Let's Begin to Study

September 2024

- **Be self-motivated, and communicate progress every 1-2 weeks**
- **Read textbooks**
  - Optimization: Modeling, Algorithm and Theory [Book] [Video]
  - Neural Networks and Deep Learning [Book] [Video]
- **Read papers**
  - Model-Based Deep Learning, Foundations and Trends in Signal Processing [Paper]
  - Physics-Inspired Compressive Sensing: Beyond Deep Unrolling [Paper]
  - Image Denoising: The Deep Learning Revolution and Beyond [Paper]
  - Optimization Methods for Large-Scale Machine Learning [Paper]
  - Learning to Optimize: A Primer and A Benchmark [Paper]
  - Learning Fast Approximations of Sparse Coding [Paper]
- **Try to write a short draft (may be just 1 page)**
- **Track the latest literature, for example**
  - IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence [Link]
  - Journal of Machine Learning Research [Link]
  - SIAM Journal on Optimization [Link]
  - Mathematical Programming [Link]
  - NIPS [Link]
  - ICML [Link]
- **Revise the manuscript, usually lengthy and tedious**
- **Finish paper submission, complete patents or software copyrights**
- **Think more, perhaps make greater discoveries**
  - How to propose better theories
  - How to develop faster algorithms
  - How to achieve more stable performance
- **Good luck and have a wonderful study**

Enjoy with me to explore data-driven optimization!

研究生如何学习和做研究

耿志勇 2009.9.1

1. 什么是研究生

学习从事科学研究的学生（段志生语）

艰苦奋斗的的经历？浪漫的人生经历？

入学后发现与实际与想象差别巨大：

不是那么浪漫，

不是那么富有诗意，

没有天之骄子的感觉，

不是那么众星捧月，

见不到“大师云集”，感觉不到“深厚的文化底蕴”，

博雅塔未名湖几天就看够了，

书中没有“黄金屋”，更没有“颜如玉”

与本科生的区别

本科生，被动学习：学习，考试，及格，拿文凭，找工作

研究生，主动学习：体验知识，学习创造，从事研究，提高素质，增长能力

研究生是人才吗？

研究生不是人才，优秀研究生才是人才！

应该由谁来资助？

原则：谁受益谁资助。

2. 研究生应该具备的基本素质

基本道德水准：遵纪守法，诚信，有正确的是非标准和荣辱观，不极端自私，有责任感，有集体观念，对国家、民族有认同感，懂得尊重别人，对自己有正确的定位

做人的标准：（要做学问，先学做人）

做人不要老想着自己的利益，要想着自己的责任，没有责任感的人是自私的。

做人的最低标准是对社会无害，做人的最高标准是对社会有益。

自私的人都具有如下共同的特点：

1) 什么好处都想要，什么责任都不想承担；
2) 只注重个人的感受，从不考虑别人的感受；
3) 只注重自己得到了什么，从不问自己是否付出；
4) 只要求别人尊重自己，从不尊重别人；
5) 老强调别人怎么对不起自己，却从不谈怎么对不起别人；

极端自私的人的特点：

为了满足自己的任何私欲，可以不顾脸面，不顾尊严，不顾法律，不惜动用各种资源，采用各种手段，必要时可以出卖朋友，出卖亲情，出卖国家来达到自己的目的。正所谓“点着别人的房子只是为了煮熟自己的一个鸡蛋”。

身心健康，心里年龄达到成年，有独立的人格

有一定的学习能力；

有科学研究的欲望；

有积极向上的人生理想。

3. 学风和做人上如何避免愚蠢（经常听到一些冒傻气的话，看到一些人做冒傻气的事）
不要不懂装懂（拉大旗作虎皮，仔细较真却非常无知），
不要认为别人都是傻瓜（老想着用比任何人都小的代价，取得比任何人都大的成绩），
不要认为天上会掉馅饼，（老子是研究生，国家应该高待遇养着）
不要认为别人都会像你父母那样以你为中心，（稍不顺自己的意，就认为世界末日到了）
不要想象自己是比尔盖茨，或是韩寒，（比尔盖茨大学没毕业不也成功了吗？韩寒中学没毕业不就写出“三重门”了吗？）
不要把偶然性的侥幸当做必然性的成功（使人容易误入“不劳而获”的歧途，在社会学中，真理是服从统计规律的，个别反例不具有必然性），
不要在同一个地方跌倒两次或两次以上，（聪明人通过别人的失败取得经验，普通人通过自己的失败取得经验，愚蠢的人不能通过失败取得经验）
不要对任何事情想当然，（先入为主，用偏见来看待正常的事情）
不要把别人的宽容和善意当成是软弱可欺，
不要老想着环境应该适应你，而是学会适应环境（愚蠢的想法：应该取消各种考试，应该取消 SCI 要求，应该提高研究生待遇，国家应该重视博士毕业生，）

