

Academic Writing 1

for Accounting, Economics & Psychology

Session 1: Academic Journals and the Publication Process

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Agenda

1 Organizational Information

2 Academic Journals

3 Choosing a Journal

4 Conferences

5 Research Process

About me

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Publications Matter!

- In academia, publications are currently the main driver of careers.
- To become a good researcher, you need high-quality publications and a research profile.
- Here:
 - ▶ Get information about how to achieve this
 - ▶ But: The process has many random elements
 - ▶ You depend on many people to get good publications

Course Contents

What will we cover in this course?

- 1 Academic Journals and the Publication Process
 - 2 Paper Title
 - 3 Abstract
 - 4 Structure of a Paper
 - 5 Introduction
 - 6 Main Body
 - 7 Conclusion, References and Appendix
 - 8 Referee Reports
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Academic Writing II complements this course (focussed more on the linguistic aspects of academic writing).

Organizational Information

- All sessions are interactive!
 - ▶ You will work with the papers you have chosen.
 - ▶ You will work with each other.
 - ▶ We will have discussions in class (lots, hopefully!)
- You have until April 18th to re-work a piece of your own writing based on the contents of this course.
- One of your peers will give (written) feedback on it until May 2nd.
- You have to hand in your writing sample on or before May 23rd.
- Grading is based on your own writing sample (50%), feedback on one of your peer's writing (25%) and class participation (25%).

Your Writing Sample

- Should be between 2 and 8 pages of writing with 1.5 or 2 line spacing (plus title page).
- Can be an extended abstract for a research project, or an introduction to a research paper.
- The writing sample should have a title page with a short (100 word) abstract and all common elements.

Readings

There are a lot of resources for academic writing (printed and online). Some I particularly recommend:

- McCloskey, Deirdre (2019): *Economical Writing*. 3rd Edition, University of Chicago Press.
- Faff, Robert W., *Pitching Research* (May 6, 2019). Available [online](#).
- Bellamare, Marc (2020): How to write applied papers in economics. Available [online](#).
- Schimel, Joshua (2011): *Writing Science: How to Write Papers That Get Cited and Proposals That Get Funded*. Oxford University Press

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Journal Rankings

- Rankings matter, because they give your publications a value
- It's useful to get to know journal rankings—although they are always partially subjective!

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	Economics	Accounting
A+	AER, Ecra, JPE, QJE, RES	JAE, TAR, JAR
A	JPubE, EJ, JEEA, AEJs	JPubE, RAS
B	ScandJoE, CanJoE	ITAX, JATA
C	ITAX, FA, NTJ	WTJ, BTR

- Some overlap between fields (Journal of Finance is A+ also in accounting and between A and A+ in econ)
- Rankings are field-specific (TAR is between A and B in econ)
- Science and Nature are starting to play a larger role in econ

Journal Rankings

Economics:

- German-speaking area: Handelsblatt Ranking
- International rankings: e.g. [RePEc](#), Bornman et al. (2017)

Accounting:

- German-speaking area: Handelsblatt Ranking, VHB Jourqual
- Many business schools have widely used rankings (e.g. [Tinbergen](#))

WU has its own [lists](#).

Impact Factor

- Impact factor: How often has a published paper been cited by other published papers
 - ▶ in general,
 - ▶ in the first two years after publication.
 - ▶ Citations by working papers or own citations sometimes count.
- Impact factor measures how relevant your paper is.
- Impact factors also differ by fields a lot (e.g. due to different citation habits).

Peer Review

- All the journals mentioned so far are peer reviewed.
 - ▶ 1-3 “peers” (usually postdocs or professors in the field) write referee reports on your paper.
 - ▶ Recommend “revise & resubmit” or rejection to the editor.
- Peer review is a quality control mechanism—flawed, but the best we have.
- At some journals, associate editor assigns referees and also writes a report; editor-in-chief decides.
- At other journals, paper is directly handled by associate editor, who assigns referees and decides.
- (Double) blind.

