

# A novel replicability survey tool to measure assess and promote improve data availability and research reproducibility in hydrology

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#### Abstract

There is broad interest to improve the reproducibility of published research. We developed a simple survey tool to assess the 1) availability of availability of digital research artifacts published alongside peer-reviewed journal articles (e.g. data, models, code, directions , and other digital artifacts, and 2) replicability of results published in peer-reviewed journal articles for use) and reproducibility of article results. We used the tool to assess 360 random sampled articles of the 1,989 articles published in 2017 in six well-regarded by six hydrology and water resources journals . Like several prior studies, we replicated results for just in 2017. Like studies from other fields, we reproduced results for only a small fraction of articles (1.6%; estimated between of tested articles) using their available artifacts. We estimated, with 95% confidence, that results might be reproduced for only 0.6% and to 6.8% for of all 1,989 articles with 95% confidence). Unlike prior studies, the tool helped identify identified key bottlenecks to make making work more reproducible. These bottlenecks Bottlenecks include: only some digital artifacts available (44% of articles), no directions (89%), or all artifacts available but results not replicable reproducible (5%). These results suggest the The tool (or extensions) can help authors, journals, funders, and institutions to self-assess the availability and replicability of manuscripts, provide feedback to authors to improve manuscript improve reproducibility, and recognize and reward reproducible articles as examples for othersto follow.

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#### Introduction

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The science community is broadly interested to improve the reproducibility of research [1, 2, 3, 5, 6] [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. While exact definitions of reproducibility vary [7, 8, 1, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14], one overarching theme [7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14] , there are recent attempts to harmonize definitions [15, 16]. One overarching theme of definitions is that reproducibility requires multiple, progressive components such as (i) all data, models, code, directions, and other digital artifacts used in the research are available for others to reuse (hereafter, "availability"; [17, 18, 19]), (ii) the artifacts can be used to exactly replicate reproduce published results (replicability reproducibility, sometimes called bit or computa-10 tional reproducibility; [20, 21]), and (iii) existing and new datasets can be processed using the artifacts to reproduce published conclusions (reproducibility). 12 replicability). This progression follows the framework laid out out in a new 13 report on reproducibility and replication by the National Science Foundation 14 and the U.S. Department of Education [16]. In this framework, replicability is a higher standard than reproducibility. 16

Replicable and reproducible Reproducible and replicable scientific work is currently uncommon because of misaligned incentives and poor coordination among authors, journals, institutions, and funding agencies that conduct, publish, and support scientific research [22, 23, 9]. For example, making artifacts available requires authors to document additional materials [24, 25] and learn new skills and technologies [26]. Authors may worry that shared materials will never be used [27, 10] or that other scientists will scoop them on follow-up studies [28]. Further, universities typically reward peer-reviewed journal publications, rather than data repositories or documentation, while current scientific culture rewards novelty rather than replicating reproducing prior efforts [20, 2].

Several efforts are underway to encourage more reproducible science [9]. Authors can share research materials in a growing number of online repositories such as Github, Figshare, Harvard Dataverse, Dryad, and or HydroShare. Institutional libraries are transitioning to offer online repositories to house digital research artifacts [29, 30, 31, 32]. Within our field-fields of hydrology and water resources, recent tools provide environments to repository data store data publicly and allow software to operate on the data as well as create virtual environments that package code, data, and a working operating system to reduce problems of incompatibility (e.g., [33, 34]). Authors can assign digital object identifiers (DOIs) to research packages to create persistent links and use umbrella research licenses to describe the manner in which these digital artifacts and their associated paper may be legally used by others [22]. Additionally, authors can specify the level of reproducibility that readers and reviewers can expect from each publication, for example that a typical reader could easily reproduce the paper's results. And yet, despite these powerful tools, few authors are making their work available for others to replicate or reproduce reproduce or replicate.