4. 什么是导师
父母？领导？老板？朋友？合作者？
目前导师能做到的只是合作者，合作好了有可能发展成朋友。
导师与学生双向选择，双方都有权解除师生关系
老师解除师生关系不是一种处分，而是教师认为学生由于某种原因不适合再做他（她）的学生了；同样，学生解除师生关系也不意味着老师不具有导师资格，而是由于某种原因学生认为老师不在适合做他（她）的导师了。
解除关系是一件很正常的事情，是双方当事人的权利。

导师的作用：教书育人？教书难育人更难！
道德修养：部分可观，几乎不可控

学习方面：
提供学习研究经验？
帮助把握研究方向？
帮助选题？
制定研究方案？
给研究结果?
给写论文？
看管学生学习？

低能方向

生活方面：
提供助研机会？
解决家庭生活困难？
无偿提供资助？

要求过分

克服心理障碍？

其实环境的影响>>>>>>>>导师的影响

导师与学生认识问题的同异：

导师：努力刻苦学习 → 提高能力 → 提高水平 → 毕业（毕业是努力刻苦学习的结果）

学生：毕业→必要的水平→必要的能力→必要的努力学习（为了毕业就要努力刻苦学习）

5. 研究生应该如何学习

对自己如何定位？

我自卑吗？我只要能对付毕业就可以了，其他不想了。

听说**没有 SCI 也毕业了，我也…

据说做**方面的题目容易出 SCI，我也…

做这个能出 SCI 吗？出不了 SCI 怎么毕业呀？

你自信吗？别人能做到的我一定能做到，而且比他们做得好！

我为什么就不能做出优博的工作？没有证据表明我比他们差！

我在这方面不是没有优势，是因为我在这方面还没有花精力。

自信不等于自负。

以怎样的标准毕业？

优博？（最起码应该作为目标）

2 篇 SCI？（只是必要条件）

以抑郁相要挟？（达不到目的，只能自取欺辱！）

软磨硬泡、死缠烂打、撒泼打滚？（人渣！）

主动学习？老师，我想…，您看可以吗？

被动学习？老师，下一步我干啥？（我都是按你说的去做的呀，我怎么写不出论文呢？这题目太难，你都做不出来还让我做？）

混学位学生语录：

老师，什么最容易做又能毕业？（不想努力，还想天上掉馅饼）

老师，听师兄师姐们说没有文章也能毕业？（暗示我可能不写文章啊）

老师，读书报告是什么？没写过；论文是什么？没看过；（装傻）

老师，我这几天没看邮件，手机也坏了（其实换号了），寝室电话也不知怎么了就是不响（几天没回寝室了），来你办公室几次找你你都不在（耍小聪明忽悠老师）

老师，下次我一定注意（这都不一定是第几次了）

老师，我今后一定努力；（说完自己说的是什么都不知道）

老师，我忘了；（好像无所谓）

老师，我有几个问题请教您，第一个…，第二个…, ….（问题还真多呀，挺用功的？原来是其他课程老师留的作业，要记成绩的）

老师，我最近情绪不好；（潜台词：你别逼我呀）

老师，我很郁闷，经常一个人发呆；（暗示：我可能发展成抑郁）

老师，我一看书就头疼，烦躁不安；（我已经有不正常的征兆）

老师，我没有论文咋办？咋毕业呀？（开始施压，因为你是导师，应该对我毕业负责）

老师，***的论文就是导师帮他写的（暗示：老师应该给我写论文，老师只能装傻），

老师，我觉得前途渺茫；（进一步施压），
老师，我觉得活的很累，生活失去意义；（开始要挟），
老师，我家里非逼着我读研，我要拿不到学位没脸面对我妈，还不如就此…（进一步要挟），
老师，其实我并不想这样，但是…；（给自己的无耻找根据），
一旦毕业，看！哥们儿这几年多潇洒，什么都不干，该玩就玩，该泡妞就泡妞，半夜斗地主，白天一觉睡到日夕斜，学位照拿，钱照发。那帮傻帽，整天看书，念书都念傻了，也没见得比我好哪去，哥们儿这叫本事。（传道给师弟师妹）

6. 如何做研究

控制科学的特点：门槛高，在真正有能力做研究之前，需要在短时间内掌握大量的基础知识和专门知识。那种认为“看点东西就可以东拼西凑”做研究最好去买彩票（还可能中个头奖），不要做控制科学研究。

我是专家吗？应该说，每个人在某种程度上都是专家，你可能是：

摄影专家？
集邮专家？
电玩专家？
编程专家？
……

但是，做控制研究，你首先要成为控制理论某一研究方向的专家，也就是说对你要研究的问题要比别人知道的多（深入的专门知识），做不到这一点，那你距离做研究还有相当的距离。