Publication Process

- ① Submit to journal
- ② Up to a week later: desk reject
- ③ 1-6 months later: decision by journal (R&R or reject)
- ④ 2 months to a year for revisions
- ⑤ 1-6 months after resubmission: decision by journal (accept, R&R or reject)

Decisions at AEJ: Economic Policy

TABLE 2—STATUS OF MANUSCRIPTS BY YEAR OF SUBMISSION, 2015–2019

Submission year	Accepted	Conditional accept	Pending	Rejected	Summary reject	Revise and resubmit	Withdrawn	Total
2015	57 (10)	0 (0)	1 (0)	237 (41)	275 (48)	5 (1)	2 (0)	577 (100)
2016	39 (6)	0 (0)	1 (0)	255 (43)	299 (50)	3 (1)	2 (0)	599 (100)
2017	51 (6)	4 (1)	4 (1)	282 (39)	383 (52)	4 (1)	1 (0)	729 (100)
2018	22 (3)	4 (1)	18 (2)	290 (39)	387 (52)	20 (3)	0 (0)	741 (100)
2019	1 (0)	0 (0)	106 (14)	232 (31)	392 (52)	22 (3)	1 (0)	754 (100)

Notes: Entries show status as of November 1, 2019. Figures in parentheses show row percents rounded to the nearest integer. Pending manuscripts include submissions and revisions that were undergoing review as of November 1, 2019, while revise and resubmit manuscripts are manuscripts that have been returned and are in the hands of the authors on that date. Summary rejections are manuscripts rejected without referee review.

Source: Report of the Editors, AEJ:EP (AEA Papers and Proceedings 2020, 110: 695–702)

Potential Outcomes

- Desk reject
- Reject with reports
- Reject & resubmit
- Revise & resubmit or major revisions
- Minor revisions
- Conditional accept
- Accept

Try to see each of them positively!

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Position Your Paper

- ① Vertical positioning (Is an A journal realistic?)
- ② Horizontal positioning (Which field? General interest?)

Vertical Positioning

- As highly ranked as is “realistic”
 - ▶ Usually high correlation between rank and citations
 - ▶ When assessing a scholar’s quality, journal quality is easier to judge than actual article quality
- What is realistic? Acceptance probability at top journals often <10%!
- Some advice:
 - ▶ Set high goals (don’t work on project if you don’t see potential for A/B publication)
 - ▶ Talk to seniors and ask for a realistic range of outlets
 - ▶ Be persistent, but not pig-headed (papers get older)

Horizontal Positioning

- Which field does this work contribute to most?
 - Check which journals you cite most often!
- Who will read this paper? Who do you want to read the paper?
- Can the paper (and its results) be allocated to a specific field or does it touch on multiple fields?
- Would other disciplines benefit from this work and could this start off a stream of research?
- Can I “speak the language” of the field I am talking to?
- In which field do you want to make your career?

Identifying Target Outlets

- Generalist Journals

- ▶ Typically publishes papers making broader points and mechanisms
- ▶ Wider (less expert) readership
- ▶ High variance of referees (both in expertise and quality)
- ▶ Editor with good overview of field helps

- Field Journals

- ▶ Specialized readership
- ▶ Fit and relevance often easier to judge
- ▶ Usually referees/editors very familiar with literature

Submission Strategy

- Paper needs to be tailored to journal, esp. in the introduction.
- Think about a “submission tree”.
- Paper may only be submitted to one journal at a time!
- And only once to each journal, no matter how much you revised it (except: reject&resubmit).
- Rejection is the normal outcome!
- If rejected, work in valid comments and resubmit quickly.
- Be aware that aiming for a better journal may cost a lot of time.
- Some people submit to 2nd preference first, if rejected to first preference.

Editors Matter

- It greatly helps if an editor finds the topic of your paper interesting.
- If they know the field, they can send it to competent referees who are experts in the field.
- If they are active in the same field, they are more likely to find the topic important.

Lower Bound

- Lower-ranked journals: Only publish if name of journal is known and well-respected
- Never submit to predatory journals!

