FIT5190 Introduction to IT Research Methods

Lecture 11

On the Publication Road

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Learning objectives

- Understand
  - the need to publish research work
  - the process of getting published in refereed journals
  - how to select a target journal for publication
  - what to expect in the submission and review processes for publishing refereed journal papers
  - how to build a prolific publication record

- Be able to
  - manage the submission and review processes
  - increase the chance of getting published in refereed journals

Overview

- This lecture deals with research publication matters in relation to refereed journals.

- The lecture discusses the process of submitting and reviewing refereed journal paper and addresses submission and review issues on the journal publication road.

- The lecture also discusses how to build a prolific publication record.

Lecturing objectives

- To share with students my experience of publishing and reviewing in refereed journals.

- To help students build up the knowledge as well as maintain momentum and confidence in dealing with submission and review issues on the journal publication road.

- To help students increase the chance of getting published in refereed journals.

Outline

Topics

1. Setting the scene for the publication road
2. Selecting target journals
3. Managing the process (submission and review)
4. Building a prolific publication record
5. Concluding messages

Topic 1

Setting the scene for the publication road

1. Setting the scene for the publication road
2. Selecting target journals
3. Managing the process (submission and review)
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5. Concluding messages

It is all about publication

- The goal of conducting research is publication.

- No research will make impact if no one knows about it.

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Research  →  Writing  →  Submission Review  →  Publication
          ←
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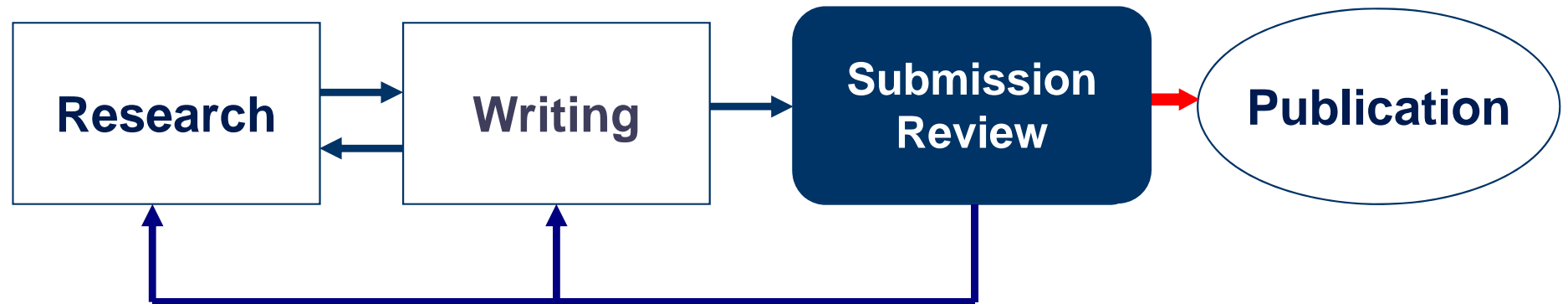
Benefits of publication

- Publish or perish.

- Researchers are measured and become known by their publications.

- Scholarly publications improve our academic credibility, indicating that we are not a mere retailer of other people's work.

- Publication enhances our academic reputation and professional career, such as appointment, promotion or tenure.

Four good reasons to publish our work   (1/2)

- **Because I have to**
  - It is not a choice, but a demand.
  - It is an obligation, but can be fun, easy and fruitful.

- **Because I want to get ahead**
  - Research itself is worthless unless it is disseminated.
  - Those who publish in competent journals are judged competent themselves.
  - They have recognised the importance of publishing.
  - They know **how to write good papers** and **how to target the right journals**. They know how to prioritise. They know how to get ideas out of their heads and onto paper.
  - And they **enjoy doing it**.

Four good reasons to publish our work (2/2)

- **Because I need to learn through others**
  - Feedback and collaboration are valuable components of the publishing process - and they are free.
  - Revision or even rejection is an invaluable learning experience.

- **Because I need clarity**
  - Nobody can write without focus.
  - Many writers like the opportunity to write to clarify their thinking.
  - With the art of focusing, we structure our thinking and puts sometimes difficult and abstract concepts into words.
  - We write, we edit, we revise, and we do everything we can to make our argument and our evidence clear.

Four even better reasons not to publish our work (1/2)

- **It is not good enough yet**.
  - Perfect articles never get published, and those that are **good enough** do.