如何读书？读多少书？

不在于读了多少书，在于掌握了多少知识，掌握的程度如何。“降龙十八掌”不必每一掌都精通，能活用前九掌就可以傲视武林了。

一本好书：“浅入深出”，起点不高，论述精辟，但是读后达到的水平很高；

一本坏书：故弄玄虚，晦涩难懂，把简单的问题复杂化，读后得不到直觉；

好书、坏书可能因人而异。

一般是读教科书入门，读专著提高水平、技能，读综述开阔视野，读论文掌握研究动向，提炼研究问题。

要写论文一定要多读论文！要写高水平论文一定要多读高水平论文！

读“大师”的书，读“名家”的论文，你才可能称为“大师”和“名家”（标准是引用率高，引领方向，经得起时间考验）

读“垃圾”只能产生“垃圾”（浪费时间、精力），除非你有“变废为宝”的本事

如何选题？

1）科研选题应该考虑的因素（毕业，科研任务，国家需求，发展后劲，学术水平，兴趣，）

2）科研选题是否有难易（yes），

问题简单吧，没有什么可做的，

问题难吧，又不会做，

有对我而言容易解决的“难题”吗？几乎没有，因为别人也不是傻子。

个别情况：对于一个对大家来说都是全新的领域，很多“移植”性工作，谁早发现，谁就收获，有可出文章的大量“处女地”，也不乏有价值的工作，但也有大量习题，垃圾可以做，有时甚至产生“井喷”，然而这种情况不会持续多长时间，因为寻找垃圾的人很多。

3）科研选题对于出 SCI 论文是否有难易(yes)，

真正解决科学问题，和多出 SCI 很难统一。解决科学问题能出 SCI，但可能不多，怎么选择？视情况而定。因为我们的工作要被不同的要求，不同的标准来衡量。

4）科研选题的意义与 SCI 论文的多少有什么关系？

科研选题是一个多维变量，SCI 只是其中的一维，其实它对科研选题的意义不具有“可观测性”，它只是具有“易观测性”（数 1，2，3，…，幼儿园小孩都会做）。

5）选题是一个迭代过程

一开始不不可能很具体，必须先做起来，随着研究的深入，选题会具体深入。

6）一个成功的选题等于完成了研究的 50%或更多

7）同样问题，不同的视角：

数学家关心其中的数学问题：可解性、存在性、唯一性，….

力学家关心其中的力学结构：构形，速度，动量，力，哈密顿原理，拉格朗日函数，勒让德变换，动量守恒，对称性，…

控制科学家关心控制问题：适定性，可控性，可观性，动态特性，控制器设计，…

应该清楚你选题关心的是什么？

下功夫与天分，创造的过程

只有下功夫，你的天分才会体现；

被动地下功夫不会有效果，要目的明确，有积极的心态；

创造需要“灵感”和机遇，灵感来源于对研究的问题深刻的理解所形成的直觉，机遇对于每个人的机会是均等的，但能否抓住机遇却引人而异，机遇更偏爱“有准备的头脑”

我有特长与短处吗？

在很大程度上，“特长”与“短处”都是以往经历“正反馈”的结果，认识到这一点，可以利用“负反馈”，克服自己的短处，有可能使其变为特长。

查文献，应该看那些文献？

怎样读文献：

泛读：了解文章的问题和结论，判断一下是否值得细读

精读：

问题：问题的产生，提炼，表述，科学抽象，与其他工作的关系，我能提炼这样的问题吗？我差在哪？

主要结果：结论，可用性，保守性（充分？必要？），理论价值，

主要方法：理论基础，技巧，解决问题的关键步骤？我能想到这样的方法吗？为什么？

读出背后的东西：问题是特例吗？在我的知识系统里有类似的问题吗？还有那些应该考虑的问题？解决问题的方法具有一般性吗？能推广吗？有值得进一步考虑的问题吗？若有，为什么作者没有考虑？