To quantify the current state of reproducible science in hydrology and to understand the factors preventing more replicable or reproducible reproducible



or replicable publications, we present here a simple 15-question survey tool (Fig. 1) designed to assess the availability of digital artifacts and replicability of re-47 sults in peer-reviewed journal articles (see Methods). We use this survey tool to assess 360 stratified random-sampled articles from the 1,989 articles published 49 in 2017 across six reputable hydrology and water resources journals. Sampling The sampling design was stratified by journal and reproducibility keywords of 51 interest to produce a representative population sample, while increasing the linelihood to include articles with reproducible results. Results identify bottle-53 necks to making digital artifacts available and replicating output. We also use 54 results to generalize replicability reproducibility for the entire sample of articles, test a hypothesis about use of keywords to identify replicable reproducible articles, compare the effectiveness of different journal data availability policies, 57 and highlight how authors, journals, funders, and institutions can use the en-58 closed survey tool to encourage, recognize, and reward the publication of more reproducible articles. 60

#### 61 Results

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Applying our survey tool to 360 random-sampled hydrology articles published in 2017 shows that a decreasing number of articles are able to satisfy the progressively stricter reproducibility requirements of artifact availability and ultimately replication of reproduction of the published results (Fig. 2). For example, 70.3% of the 360 sampled articles stated some materials were available, but we could only access 48.6% of those materials online (Fig. 3). Only 5.6% of sampled articles made data, model/code, and directions publicly available while just 1.1% of sampled articles made artifacts available and were fully replicated reproduced. We partially replicated reproduced an additional 0.6% of articles.

#### 71 Artifact Availability

Across all journals sampled publications, the most common primary artifact provided was input data, followed by code/model/software, and then directions to 73 run (Fig. 4). Other artifacts These three primary artifacts were each needed to reproduce modeled results. Secondary artifacts, such as hardware/software 75 requirements, common file formats, unique and persistent digital identifiers, and metadata, were made available at much lower rates than the primary arti-77 facts. Articles published in Environmental Modeling & Software (EM&S) made artifacts available online at a high rate and these articles also provided data/-79 model/code, directions, hardware/software requirements, common file formats, and metadata at rates 2 to 3 times the next most frequent journal two times or 81 higher than other journals. 82

Sampled articles use different methods to make artifacts available and these methods differ markedly across journals (Fig. 4). A majority of sampled EM&S had the largest proportion of sampled articles that articles made at least some artifacts available online (61.9%). By contrast, Hydrology and Earth Systems



Sciences (HESS) and Water Resources Research (WRR) had high percentages of articles where materials were only available by first author request (38.5-40.2%).
Otherwise, the Journal of Hydrology (JoH), Journal of the American Water Resources Association (JAWRA), and Journal of Water Resources Planning and Management (JWRPM) had large proportions of articles where data was not available or was available were available within the article and or as supplemental material. These three journals also had high proportions of sampled papers in which research artifacts were not available.

#### 85 Replication Reproducibility of Results

Twenty sampled articles (5.6% of total sampled articles) made the required in-96 put data, software/model/code, and directions available, allowing an attempt 97 at replicating reproducing published results. We were able to fully replicate 98 reproduce results for four articles [35, 36, 37, 38] and partially replicated reproduced results for two additional articles [39, 40]. We were unable to replicate reproduce 100 results for four articles [?, 42, 43, 44] [41, 42, 43, 44], which nonetheless appeared 101 to provide the necessary materials. During the process to replicate reproduce 102 results, we found 10 of the 20 articles did not have all the required artifacts, 103 despite being initially considered for replication reproducibility testing. Rea-104 sons we only partially replicated reproduced results for two articles and did not 105 replicate reproduce results for four articles included unclear directions (4 arti-106 cles), did not generate results (3 articles), hardware/software error (2 articles), 107 or results differed from the publication (1 article; some articles had multiple 108 reasons). The survey permitted multiple selections for this question. A com-109 mon issue across cases where we did not generate results was that folder and 110 file locations were hard-coded to work on the author's computer. If these issues 111 were obvious, we tried, with limited success, to fix them. Other cases pointed 112 to general data gateways, like the USGS streamgauge network, with no further 113 details or required expensive or proprietary software. Of the 10 articles that had 114 all artifacts available, five were published in EM&S, two articles were published 115 in HESS and in WRR, and the remaining article was published in JWRP&M. 116