- **I am a failure.**
  - Many people do not submit their work because they fear rejection.
  - People who have no fear are not brave, they are fearless.
  - Bravery is having the fear but doing it anyway.
  - No one likes rejection. Even the best authors have been rejected.
  - Use some basic tools of cognitive psychology to regard rejection as learning.
  - **Do our homework** - too many authors throw themselves into the publishing process without a plan or any idea about what is important or not.

Four even better reasons not to publish our work (2/2)

- **People might steal my ideas.**
  - People who are well-published are rarely afraid that their ideas will be stolen. Ideas are cheap.
  - People only succeed when they actually do something.

- **I do not have time.**

  - No one has enough time nowadays.
  - If it matters to us, we will find the time.
  - People who use time well **concentrate intensely** on whatever they are doing. If someone focuses on what they are doing, they can do in 15 minutes what would otherwise take them four hours.
  - If we know how to focus and what to focus upon, our time will be spent more effectively.

What is the worst that can happen?

- Even the best authors have been rejected.

- The famous science fiction writer Ray Bradbury put it well:

  "If you write a hundred short stories and they are all bad, that does not mean you have failed. **You fail only when you've stopped writing.**"

- At worst, it means we need to do some more work.

- Revising based on the "free" comments from an editorial review is a good learning experience.

- Concentrate on the benefits and minimise the risks.

- More likely, **if we have done our homework**, we will be asked to revise our paper before it can be accepted for publication.

Taking the first step on the road

- Getting published is a bottom line for our academic career.

- Break the barriers associated with submitting the first manuscript for publication:
  - Lack of confidence.
  - Fear of rejection.
  - Just thinking, planning without taking action.
  - Lack of "know-how" about the publishing process.

Topic 2

Selecting target journals

1. Setting the scene for the publication road
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3. Managing the process (submission and review)
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Selecting a list of journals

- Look through the journals we read regularly.

- Investigate the journals cited in our manuscript first.

- Produce a list of journals that cover the subject area.

- Look at the recent issues of each journal investigated.

- Read carefully the journal's Notes to Contributors and Instructions to Authors.

  - The editorial policy, including aims and scope, the type of manuscripts acceptable (e.g. theory, application, case study, review, survey), areas of interest, and the review process.

  - Manuscript preparation and submission information, including the style of manuscript (e.g. abstract, keywords, sections, paragraphs, tables, figures, formulae, footnotes, references, a brief biographical note).

Selecting a journal

- ## Prestige
  - e.g. SCI/SSCI, impact factor, citations (total cites), peer perception.

- ## Peer recommendation
  - Ask colleagues who have published in the journal being considered.

- ## Quality criteria
  - Theory/methodology versus practice orientation (research rigor vs. practical applications)
  - e.g. reviewer's report form.

- ## Timing
  - How prompt a journal is about reviewing.
  - How quickly accepted papers are put into print.

Selecting a journal (2/2)

- Publishers
  Visibility and accessibility (possibility of being cited)
  - Roughly half of the papers published in some 40 high-ranked economic journals are never cited by others (Choi, 2002).
  - Commercial publishers, professional associations, or academic institutions.
  - Publication place or country, truly international, authors' country of origin, editor, editorial board.

- Possibility of being accepted
  - Do not expect to publish in a journal that we do not understand.
  - Understand relevant papers recently published in the journal being considered (and cite them if the journal is targeted).
  - Backlog of articles in press.

Topic 3

Managing the process (submission and review)

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- Carefully follow the Notes for Contributors or Instructions to Authors ("Author Guidelines") for style and format requirements, the submission guidelines, etc.

  – Failure to comply with the requirements and guidelines may result in rejection or delay in the review process.

  – Give the editor and the reviewers the impression that this is a new submission (and it is not originally prepared for another journal and gets rejected).

  – **Know the rules and speak the language** – giving the editor and the reviewers the impression that we are an **experienced author** just like them (i.e. creating the "one of us" notion).

Before submission (2/5)

- Avoid plagiarism, either consciously or subconsciously.

    – Plagiarism is copying without acknowledgment.

    – Properly cited references must be made if phrases, statements, data, or evidence from another publication are used (preferably replaced with our own words).

    – Use quotation marks when quoting the whole statement or sentence is necessary.

    – Be aware of the copyright issues of "re-using" our own publications (as a general rule of thumb, no more than 10% or 300 words).