最后如果你觉得文章写的思路清晰、文笔流畅，要学习一下文章的写作风格。如果你觉得文章可读性差，找出原因，如何在你的写作中避免。

7. 面对失败和挫折

第一次失败是非常正常的；

争取下次不要犯同样的错误；

认识失败的价值，它和成功的经验一样重要，但很多时候被忽略了。利用失败和挫折校正行动是“负反馈”，这是自然界的规律。

成功的人都是走出失败的强者。

面对挫折的两种态度：

1） 鸵鸟？回避问题-----永远不能成功

2） 总结教训，找出原因，目的是下次不要因为同样的原因而失败-----如果你这能做到，最终会成功。

8. 讨论班

我为什么参加讨论班？

通过讨论班这个平台进行学术交流、探讨，

应付差事，不得不参加（给老师面子）？

我听不懂，没什么收获，见见同学，侃侃大山？

学术交流的培养；

创造性思维的锻炼；

基本技能（作报告、综述、幻灯片、）

9. 学术成果的表达

请记住：论文是给别人看的。

与谈话不同，它没有读者理解状态的反馈，不要假设读者理解能力有很强的自适应性和鲁棒性。

为什么我写的东西别人看不懂？

写给外星人？————天书？

写给自己？ ————隐私？

写给思维不正常的人？————心里辅导读物？

读者看不懂说明什么？

A． 作者水平太高（阳春白雪，和者盖寡）？

B． 作者缺乏科学表达的常识和技能？（不幸的是很多情况下是后者）

应该写给同行科技工作者：

用正常的思维逻辑：概念+推理

易犯的错误：

1）照搬自己不懂的概念，企图让别人懂————那是不可能的；

2）自己创造新概念不加解释以为别人也懂————打哑谜，把读者想象的太聪明了；

3）照搬自己不懂的方法得到的结论————非常危险；

4）将自己不懂得东西或很难的东西装作很轻松地表述为“显然”，“易证”————其实一点都不显然，自己不见得会证；

5）给连续思维的读者输入离散、跳跃事件，将蒙太奇的手法用于写作———心虚的读者会被吓到，认为自己水平不够；

6）看完整篇文章，不知作者做了什么 ———— 将别人的工作和自己的工作一股脑地柔和在一起（可能构成剽窃）；

7）一个符号有 n (n >1)种意思————你猜，就是让你看不懂！

8）废话太多 ———— 看完废话，忘记了论文的主题；

9）画的图没有标注 ———— 可能只有艺术价值；

10）前后矛盾，如“一个离散的连续系统”（应为“离散化的连续系统”），“一个静态反馈控制器的状态”（应为“带有静态反馈控制器的系统的状态”），“对任意不确定参数，存在闭环镇定控制器，则系统鲁棒镇定”（应为“存

在镇定控制器，对任意不确定参数，闭环系统稳定，则系统鲁棒镇定”）————将别人的英文错误地翻译并照抄，或套用，其实是没有搞懂；

11）编号混乱，整篇文章就两个定理却说“由定理 5 可得结论”，公式按（1），（2），…排列，却说“请见式（3.1）”；就 10 篇参考文献，却说“文献[100]给出了…”————很有可能是拷贝了其他东西的原话；

10. 希望

我赞成的一些说法：

心有多大，舞台就有多大

人生就是不断超越自我

只要我拼过，就不后悔

失败不可怕，可怕的是丧失斗志

学术论文阅读与写作

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1 论文阅读

每周坚持写学习科研总结和文献阅读笔记:

- 总结上一周的工作进展
- 课题任务类型：应用/建模，算法，理论分析，数值试验等等
- 根据课题任务，把任务分解成本周可以实现的小任务，哪些是要学习的分析技巧/算法技巧，哪些是要研究的内容。
- 理清课题主要贡献，如何寻找课题切入点，目前主要困难，有哪些解决策略
- 坚持写作，整理论文草稿，读书笔记等等
- 及时总结讨论内容，整合到科研总结里
- 主动跟导师或合作者更新和沟通进展。

1.1 总体原则

- 读厚：按照下面三步曲原则详细读论文，不单要读懂论文本身，遇到不懂的地方，还需要去查找文献
  - 勤用google: 搜索词组或句子用" " 扩起来，指定文件类型filetype:pdf，指定网址: site:。例如："online optimization" filetype:pdf site: http://www.jmlr.org/
  - google scholar: scholar.google.com
  - 数据库：http://www.ams.org/mathscinet/
  - 文献管理工具：bibdesk (Mac OSX), JabRef。它们也提供了很方便的文献查询工具，可以对接一些常用数据库直接查询
  - 坚持浏览arxiv等文献相关网站，可以订阅邮件，接受固定周期推送
    - http://www.arxiv.org
    - http://www.optimization-online.org
    - Mathematical Programming
    - SIAM Journal on Optimization
    - SIAM Journal on Scientific Computing
    - SIAM Journal on Imaging Sciences
    - SIAM Journal on Matrix Analysis and Applications
    - Journal of Machine Learning Research
    - NIPS 网站

    - ICML 网站
    - 其它一些相关的杂志网页
    - 相关领域研究人员的网页
    - 课程网页，如：http://suvrit.de/mit/optml++/index.html
  - 读书报告：按读文献不同阶段准备读书报告，不断完善，需要回答三步曲的问题。不偷懒，不同部分可以用在自己学术论文，学位论文，综述等等
  - 精读与略读。其中略读是精读步骤的简化
- **读薄**：按照下面三步曲原则详细读论文，要能收回来
  - 读完之后一定要简要及时总结。一两句话的概括，一段话的概括，这些在自己写文章时的introduction 等地方用到。
  - 在一定积累之后，可以找出文献直接的区别与联系，寻找自己课题的指导
- 细心，有耐心，持之以恒
- 科研遇到问题怎么办?
  - 放松一下：体育运动，看电影，找个好吃的，找朋友侃大山...
  - 找找相关文献，参见“读厚”原则，运用泛读方法
  - 列提纲，分解问题，哪些能解决，哪些不能解决，哪些需要解决，问题归类，从熟悉和简单问题入手
  - 问题化简，简化简化再简化成熟悉的问题解决之，然后一点点添加复杂度解决之，如此反复
  - 参考“阅读三步曲”里的“**总结，思考与扩展**”
  - 尝试该课题的其它事情，比如理论上有困难先做数值实验，数值实验有困难先做理论问题。
  - 尝试考虑其它问题