#### 117 Estimated Replicability Reproducibility for Population

Because the stratified sampling method oversampled articles with certain repro-118 ducibility keywords, we used bootstrap resampling (see Methods) to estimate 119 that 0.6% to 6.8% of all 1,989 articles published in 2017 in the six journals tested 120 here would be replicable reproducible (95% confidence interval). We estimated 28.0% (23.1-32.6% confidence interval) of all articles published in these journals 122 during 2017 provided at least some of the artifacts necessary for replicability 123 reproducibility (Fig. 5, black). EM&S differed from other journals by having 124 a large proportion of articles with some or all data available (31.8-64.0%) and 125 relatively high estimates of replicability reproducibility (Fig. 5).



# Using Keywords to Identify Replicable Reproducible Articles cles

We found that five of the six articles with some or complete replicability had 129 certain reproducibility-related reproducibility had certain related keywords of 130 interest in their abstracts (full list in Methods). This positive hit rate (4.2%) 131 for articles with reproducibility keywords is significantly greater than articles 132 without (0.4%; 2-sample Chi-Squared test with Yate's continuity correction (p =133 0.014)). These findings confirm the value of reproducibility keywords to identify 134 replicable reproducible articles and reaffirm the difficulty to know at the outset 135 whether the results presented in an article are replicable reproducible. 136

#### 137 Time Required to Determine Availability and Replicability Reproducibility

We surveyed and analyzed the time required to complete the survey to show 138 the incremental effort required to determine the availability of article artifacts 139 and replicability reproducibility of results (Fig. 6). For example, for a single 140 publication it took us as little as 5 to 14 minutes (25-75\% range) to determine the availability of input data, model/software/code, and directions and ... 142 Reproducing results for a single paper required upwards of 25 to 86 minutes (25-75\% range) to fully replicate results with outliers of 25 and, with an upper 144 outlier of 200 minutes (minimum and maximum). There were no statistically 145 detectable differences in the time between journals to determine availability of 146 digital artifacts or replicate to reproduce results. 147

#### 148 Reproducibility and Journal Policies

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Among the six hydrology and water resources journals we studied, the HESS and WRR policies effective during the 2017 review period require articles to state how data, models, and code can be accessed. In contrast, the 2017 policies by EM&S, WRPM, JoH, and JAWRA simply encouraged this practice. EM&S further recommends articles include an explicit "Software and/or data availability" section within the article and requires authors to make software essential to the paper available to reviewers during the review process (Supplemental Material Table??). HESS includes an assets tab in each publication, based on the Code and Data Availability sections. EM&S, WRR, and JOH are all signatories of the Transparency and Openness Promotion (TOP) policy framwork [45], while HESS participates in the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) data project [46].

These Stronger journal data availability policies partially but not fully explain differences in and making open data commitments tend to produce higher rates of artifact availability and result replicability by journal. reproducibility. However, there is significant variation among these journals, likely due to minor differences in implementation or other factors. For example, EM&S, which only encourages authors to make artifacts available, had the highest rate of articles that made artifacts available (Fig. 3) and this high rate persisted across nearly



every artifact category (Fig. 4). Although EM&S used "should" instead of "must" statements, their policy was by far the most specific for papers with a software component (Supplemental S1 Material). This may explain their high participation rate. EM&S is also a software-focused journal, which may attract papers and authors that are more conscious of reproducible software. In con-trast, HESS and WRR, which require data availability statements, had lower percentages of articles that made artifacts available and more papers that direct readers to the authors or third parties for data, models, or code (Fig. 3). These directional statements tend to appear in the Data Availability section of HESS articles and the Acknowledgements of WRR articles. The final group, JoH, JAWRA, and JWRP&M, that also encouraged authors to make artifacts avail-able, had high proportions of articles without available digital artifacts (Fig. 3). The HESS and WRR policies that require data availability statements appear to encourage authors to select options like contact the author rather than work to provide a research article and supporting materials that are available, replicable, and reproducible, and replicable. In July 2018, JWRP&M switched to start requiring authors to state the availability of data, models, and code, similar to HESS and WRR [47]. 