- Check the "reviewer report form" of the target journal if available.

  - Check the journal website (e.g. reviewer information section).

  - Ask colleagues or the editor.

  - Often acts as a statement of quality criteria which guides the editor and reviewers to make their decisions.

A reviewer report form

- **European Journal of Operational Research (EJOR)**

PLEASE USE THIS SCALE:

False = 1
Rather false = 2
Questionable = 3
Rather true = 4
True = 5

General Judgment

The author is familiar with the existing state of knowledge.

The topic is relevant to the scope of EJOR.

This is a new and original contribution.

The paper makes a valuable contribution to the practice of OR.

The title is appropriate.

The abstract and keywords are adequate.

The paper is logically and technically correct.

The interpretations and conclusions are sound and justified by the results.

The paper is well presented and organized.

The writing style/English is clear and understandable.

The paper is of the right length.
If not, please explain:

The references are adequate.

Rating of this paper in comparison to similar papers published in top-rated scientific journals:

_____ Below publication level
_____ Bottom 20%
_____ Below average
_____ Average
_____ Above average
_____ Top 20%

Before submission

- Proofread and check the manuscript a couple of times before submission.
    - Make the lives of the editor and reviewers easier.
    - Check spelling and grammar (use a computer checker first and then ask a colleague or friend to double check).
    - Reread carefully the sections that the editor and reviewers will read first, e.g. Abstract, Introduction, Conclusion.
    - With inherent subjectivity, the reviewer's (positive or negative) **first impressions** of the manuscript (say, after 15-minute reading) is often the most crucial.
    - A typical experienced reviewer spends two hours or more in reviewing a manuscript.

Before submission

- Find a supportive colleague, peer or friend to help with the **internal review** of the manuscript before submission.
  - Apart from checking spelling and grammar.
  - Ask the internal reviewer to be honest rather than soft-hearted, in particular to identify the weaknesses and point out problems in the current manuscript.

Submission

- The manuscript should not have been published or accepted, nor is being submitted or under review elsewhere.

  - No duplicate submission is allowed.

- Where necessary accompany the manuscript with a brief cover letter, including at least the paper title, the journal name to which we are submitting, and our correspondence information.

The review process (refereeing)

- Single-blind or double-blind review.
- The editor reads a submitted manuscript to make an initial assessment on the suitability of the paper for the journal and on the quality of the paper itself.
  - Manuscripts, poorly written or targeted, may be rejected at this stage – desk rejection.
- The editor usually sends the submitted manuscript to 2 or 3 reviewers (referees).
- Reviewers are asked to make a recommendation about the manuscript:
  - Acceptance
  - Minor revision
  - Major revision
  - Rejection

Editor's expectations

- A manuscript has to be "**good enough**" to be put in the review process, if judged appropriate for the journal.

  – "Good enough" means sufficiently original and interesting, adequately researched and documented, clearly written, logically structured, or all of these.

- A journal publication should be described as both **"good"** and **"original"**, but not the following:

  "The parts that are good are not original and the parts that are original are not good."

- A journal paper should **have something worthwhile** (new and important) **to say, and say it well**.

Reviewers' expectations (1/2)

- Paper reviewing itself is not always easy and reviewers have their own preferences in addition to the criteria laid down by the journal editor.

- Very often reviewers have different recommendations about specific manuscripts:

  – Agreement among reviewers is no greater than would be expected by chance alone.

- Reviewers' recommendations about a paper (acceptance, revision, or rejection) may be unanimous, but they often give different reasons.

Reviewers' expectations

- **Reviewers have certain expectations of a journal paper**

  – Purpose clearly stated

  – What is promised in the purpose of the paper delivered, meeting the needs of the readership

  – Well written and well structured (i.e. easy to read, with a logical flow of thought and argument)

  – Something new and interesting to them

  – Main points logically flowing (i.e. easily identified)

  – Methodology easily understood

  – Arguments and conclusions well justified

  – Implications clearly specified

Common problems identified by reviewers

- **Problems with unacceptable manuscripts**
    - Originality, novelty, relevance
    - Significance, contribution

    Content

    - Too much information
    - Too little information
    - Missing information (justification)
    - Inaccurate information

    Presentation

    - Poor structure or organisation
    - Not easy to read and understand (readability)
    - Linguistic quality of English

Top reasons for rejection

- Trivial topic

- Obvious results

- Marginal contribution

- Inadequate concept/theory

- Inappropriate method/approach

- No or weak empirical support

- Insufficient or flawed analysis

- Wrong journal

Waiting for the result

- It can take a long time to get published in an academic journal (more than a year is not uncommon).