1.2 阅读三步曲

- **初读/粗读**
  - 粗略浏览，顺序不一定是从头到尾，先读熟悉的，不熟悉的略读或跳过
  - 关注主要结论，问题的描述，主要定理，主要算法，主要数值实验
  - introduction 往往比较抽象，可以略读，后期再推敲。写作的时候introduction 通常是最后写的，读的时候也可以反过来
- **仔细阅读和思考**
  - introduction：研究什么问题，文献里已有哪些方法，这些方法存在哪些问题，作者的理论或方法是哪些，作者的主要贡献是哪些
  - abstract，introduction，conclusion 里claim 了什么主要结论? 这三部分都是简略的概括文章研究的问题以及贡献，但详细程度不太一样，侧重点分别有哪些?
  - 正文部分：
    - 所研究问题的详细表述和定义，问题的基本性质（还包括文章里没有写的），比如（最优）解的性质，存在性，唯一性
    - 理论文章：有哪些理论问题，主要有哪些假设，理论上的主要结论，证明的主要技术。任务：读明白，能写出证明
    - 算法文章：算法motivation, 算法的具体描述，算法的理论性质，比如收敛性，收敛速度。算法的主要技术，理论证明的主要技术。任务：能推导出算法
  - 数值实验：程序如何实现的，算法的参数有哪些，测试算例是哪些，作者是否提供测试程序和数据? 测试算例是如何设计的，主要的数值实验结论有哪些。任务：复制数值实验结果

- **总结，思考与扩展**
  - 研究问题: 问题描述和定义是否清晰，简化形式有哪些，扩展形式有哪些
  - 理论文章：作者有没有做到claim的理论结果，假设是否合理，假设简化情况如何？假设加强情况下如何？比文献里结果好在哪些地方？哪些地方是否可以做得更好，证明是否可以简化。是否可以推广到其它问题
  - 算法文章：作者有没有做到claim的理论结果，算法的假设和适用范围，比文献里算法好在哪些地方？哪些地方是否可以做得更好，如何改进算法，是否有更好的算法，是否可以推广到其它问题
  - 数值实验：数值实验是否解决核心理论问题和算法问题，测试算例是否有借鉴意义，是否可以解决其它问题
  - 文章的精华在哪里？我如何解决这个问题？

2 论文写作

- **语法问题**
  - 主谓宾原则。每一个句子都应该有完整的主谓宾语。负责的句子特别要仔细检查。如果复制的句子写不清楚，先拆成简单的句子，然后再考虑组装成复杂的句子。
  - 初稿可以比较随意，把能写的都写下来，然后再一遍一遍的修改中慢慢改进。主动的态度永远最重要，不能等着老师找你修改
  - 学习文献的写法，拷贝下来，利用语法知识，改写成自己所需要的形式
  - 句子表达的多样化：修改一些主要的词或短语，修改句式，修改从句的表达等等
  - 多用google 查询，参考读厚原则。不要怕麻烦，开始阶段要敢于逐字逐句查询
  - 多查数学字典
    http://bicmr.pku.edu.cn/~wenzw/MathEnglishDict.html
  - 严禁直接拷贝！学会如何合理改写
- **组织问题**
  - 总体原则：有条理，摆事实，讲道理，讲到位
  - 思考：中文能写清楚么？中文能表达完整么？
  - 写哪些内容？参考阅读三步曲。下面是一个典型的写法（比较八股）
    - abstract 是introduction 从不同侧面的缩写。
    - introduction：研究什么问题，文献里已有哪些方法，这些方法存在哪些问题，我们的理论或方法是哪些，我们的主要贡献是哪些，本文的organization。上述每一个问题基本上分别一段
  - 正文部分，Preliminary：问题的详细表述和定义，问题的基本性质，已有方法的一些综述等等
  - 正文部分，理论文章：理论问题表述，引理，定理的证明
  - 正文部分，算法文章：算法motivation, 算法的具体描述，算法的理论性质，比如收敛性，收敛速度。
  - 数值实验：算法的参数有哪些，测试算例描述，数值结果以图或表格形式表述，主要结论。图中数字字体应该基本上与正文字体大小一致，线条的粗细和marker 应该清晰可辨，原则上是打印出来能非常直观
  - conclusion 也是introduction 从不同侧面的缩写，与abstract略不同。conclusion 还可以有一些展望
  - reference 参考文献一定要规范，学会使用bibtex, 管理自己的参考文献库
- 段落内部的组织。第一句一般为中心句子。句子之间推敲哪些先写，哪些后写。哪些是原因，哪些是结果。
- 段落之间的组织。

- section 之间的组织。
- motivation 应该讲清楚。算法描述之前，定理和引理等理论结果描述之前应该有解释性语言，不能只是公式。
- 冰冻三尺，非一日之寒。从读书报告开始，一步步改进，每一次有改进
- **典型的一些语法错误**
  - a, an, the 的用法，什么时候加它们，什么时候不加
  - 标点符号。如果一句话是公式结尾，也应该有合适的标点符号
  - 待续....

How to Publish in Top Journals*

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Abstract

In response to popular demands, this brief note is provided for the benefit of all academic authors. The original intent was to produce a book of advice, but time is a scarce commodity and you may have to wait indefinitely for a book-length summary. This brief manual provides useful suggestions for today's authors. The goal is to foster the greatest good to the greatest number of people. If this note is useful to you, please tell your friends about it. If you follow most of these rules, the probability of achieving tenure or promotion may increase significantly. If most authors acquired the basic skills mentioned here, they would then be competing in terms of the beauty of their ideas, not in terms of cosmetic skills. Please note that the advice contained here may not necessarily improve the chances your research papers will be published. By downloading or acquiring a copy of this guide, you agree that: In no event shall the author be liable for any indirect, incidental, collateral, exemplary, consequential, or special damages or losses arising out of your use of rules suggested in this guide.