#### 186 Discussion

Our findings of low replicability reproducibility of research published in six hydrology and water resources journals in 2017 mirrors low rates of replicability reproducibility previously reported in psychology (100 experiments; [2]), computer systems research (613 articles; [48]), and across articles published in Science (204 articles; [6]). Unlike those studies, our survey tool additionally identified bottlenecks to making all digital artifacts available and replicating reproducing results. Here, we discuss how results for our study in hydrology and water resources can inform broader use of the survey tool by authors, journals, funders, and institutions to improve the reproducibility of published scientific research.

Authors. Authors can use the survey tool as a checklist to self-assess the availability of data, models, code, and directions and replicability reproducibility of their work before submitting work for publication. The tool can help identify missing components that, if provided, will improve reproducibility. For example, our results showed that, for all journals, the number of sampled articles with code/data/software was consistently 2 to 3 times higher than the number of articles that additionally provided directions (Fig. 4). If authors used the tool and subsequently provided directions to use their materials, the tool could potentially double the number of articles which could reasonably be tested for replicability reproducibility. Another bottleneck was a large fraction of authors who chose not to make artifacts available or only made artifacts available by author or third party request. Authors can look to the 10 articles we found that made all digital artifacts available to see easy-to-access platforms to provide access. These platforms included GitHub (6 articles), HydroShare (1



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article), journal supplementary material (1 article), a custom website (1 article), or Figshare (1 article). Authors who bundled their code and data together in a single GitHub repository further allowed us to download the entire project, with a higher likelihood that code pointed to valid file directories.

**Journals.** Journals can use the survey tool to assess the availability of data/model/code and directions, replicability reproducibility of results of new submissions, and provide feedback to authors. Alternatively, journals can require that authors use the survey tool to self-check their work prior to submission. Feedback can be crucial as our study showed that a very low fraction of articles provided all the required artifacts. However, when artifacts were available, we fully or partially replicated reproduced results for 6 out of 10 articles. We also found that time to assess the availability of artifacts was typically less than 15 minutes, while time to replicate reproduce results was much longer. The combination of these findings suggests that promoting inclusion of digital artifacts through a relatively quick availability survey could pay significant dividends for replicability reproducibility. We leave open whether responsibility for assessment should fall on a journal editor's assistant, associate editor for reproducibility, reviewers, or others. With a tool to measure reproducibility of published articles, journals could also track reproducibility over time. Tracking and publishing this information would benefit the journal as a promotional tool to show journal commitment to reproducible science. Tracking would also allow journals to acknowledge articles and authors that reach certain reproducibility standards, as implemented by Psychological Science [49]. For example, show a bronze, silver, or gold medal icon on article webpages to recognize and reward progressively greater reproducibility corresponding to availability, replicability, and reproducibility reproducibility, and replicability. These badges would simultaneously communicate the expected level of reproducibility of published work. In our study, we are excited to award silver badges to the four articles whose results we fully replicated reproduced [35, 36, 37, 38] and bronze badges to six articles that made all artifacts available [39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 40]. This recognition also makes it easier for authors to find and emulate excellent reproducibility practices. We propose these recognition programs as voluntary to encourage authors to make their artifacts available and results reproducible, but not required in cases of proprietary data or code. Cross-journal indices could further aggregate reproducibility metrics and encourage journals and authors to improve the reproducibility of their research portfolios. To oversee these journal efforts, we envision a new role for an Associate Editor of Reproducibility to develop journal data availability and reproducibility policy, manage reproducibility evaluations, and advocate for best reproducibility practices.