- Contact the editor or the editorial office if we do not get the acknowledgement of receipt of the submission after one month.

- Contact politely the editor or the editorial office about the status of the paper if we do not get the review result after six months.

- Consider withdrawing the paper if no reply is received after a couple of enquires (via email or phone) within three months.

- Very often we receive the review result at an unexpected or unfavorable time (good or bad).

Reviewers' comments

- No matter what is in the reviewer report, do not get angry.
  - No one likes negative comments, but it is reviewers' job to identify the weaknesses of our paper.

- Reviewers' comments, even if negative, can provide us with valuable new insights for improving our paper.

- Not all criticism is constructive, but much of it will often give general advice on further sources or weakness in our argument or presentation whose modification would make our work publishable.

- The editor usually abides by the reviewers' recommendations.
  - In the event of a split vote, the editor may personally reread the paper or alternatively send it out to an additional reviewer.
  - The editor makes the final decision.

Revision

- It is definitely good news if we are requested to revise the paper.

  – All papers could be improved.

- We could also ask experienced colleagues to help us understand what we need to do and how to make the changes.

- If we are unclear about what is required to revise the paper, we could contact the editor for clarification.

- Take the reviewer reports seriously and revise the paper responsively and comprehensively to meet the reviewers' comments, following the editor's recommendations if any.

  – In our response to the reviewers' comments, first appreciate their suggestions.

Revision

- Explain and justify why a particular issue or concern raised by the reviewer is not addressed

  - e.g. beyond the scope, not relevant to the main objective or contribution.

  - Thank the reviewer for the suggestion.

- If a reviewer has apparently missed the key points of our study, very likely the fault lies in the clarity of our presentation *in its present form* rather than in the incapacity of a reviewer to understand.

Revision

- Alternatively we may try to convince the editor that some comments are invalid, particularly if the reviewers hold conflicting views.

  – The key is to adapt a low-key approach.

  – "Although I agree (or do not disagree) with …, I think…"

    "Although the reviewer makes a good point about …, I believe…"

    "I respect the reviewer's comments on ...; however, …"

- Do not make **unnecessary defense** or arguments against the reviewers' comments.

  – The worst thing that we can do is to attack reviewers.

  – The goal is to **get published in the quickest time possible**.

Resubmission

- Resubmit the revised manuscript on time or as soon as practicable.

- When re-submitting, it is advisable to include a brief response to the reviewers' comments on a separate sheet.

  – Explain how we have responded to the reviewers' concerns.

  – Summarize the changes we have made.

  – Where necessary separate our response to different reviewers on different sheets.

Coping with rejections (1/5)

- Do not take rejections personally and too seriously, although they always sting.

  - The whole review process can be emotionally painful if taken negatively.

  - We are not alone - even the best authors get rejections from time to time.

  - Be prepared to be a good loser.

Coping with rejections (2/5)

- Do not be discouraged, disheartened or upset by an initial rejection.

  - Did we aim badly? too high? or just unlucky?

  - There are always a number of equally rated journals to which our paper is suited.

  - Charnes, A., Cooper, W.W., Rhodes, E.L. (1978). Measuring the efficiency of decision making units. *European Journal of Operational Research* 2(6), 429–444.

    - Cited 29,685 times based on Google Scholar - Accessed February 2018

Coping with rejections (3/5)

- Do not immediately commit the paper and everything associated with it.

    - Do take time (at least a week) to go over it and think rationally about the paper in relation to the reviewers' comments several times.

    - **Seek advice** from experienced colleagues or friends.

Coping with rejections (4/5)

- Do take positive attitude towards rejections
  - Rejection is not failure if we learn from it.
  - Reviewers' constructive comments are free.
  - Restructure and rewrite the paper, or redo the research if necessary.
  - Refine the paper and submit it to another equally-rated, probably more appropriate, journal.
  - **Make sure that the paper looks brand new, with no trace of previous rejections**
    - e.g. new referencing and formatting style, updated references.

Coping with rejections (5/5)

- Reviewer's rejections based on false information or biased view.