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How to Publish in Top Journals

I. INTRODUCTION

Publishing technology has changed drastically in recent years. The advent of the personal computers and laser printers has lowered the technical barriers of publication. Economists are now producing more papers than they were a couple of decades ago. Consequently, top journals are being inundated with manuscripts.

Journal editors have become extremely risk averse; they are more concerned with the risk of accepting low-quality articles than with the possibility of rejecting good articles.

1. Purpose of this Manual

Ideally, the decision to publish should be based solely on the ideas contained in the papers. In practice, the decision is affected by other nonsubstantive and cosmetic factors. If all authors were equally skillful in presenting their ideas, they would be competing essentially in terms of the merit of ideas, rather than the art of presentation.

This manual will advise authors on how to prepare papers to improve their chances for acceptance in top journals.

2. Why is the journal acceptance rate so low?

(1). Among the papers submitted to ranking journals, 1/3 or less receive mildly favorable reports. (This generally depends on the quality of the journal and the referees.) The rest do not receive favorable recommendations.

(2). If two referees are employed, the chance that a typical paper of average quality will get a favorable recommendation from both referees is about 11% (= 1/9).

(3). There is no such thing as good luck in publication. Painstaking work, coupled with careful risk taking, is required for success.

All referees are not equal. Comments of a well-known referee weigh more heavily than those of a lesser-known referee. You should be aware of which referee is more important.

When a paper is rejected, the editors paid more attention to the negative than the positive aspects of your paper.

If you eliminate or reduce the negative elements, the good ideas in the paper will far overshadow the shortcomings and your paper is more likely to be accepted.

3. Why is your acceptance rate lower than others?

(1). You may lack experience. However, this can be remedied.

(2). You may need to submit more papers. Volume also increases the acceptance rate because of learning by doing.

(3). Identify the cause and act accordingly. There might be biases against you based on race, sex, nationality, or schooling. For instance, if a university journal has a reported acceptance rate of 10% but pre-allocates half the space to its faculty and immediate students, your acceptance rate is 20% if you are in the preferred class, and 5% or lower if you are not.

(4). You may not be able to eliminate existing biases, but you can avoid them.

II. GENERAL PUBLICATION STRATEGIES

1. Diversify your research portfolio

Average wait for an acceptance decision = 3 years.

Average wait for a rejection = 6 to 8 months.

Survival is more important than glory in the early stages of your career.

Diversifying the research portfolio is particularly important during the first five or six years of your teaching career when each publication counts heavily.

Diversify research topics for possible publication.

If you have a solid hit in one area, then redouble your effort to establish your name as an expert in that field before you move into another field.

Writing several papers in a very narrow area is risky. It is like putting all your eggs in one basket.

Continuing to write papers in the same narrow area without clear evidence of success is risky.

2. Concentrate on one or two fields

Normally, you should not select more than two fields of specialization. Research economies of scale often may require your undiluted attention in a single field.

Choose, at most, two or three focused areas within your field of specialization. Then pursue those topics until you produce a couple of publications.

If you have published no papers in one area for three years, then consider switching to another topic.

3. Generate one or two papers from your thesis

You invested two or more years writing your thesis.

Try to generate a couple of papers from the most important chapters of the thesis. This is easier than writing a totally new paper from scratch.

Work jointly with your advisor to help market your papers.

4. Maintain a stock of papers under review constantly

If the acceptance rate of the top-ranking journals is 15%, one needs about 7 papers under review at all times to have one paper accepted per year at the targeted journals.

If your goal is to get 10 papers accepted in the first 5 years of your career, you need about a dozen papers under review at all times.

Half a dozen papers should be under review at all times for untenured authors. This does not mean that you should write 7 new papers each year.

5. Don't put two good ideas in one paper

Separate them into two papers.

Do not try to put down everything you know about the subject in one paper. What will you do next?

As the paper's length increases beyond 15 pages, the chance of acceptance shrinks geometrically.

When a topic is appropriately split into two papers, the probability of getting at least one of them accepted more than doubles.

You also will get a paper accepted sooner.

If x = original length, and p = probability of acceptance, then

$$p(x/2) = 2p(x) + a, \text{ where } a > 0 \text{ and } x > 15 \text{ pages.}$$

The alpha (a) factor:

Editors like short papers.

The chance that a referee will detect a mathematical error declines.

Referees will return the report faster.

The chance that a referee will misunderstand the paper also decreases.

6. Approach different types of journals

Sending all papers to top journals is risky.

Sending all papers to low-quality journals also is unsatisfactory. You will regret it when the papers are accepted!

Your curriculum vitae should contain some publications in the top journals.

Quantity of publications also is important.

Having three papers in different journals is better than three in one journal, if the relative quality of the journals is the same.

