll need to revise your paper, write a letter to the editor, and write point-by-point responses

Letter to the editor



Dear Dr. _____,

Thank you for the opportunity to revise our paper, “Terror Attacks and Election Outcomes in Europe, 1970-2017” (MS#EL54662). In response to your comments and those of the reviewers, we have made a number of substantial changes to the paper:

- The effects of terror attacks occurring 61-150 days before an election are now examined in online Appendix B. The reviewer suggested that this analysis be included in an appendix.
- In response to a comment made by Reviewer 1, we restructured...
- Although we could not obtain data on the number of fatalities per month, we were able to...
- We now include “back-of-the-envelope” estimates of the cost to society from allowing...

Our point-by-point responses to the comments of the reviewers are below. We have bolded and italicized their comments.



Point-by-point responses to Reviewer 1

3. Another issue is the type of terror attacks is not documented. The effect of an Islamic terror attack is probably very different than an attack by a left-wing terrorist group, don't you think?

In response to this comment, we now include a list of all known groups that committed terror attacks shortly before a European legislative election during the period under study (online Appendix Table A3). There are more than 100 terrorist groups on this list, 13 of which can be labeled Islamic.

Making distinctions between European terrorist groups based on their political orientation on a left-right scale proved to be difficult, but we now examine effects of terror attacks perpetrated by Islamic terrorist groups versus terror attacks perpetrated by non-Islamic groups...

The goal is to seem responsive. Be clear about what you were able to do and always try to do something even if it not precisely what the referee is asking for.



It is often useful to repeat or rephrase a comment. Try to put some structure on vague comments.

4. It would be useful to run the regressions over different time periods and see how well the results hold. Similarly, a south dummy might be useful, since the South had fewer hospitals and more blacks...

As attitudes, physician training and medical technology evolved, middle- and upper-class women increasingly chose to give birth in hospitals during the period under study. This trend accelerated markedly after 1920 (Wertz and Wertz 1989, p. 133). In Appendix Table 5, we provide pre- and post-1920 estimates of the effect of licensing on maternal mortality.

If the state fixed effects are replaced with region dummies (i.e., an indicator for South, an indicator for Midwest, etc.), the negative relationship between maternal mortality and the licensing of midwives remains....

If the referee is wrong or misinformed, avoid pointing it out. Try to work around it.



Do not make the referee hunt for your new estimates. Put new and updated results in the point-by-point responses. You can put tables or figures in the point-by-point responses.

The table below reports the results from Table 2 with p-values calculated from the wild cluster bootstrap technique for comparison. In general, inference changes little when bootstrapping.

Results from Table 2 and wild cluster bootstrapped p-values					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Midwifery License Required</i>	-.076** (.037)	-.067** (.028)	-.068** (.028)	-.081*** (.024)	-.086*** (.024)
p-value from wild cluster bootstrapping	.052	.027	.032	.002	.001

Notes: Bootstrapping was performed over 1,000 replications.



Referees, of course, can be negative. Often, you will disagree with a suggestion and want to avoid implementing it.

First, the authors should determine what the main focus of the paper is and organize the structure of the paper accordingly. On the one hand, the title and the introduction focus on suicide behaviors and not on bullying victimization or depression. The rest of the paper also seems to be changing focus from one issue to another without a clear thought process about whether the focus is on bullying victimization, suicide behaviors, depression or LGB.

The rest of the report read like a detailed guide to restructuring our paper, which we did not want to do. Because the editor was engaged, we decided to push back. Probably not a good idea if the editor is not engaged!



We appreciate the referee's concern. We believe that our main contribution is examining the effects of state anti-bullying laws (ABLs) on suicidal behaviors among teenagers and this is precisely what we lay out in the introduction:

1. On page 1 we write, "Using Youth Risk Behavior Surveys (YRBS) data for the period 2009-2017 and a difference-in-differences (DD) regression framework, we begin by exploring the effects of ABLs on bullying victimization and suicidal behaviors among American high school students."
2. On page 2 we write, "We turn next to the relationship between ABL adoption and completed suicides among 14- through 18-year-olds."

We are particularly interested in high school students who are marginalized, suffer worse mental health outcomes than their majority counterparts, and stand to gain most from effective state ABLs. We hope that the title and **revised** introduction of the paper reflect these dual contributions more clearly.



How long should you wait before resubmitting?

- Major revision
 - Check to see if there is a deadline
 - Not all journals set a deadline. For instance, the *JPubE* does not give deadline, while *HE* gives a deadline of 4 months. Editors can alter the deadline.
 - Medical journals have very short deadlines (≤ 1 month)
 - Even if there is no deadline, try to resubmit within six months
 - If the revision is going to take longer than a year, consider emailing the editor and letting her know
- Minor revision
 - Check to see if there is a deadline
 - Even if there is no deadline, try to resubmit quickly (within a few weeks?)
 - Unless the revisions are trivial, avoid resubmitting the next day



Q&A (\approx 15 minutes)
+
Break (\approx 10 minutes)