Funders and Institutions. Similar to journals, funders and institutions can use the survey tool to assess artifact availability, verify replicability reproducibility of results, and recognize or reward authors whose work achieves bronze, silver, and gold levels of reproducibility. Alternatively, funders and institutions could use reproducibility assessments made by journals. Funders can encourage authors to use the survey tool to self-check work prior to submitting progress or final reports or use the tool to check the reproducibility of work authors submit.



Use of the tool could help verify that author submissions fulfill requirements of funder data management policies and help direct authors to improve the reproducibility of their work. Institutions could also use the survey tool to determine and post the expected level of reproducibility of author work deposited into institutional repositories.

Together, these actions by authors, journals, funders, and institutions can help nudge authors further along the reproducibility continuum to make their digital artifacts more available and to replicate reproduce published results. While these proposed policy nudges represent small shifts targeted at particular actors in the science community, this approach can produce large effects collectively [50], particularly when all parties agree that the shift will provide a net benefit, as for reproducible science. Each individual nudge is made possible by using a survey (or similar) tool to measure and quantify the availability of digital artifacts, replicability reproducibility of published results, and reproducibility replicability of findings. We welcome discussion to improve the survey tool aimed at improving the reproducibility of our science.

#### 273 Methods

#### Online Survey Tool

The authors translated definitions of availability, replicability, and reproducibility reproducibility, and replicability into a 15-question Qualtrics Research Core (Qualtrics) online survey (Fig. 1). The Qualtrics survey format has been converted into a publicly available versionGoogle form, provided here as an example (https://goo.gl/forms/95S4y9BdPmVqMtm02). The survey progressed from soliciting metadata about the article (Questions 1-4), to testing availability of artifacts (Q5-9), and ultimately testing replicability reproducibility of results (Q10-14). Green or yellow shaded answers (Fig. 1) were required to progress to the next question so that survey questions followed the availability and replicability reproducibility progression. Selecting a red-shaded answer stopped progression and directed the reviewer to a final question that asked how many minutes the reviewer spent to reach their stopping point (Q15). This time to complete was self-reported by reviewers rather than using the built-in Qualtrics timer so reviewers could consider the entire time spent reading and assessing the published article, rather than the time completing the survey.

The authors developed the tool over four months in Fall 2017 and pre-tested it in early 2018 on a sub-sample of five articles that spanned the availability and replicability reproducibility progression. From our experience pre-testing and to improve use of the tool, we reworded some questions, altered the survey logic, discussed and addressed inter-reviewer variability. Later, after we had reviewed 23% of sampled articles, we added a final question (Q15) to ask how much time it took to complete the survey. We did not re-analyze the time spent for the initial 23% of papers, as reviewers were already familiar with those papers. Instead, we calculated time spent using papers from the remaining sample.



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#### Selection of Articles

360 peer-reviewed articles were random stratified sampled from the 1,989 articles found in Scopus that were published in 2017 in by six well-regarded hydrology and water resources journals (measured by impact factor and reputation). Journals were selected based on impact and to cover a range of hydrology and water resources topics. The six journals were Hydrology of and Earth Systems Sciences (HESS), Environmental Modeling & Software (EM&S), Journal of the American Water Resources Association (JAWRA), Journal of Hydrology (JoH), Journal of Water Resources Planning and Management (JWRPM), and Water Resources Research (WRR). Stratified random sampling was approximately proportional to the number of articles published in each journal in 2017, with extra weight placed on articles with a set of reproducibility-related keywords (Table ??).

We further adjusted the stratification so each journal had at least 30 articles (JAWRA and JWRPM were oversampled). Similarly, we oversampled articles with the keywords: analytical software, application programs, C++, cloud computing, computational reproducibility, computer modeling, computer programming, computer software, computer software usability, computer-based models, development and testing, engineering software, fortran, freely available data, freely available software, github, hardware and software, java, open code, open source, replicative validation, scientific software, code, python, cran, and http. Of the 120 articles published in the six journals in 2017 that had at least one keyword, we sampled 119 articles, principally to retain at least 15 non-keyword articles for each journal with an approximately 2:1 non-keyword to keyword ratio overall.