7. Write clearly

The main assumptions and results should be explained clearly. If there are many assumptions, present them together in one place. Do not bury them in long paragraphs.

Define every symbol when it is first introduced. Otherwise, the referees will be frustrated, and you won't get a favorable report.

If many symbols are introduced to present your model, it is a good idea to define all symbols together and display them in one place so that the referees would not waste time hunting for them.

Clearly state the contributions of the paper, relative to the literature, in the concluding remarks.

8. Learn word processing skills and master other relevant software programs

Be independent of secretaries. They do not work 24 hours a day.

Word processing skills are particularly helpful when the amount of revision is minimal.

Researchers without computer skills will be an endangered species in this century.

9. Scan current journals

Keep up with the current literature (e.g., EconLit).

Using the potential key words, search to see if others have written papers on the same or similar subjects.

By not duplicating what others have done, you will save time and effort.

Subscribe to a couple of journals in your field of interest, rather than general journals.

General journals are not cost effective as a source of research information. Fewer and fewer articles in general journals are relevant for your research.

Utilize the libraries for other journals.

Social Science Research Network features news about papers as soon as they are accepted; you can have the latest information about publications in your field.

10. Present papers at conferences before submission

Present your papers at regional, national, or international conferences. You may get surprisingly valuable feedback.

This also is an important way for you to become familiar with others working in the same area.

Presenting papers within one's department is not effective. Except in top schools, most of the faculty in a typical department with 20 or fewer members are not familiar with the subject, and with due respect to their expertise, they generally are not qualified to make substantive comments on your topic.

11. Do not distribute unpublished papers to strangers (at big conferences)

If you do, your desire to become well-known may be temporarily gratified, but the penalty can be harsh later.

Some people might steal your idea and submit a closely related paper sooner than you do.

You get no credit.

Distributing papers is okay in a closed circle of researchers, where everybody knows each other.

12. Only the tough get going

One gets rejection letters more often than not. This is inevitable!

Develop a thick skin and be a good loser. This game is not for the faint-hearted.

If you cannot swallow rejection easily, don't submit papers.

A good paper deserves at least three chances at publication in ranking journals.

If you ignore a rejected paper more than one month, you are likely to lose interest. Do something about it.

Bad luck eventually comes to an end.

13. Get to know one hundred people active in your field

There are about a hundred people in your field who are likely to be referees of your papers.

Prepare a list of one hundred active people in your main research areas. Try to meet them within a five-year period.

Present papers at, or at least attend, two professional meetings a year.

When presenting papers or attending regional, national, or international meetings, try to get to know these people. How? (Think!) This is your best opportunity for networking.

14. Maintain contacts

Maintain contacts with other economists via telephone, fax, or e-mail. Do not send copies of your papers to them unless requested to do so.

What to do when they don't respond? Think!

You also need these contacts later: they can write letters of recommendation when you seek promotion and tenure.

II-I Articles and Books

15. A journal article is preferable to a book

Don't publish a book, at least not before getting tenure.

Readers find it easy to remember if your papers were published in journals because they are often abbreviated like AER, JPE, RIE, etc. They might even remember the years of publication.

They won't remember your books, unless the titles are extremely short and sexy.

15.1 Life of a publication

The life of a book is about 1 to 2 years.

The life of a journal article is about 10 years.

Publishers will not spend much money to advertise your book because profit margins are small.

Accordingly, most economists do not know whether you published a book, let alone know the title.

Bragging to your colleagues about your recent book is like introducing yourself by long names with 10 or more words.

Authors who have published an article in the same journal feel friendly toward you. It creates a bond among the authors.

Book authors operate alone.

Researchers know that books do not go through the refereeing process.

15.2 Weight of a publication

Your department or division may not clearly specify quantified weights to evaluate your research.

But rest assured that they are there; a given number of papers in certain journals or certain ranks, etc. These standards are developed by consensus, and you can find these standards by checking the records of those who received tenure recently.

Journal rankings often are used to evaluate the quality of your research.

All things considered, the following weights could be used:

1 = an article in a good journal

0.5 - 1 = a whole book, maybe 2 if it is very popular.

0.1 = a chapter in a book someone else edited.

Textbooks do not count.

Handbooks and some special series might be treated like a journal because of their long shelf life (10 + years).

Do not give away your precious paper as a chapter of a regular book, unless

it appeals to your altruistic desire to help others.

16. A journal article first

First, publish your original idea in an article.

Then maybe in a book, not vice versa.

Journals will not knowingly publish an article if the substance was published in a book previously.

17. Cultivate coauthors

Find seasoned coauthors with publication experience and share the glory.

Working with your advisors is a good idea, at least for the first few years after receiving a Ph.D.

You have to become independent at some point, though.

Acting alone is a risky strategy, especially for those just out of graduate school.

With seasoned coauthors, the probability of acceptance will likely more than double.

Through your coauthors, you may be introduced to an established group of economists.

You also may learn how to write better papers.

17.1 Weight of coauthored articles

Whatever rankings are used, given the quality, the following weights may be used more or less as a guide to estimate the overall impact of joint articles:

1 = an article (sole author).