  – Ask an experienced colleague to validate the reviewer's comments.

  – If the reviewer's report is in error or not justifiable, consider sending a response to the editor detailing our arguments in a clear and unemotional manner.

  – A better policy would be to revise the manuscript (e.g. improve the parts being misunderstood) and submit it elsewhere.

The dark side

- Foul play by the reviewer

  - Narrow-minded, biased comments
  - Rejection without rightful reasons
  - Misuse of manuscript
  - Conflict of interest

- Be aware of the dark side of the publication road

  - It does exist (although rare) and cannot be completely eliminated.
  - Try and avoid it.
  - Look the bright side and stick to it.

Increasing probability of acceptance (1/2)

- A typical acceptance rate of a prestigious journal is about 10-20%.

  - This process is not a random event.

  - The 10-20% of manuscripts which are accepted are the most significant and best written.

  - We can achieve a publication rate of, say, 60-80% if all papers submitted are of a high standard in terms of both **content** and **presentation**.

Increasing probability of acceptance (2/2)

- Sequential submissions

  - If the probability of acceptance on the first submission is 0.5, the probability of acceptance within three sequential submissions (where necessary) is about 0.9 ($\approx 1 - (0.5)^3$)

  - The probability will improve if the paper is refined and improved after each rejection.

  - A good paper deserves at least three chances for good journal publication - **bad luck will eventually end**.

- Submitting more (good) papers would increase the acceptance rate (due to learning by doing).

Topic 4

Building a prolific publication record

1. Setting the scene for the publication road
2. Selecting target journals
3. Managing the process (submission and review)
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Defining publication productivity   (1/3)

- The publication output is commonly measured by both **quantity** and **quality**.
    - An accumulated body of research publications - consistency of performance in the rate of publication over a number of years.
    - How to balance quality versus quantity depends on the context and the norms in the academic field or discipline.

- The publication output by individuals can also be measured by both **breadth** and **depth**.
    - Breadth - e.g. types, domains, fields.
    - Depth - e.g. consistent and coherent theme, a line of progressive development.

Defining publication productivity   (2/3)

Quantitative measures

- ISI Web of Science; Scopus; Google Scholar
  - Total citation counts
  - Average citations per paper
  - Citation counts for the five most cited papers

- *h*-index (Hirsch index or Hirsch number)
  - A relative quality (productivity and impact) measure for a scientist's (or a group of scientists') publications.
  - A value *h* for an author indicates that the author has *h* papers each of which has at least *h* citations.
  - e.g. an *h*-index of 10 means that there are 10 published papers that have 10 citations or more.
  - Wikipedia

Defining publication productivity   (3/3)

Quantitative measures

- Harzing's Publish or Perish
  (http://www.harzing.com/resources/publish-or-perish)

  – A software program that retrieves and analyzes academic citations based on Google Scholar

    - Total number of papers
    - Total number of citations
    - Average number of citations per paper
    - Average number of citations per author
    - Average number of papers per author
    - Average number of citations per year
    - Hirsch's h-index and related parameters
    - Egghe's g-index
    - The contemporary h-index
    - The age-weighted citation rate
    - Two variations of individual h-indices
    - An analysis of the number of authors per paper

Knowing ourselves

- Skills, strengths, weaknesses in research and writing.

- A team player or a loner?

- Qualities of productive researchers:
  - Scholarly talent
  - Curiosity, conscience, craftsmanship, confidence
  - Diligence and concentration (time management)
  - **Seeking help** and **taking advice**
  - **The company of like-minded colleagues**, peers or friends for consultation, collaboration and co-authorship.

Setting priorities

- Where do we want to be in five years' time?

- Set specific achievable targets in publishing journal papers of good quality in a selected pool of journals.

- Take control of our **imperfect environment**
  - Who, what, when, where, why, how.
  - Do not lose sight of the big picture.

Managing time

- Learn to manage time effectively in order to work efficiently and productively.

  – Allocate substantial blocks of time and protect them for research and writing regularly.

  – Develop strategies that allow us to say "no".

  – Find the protected time best for writing and thinking.

- Develop research habits early (the earlier the better) by reading and writing regularly.

  – Spend a sufficient amount of time (e.g. no less then 12 hours per week on average) consistently over a long period of time.

  – Subscript to journal's "new issue alert" service.