Number of articles published in 2017 and number of articles sampled by journal.

Each author was randomly assigned 60 articles stratified by journal to assess the availability of article artifacts (Q1-9). After identifying all publications that had the available artifacts, we re-assigned reviewers to assess whether the published results could be replicated reproduced (Q1-15). Reassignments matched article software to the We carried through responses of "Not sure" or "Not familiar with resources" to Q9 and reassigned these articles to match article software with a reviewer most familiar with those tools. The Qualtrics online format allowed us to both simultaneously and asynchronously assess journal articles and store survey responses in an accompanying Qualtrics database. After all availability and replicability reproducibility assessments were complete, we exported results from the Qualtrics database to a text file which was processed in R to generate figures, tables, and results. Time spent to complete the survey (Q15) was analyzed for three key stopping points: no artifacts available (Q5), availability of artifacts (Q9), and replicability reproducibility of results (Q13).

#### Population Estimates

Bootstrap resampling Resampling was used to estimate the overall percent-



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age of articles from all n=1,989 articles published in 2017 in the six journals while adjusting for keyword and journal sampling. Sampled articles were sorted into six mutually exclusive categories that were stopping points in the survey: Data-less or review, Author or Third Party Only, No availability, Some Availability availability, Available but not reproducible, and Some or All Replicableall reproducible. "Some availability" included articles with one or two data/mod-el/code, and direction elements of the three required elements (Q7). "Available but not replicable reproducible" articles had all three required elements available on the initial review, but either could not be replicated reproduced or were found to be missing key elements when replication was attempted reviewers attempted to reproduce the results.

The resampling approach was based on generated random 5,000 simulations of the population. For each simulation, populations. Each population had 1,989 articles. In each population, we inserted the 360 sampled articles were inserted directly based on the survey resultsarticles we manually assessed, assuming that these were known exactly we exactly knew the reproducibility of these articles. Estimates for the remaining 1,629 unsampled articles were simulated based on survey results for the sampled articles in their stratified category, i.e. journal and keyword/non-keyword. Uncertainty for the unsampled articles was calculated using the For each random sample population, the proportion of unsampled articles in each reproducibility category was randomly simulated using the multinomial uncertainty approach of Sison and Glaz [51],assuming the six potential levels of availability/replicability represent multinomial proportions of categorical data [52][51, 52]. This produced 5,000 sample populations equal in size and distribution (journal and keyword) to the true population of articles published in 2017, while incorporating uncertainty due to unsampled papers.

# f Acknowledge ments

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#### Author Contributions

Stagge, Rosenberg, James, and Abdallah conceived the idea for a survey tool to measure the reproducibility of journal articles. Stagge and Rosenberg led



the design and refinement of the tool and Abdallah implemented the design.
All authors participated equally in the use of the survey tool to evaluate the reproducibility of articles. Stagge led the results analysis, visualization, and writing of the first draft. Stagge and Abdallah made all article digital artifacts available online. Rosenberg rewrote the initial draft. All authors reviewed and approved the final draft prior to submission.

## ... Code Availability

The survey tool, Qualtrics results, and all code used for analysis presented in this
article are available online through GitHub (https://github.com/jstagge/reproduc\_hyd)
or through a permanent repository [?] the permanent repository [53]. Please cite
this repository for any use of the related data or code. Additionally, results can
be replicated reproduced using RStudio deployed in the cloud using MyBinder
through the GitHub website.

## Data Availability

All relevant data presented in this article are available online through the permanent repository [53]. Please cite this repository for any use of the related data or code. An open Google Forms version of the survey tool is available for readers to use, modify, and extend -(https://goo.gl/forms/95S4y9BdPmVqMtm02).

# ... Competing financial interests

The author(s) declare no competing financial interests.