Impact of Lower Rated Journals on Economists' Judgments of Publication Lists: Evidence from a Survey Experiment*

Publications in leading journals are widely known to have a positive impact on economists' judgments of the value of authors' contributions to the literature and on their professional reputations. Very little attention has been given, however, to the impacts of the addition of publications in lower rated journals on such judgments. In our main tests, we asked subsamples of economists in 44 universities throughout the world to rate either a publication list with only higher rated journals or a list with all of these but with additional publications in nearly as many respected but lower rated journals. Our primary finding was that the inclusion of lower rated journals had a statistically significant negative impact on these economists' judgments of the value of the author's contribution. To the extent that such judgments may influence research and publication strategies our findings imply negative implications on social welfare.

Source: Powdthavee et al. (2017)

Working Paper Series

- Many different series, with different prestige.
- All can be cited.
- Some limited to members (e.g. CESifo, NBER, CEPR, arqus).
- WU has its own Working Paper Series: [WU International Taxation Research Paper Series](#), with some editorial review.
- You can also upload to ssrn or ArXiv/SocArXiv (most working paper series are added automatically to ssrn).

When to Publish Working Paper

- Different strategies
 - ▶ Be early and occupy a topic
 - ▶ Be serious and complete
- Depend on your research area etc.
- Additional strategy as junior:
 - ▶ Become visible
 - ▶ Have something to circulate, important for workshop applications, stays abroad...
- Consult with your advisor!

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Conferences

- Small workshops vs big conferences
- Get feedback on your research
- Show your research to potential reviewers/editors
- Learn about other's research, hot topics etc.
- Broaden your network

Conference Submission

- When to submit? Again taste, but exposure is lower.
 - ▶ Early on (as soon as you have an interesting story and some results)
 - ▶ Submitting only an abstract for a paper you haven't written (yet) is risky
- Don't get discouraged by rejections (get used to them)

Special Issues/Conference Issues

- Are a chance to show you are an active member of a research field.
- Are sometimes easier to get in...
- Are sometimes discounted in terms of journal ranking.
- Differences depending on conference/journal:
 - ▶ Is submission the conference issue mandatory?
 - ▶ Are all papers from the conference accepted?
 - ▶ Or are they part of standard refereeing process (with guest editor)?

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Research Process

- Not the focus of this course, so I'll keep this very short.
- Keep in mind: Your living a life, not a career. Your research is not everything.
- Take time off, but try to really focus on your research when you're working.
- Pre-registration and ethic committees are becoming more important, especially for (field) experiments.

Generating Ideas

- If you want to do theory, read applied empirics; if you want to do empirics, read theory.
- There is a “research frontier”, find it.
- Go to talks, even if they are not exactly in your field.
- Follow important working paper series. Read working papers from a few intellectual leaders in your (narrow!) field.
- Be inspired from the news.
- Question everything!
- There is no “right topic”. Research questions should be interesting and new.

Talking with Your Advisor(s)

- Prepare for meetings. Make a list of what you want to ask, try to anticipate comments and questions.
- It helps to write down a research proposal. Send it before the meeting. It should cover
 - ▶ What is the research question?
 - ▶ What will you add to the literature?
 - ▶ What are the effects you expect?
 - ▶ If empirical, what is the identification strategy?
 - ▶ If theory, which type of model and what are likely the main effects?
- “[Pitching Research](#)” by Robert Faff has a good template and many helpful points (more from an accounting perspective, but also very helpful for economists)

Do-File Management

- Organize your do-files **very** well.
- You won't believe how hard it is to understand them three years later. Or if a different co-author does the work on the revision. Write at least twice as many comments as you find necessary.
- Same goes for different versions of theory models.
- Some help for empirical work:
 - ▶ On file and code organization:
<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/resource/data-cleaning-and-management>
 - ▶ Code and data management by Gentzkow and Shapiro:
<https://web.stanford.edu/~gentzkow/research/CodeAndData.xhtml>
 - ▶ Version control with git by Pinter:
<https://www.frankpinter.com/notes/git-for-economists-presentation.pdf>
 - ▶ Git by DiTraglia: <https://github.com/fditraglia/git-for-economists>