Developing helping relationships

- Academic life can be pretty lonely and stressful.
  - Loneliness and isolation are often inevitable to get work done.
  - Share our successes and failures on the publication road with our colleagues.
  - Be generous in encouraging and supporting our colleagues, and giving praise when warranted.
- Join or organize a research or publication group.
- Find supportive colleagues, peers or friends to help with the publication process.
- Find a research mentor or a role model (formal or informal).
- Establish an academic network.

Maximizing publication productivity (1/5)

- Maintain a good number of "good" papers under review constantly.
  - Not all written in one year, but consistent research and writing over a number of years.
  - With a better chance of having one paper accepted.
  - In a better position of handling rejection.

- Develop a number of research areas, with focus on one or two fields.
  - Publishing in a narrowly focused area is risky.

Maximizing publication productivity   (2/5)

- Try journals of different types, fields, disciplines.
  - Maintain a balance between quality and quantity - both count.
    - All top-rated publications (difficult, risky)
    - All low-quality publications (easy, unsatisfactory)
  - Publishing three papers in different journals is better than three in one journal, if the journals are of equal quality.

- Separate two good ideas into two papers.
  - Produce multiple papers from one good idea (data set, methodology) without violating copyright issues?
  - Each paper must represent a substantial, independent contribution in its own right.
    - Tricky but doable and achievable.

Maximizing publication productivity   (3/5)

- Co-authoring (collaborating)

  – Single-authored papers are impressive.

  – Co-authored papers are much better than none.

  – Participation in joint authorship represents our cooperative scholarly quality as a team player.

  – Sharing our time and skills with experienced colleagues can open up our publication opportunities.

  – With experienced co-authors, the probability of acceptance will increase greatly.

Maximizing publication productivity　　(4/5)

- Collaborating (co-authoring)
  - Collaborative work often leads to a better paper, with a higher probability of acceptance by more prestigious journals.
  - Some research outcomes can be timely and effectively achieved only by collaboration.
    - More attractive and productive
  - Find compatible research partners or co-authors who will contribute skills and knowledge supplementary to our own.
  - We learn how to do better research and write better papers.
  - Not to collaborate is to limit our scholarly potential and publication productivity.

Maximizing publication productivity　　(5/5)

- Maintaining collaboration and co-authorship
  - It takes time and patience to develop a good working relationship.
  - There is no universal rule about the order of authors in a paper.
    - An even-headed win-win arrangement.
    - A good long-term relationship is much worth small gains.
  - The sum of subjective contributions of co-authors of a paper always exceeds 100%, as suggested by the total weights of a joint paper.
    - e.g. (80%+60%), (75%+50%+40%), (70%+40%+30%+25%)

Topic 5

Concluding messages

1. Setting the scene for the publication road
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The publication game

- Journal publication is a fixed-sum game.

- The publication game can be enjoyable and FUN.
  - It is double fun to get something significant published in a prestigious journal.
  - We can get a lot of personal satisfaction out of it.
  - It often results in tangible rewards such as career development or academic advancement.

- There are many ways to play the game and to get published.
  - There is no single way for everyone to get published.
  - We can improve our chances by **learning** from experienced colleagues and our own experiences (successes and failures).

Learning to publish

- Writing is not the objective, and publishing is.

- Conducting research and writing it up are merely the means to the end – publishing.

I am still learning

- **Learn** something from every pursuit.
- Learn **how to adapt**, **how to change**.
- Learn **how to learn**.

"Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find the information about it."

- Dr Samuel Johnson

- Learning publishing papers by **doing**.
  – Not merely learning **about** publishing papers.
  – To learn English and not to merely learn **about** English.

Learning publishing by doing

- Learning publishing papers by doing
- Not merely learning **about** publishing papers
- To learn English and not to merely learn **about** English
- A Chinese proverb

I hear and I forget;

I see   and I remember;

I **do**   and I **understand**.

The game is not over yet

- Publication is a never-ending game as long as we keep playing.

- Do not take **the outcome** of the publication game too seriously, although we should take **the process** (research, writing, submission, review) seriously.
  - Do our homework.
  - Be prepared to be a good loser.
  - It's just a game after all – enjoy the process!

- Be persistent.
- Be patient with ourselves.

Playing the publication game

"Our greatest glory is not in never falling,

but in getting up every time we do."

- Confucius

- Just do it!

- Yes, we can win and we will.

Good luck to us all!

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