# 402 Figures Legends

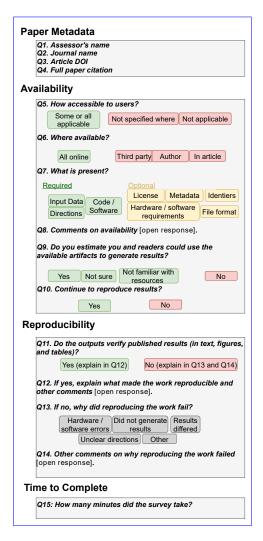


Figure 1: Survey questions to assess journal article data availability and replicability reproducibility. Green and grey answers continue to the next question, while red answers skip to question 15.



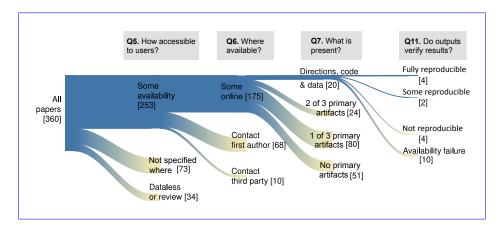


Figure 2: Number of papers progressing through the survey questions to determine availability and replicability reproducibility requirements.

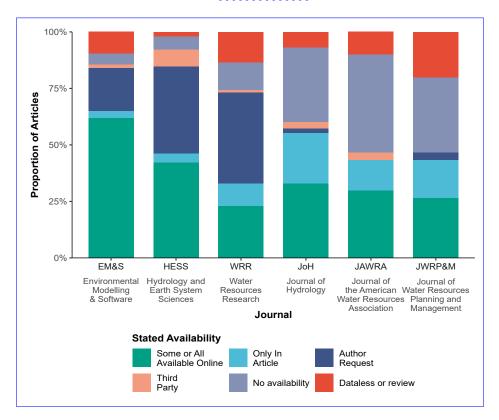


Figure 3: Data, model, code availability by journal (summary of Q4 and Q5).



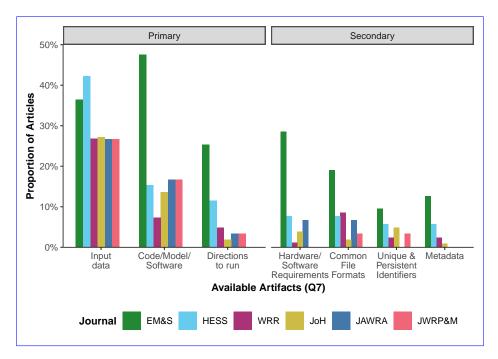


Figure 4: Availability artifacts organized by journal. All percentages are based on the total number of sampled papers for each journal. Refer to Figure 3 or the text for full journal titles.



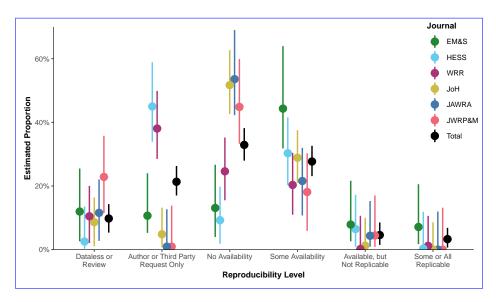


Figure 5: Population estimate of reproducibility for all papers published in 2017. Results are sorted by journal, with "Total" representing all 6 journals. Median estimate is represented by a point, vertical bars show the 95% confidence interval. Refer to Figure 3 or the text for full journal titles.

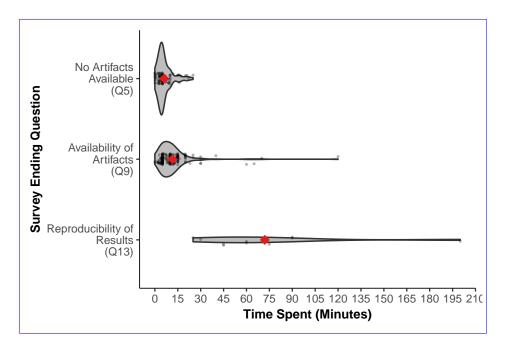


Figure 6: Self-reported time to complete survey organized by the survey's ending question. Each reviewed paper is shown by a black dot, while the mean is represented by a red dotdiamond. Distribution density is shown by width.



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