0.75 = first author in a joint paper.

0.7 = second author in a joint paper.

0.5 = an author in a paper with three authors.

1/n = four or more authors. (Don't do this, except in certain fields [e.g., agricultural economics], where it is more acceptable. You will be included in "et al.")

18. Make an agreement with coauthors ex ante

It is best to divide up the work with coauthors ex ante. This minimizes the chance of free riding when the paper is complete or accepted.

Be considerate when determining the order of authors.

To assure a long-term relationship, alternate the order of appearance, especially when the contributions are roughly equal.

If you insist on alphabetical order just because your name precedes the others, they may not come back to you for further collaboration.

Another practical idea: flip a coin.

19. Maintain collaboration

If a personality conflict develops, collaboration does not work.

It takes time and effort to cultivate relationship with coworkers. If you have found a good working relationship, don't tamper with it to obtain small gains.

If you do seek small gains, it is difficult to restore a good relationship should you change your mind later.

20. Be patient with inactive coauthors

Be tolerant of your coauthors.

Remember that the sum of subjective contributions of coauthors of a paper always exceeds 100%.

Removing an inactive coauthor from the paper may not give you peace of mind, especially if it is done insensitively.

Keep pace with your coauthors. If a coauthor does not contribute anything, caution must be exercised. Often the animosity generated is not worth the gain.

If a joint work is being terminated because of unforeseen developments, make it clear who holds the ownership of the disputed papers. This eliminates untold misery later.

II-II Choosing Topics

21. Do not waste time on dead or dying topics

If your most recent references in a projected paper are ten years old, it will be difficult to publish it. It is a dead issue. Do not start such a paper (until you get tenure)!

If the most recent references closely related to your paper are 5 years old, it is a dying issue. Editors are reluctant to accept such papers, even if the referees recommend publication.

It is difficult for the editor to find suitable referees for outdated topics.

Your inability to find sufficient references indicates

You have not read the literature.

Others are not interested in the topic, hence, it is unlikely to get published.

No problem! Dig further.

If the work is completed already, cite some papers that are more recent.

22. Do not write papers with breakthrough ideas at first

Avoid writing about your breakthrough ideas, at least in the early stage of your career, unless your mentor is the editor of a major journal.

Papers with breakthrough ideas are not often published.

Wait until you get tenure to tackle breakthrough ideas.

"I told my own young colleagues that they should preferably start off with the received wisdom with some changes until they get their tenure." -Douglas North, 1993 Nobel Laureate in Economic Science (see Nyaw and Yu, 1995).

If you do advance breakthrough ideas your papers will be rejected, and they might reappear in a modified, clearly written paper by someone else later.

After you are established, perhaps you can tackle breakthrough ideas, and become better known, instead of publishing many papers with minor ideas.

Or as you gain more experience, you may find that the ideas turn out to be trivial.

23. Extend existing literature

The bulk of papers published today are modifications of the existing literature or tests of existing theories.

Something in the paper must be original.

Duplication is not an extension of knowledge.

24. Write something creative

A journal's primary goal is to publish original ideas.

A good journal is interested in disseminating new ideas, not in publishing papers that elaborate some existing ideas or examine the implications of a minor change in assumptions.

These papers only show that some results do not necessarily hold. Such efforts are basically a comment on someone else's paper.

25. Mix ingredients of other papers

How does one extend the literature? Suppose there are two important papers in the literature,

p_1 = {A, B, C, and D}, p_2 = {C, D, and E}

where A, B, ... are ingredients. Let p_{new} = {A, B, E} be a new paper.

Does the new combination make sense? Does it describe an important economic phenomenon in a certain country or does it capture an interesting situation?

If p_{new} = {A, C, X} where X is totally new, and if it makes sense, it may be an original idea.

Original papers add something new and dare to eliminate some old notions. Do not worry about compatibility with old papers.

26. Write on interesting subjects

There must be an interesting story, a story that nonexperts—who would skip all the equations—would find intriguing.

Equations should not dominate the paper. People lose interest.

Controversies and debates stimulate reader interest.

Before writing, answer the question: what new ideas or results does this paper offer?

You have to demonstrate that there is some interest in the topic on which you are working.

II-III Comments or Notes

27. Avoid writing comments on other papers

Writing comments is risky because you are at the mercy of the original author.

If a comment or note is rejected, you cannot send it anywhere without substantial rewriting; it is too short.

When a comment or note is rejected, abandon the note or expand it to a full-blown paper.

If you add something new while making the original author shine, you might succeed. For instance, if you name the result after the original author, it makes everybody happy.

If you point out errors in the original paper, your referee (the original author) will find something wrong in your comments also, whether they are real, imaginary, or spurious.

Occasionally, writing comments is okay (once every few years). But do it quickly, while the editor's memory is still fresh.

A safer approach is to write an independent paper.

AER has a standing policy not publishing comments, even to correct errors. Remember Robert Fulghum's advice "Clean up your mess"?

Do not develop a habit of writing comments on others' work.

28. Do not correct small errors others make

It is dangerous. This practice rarely earns you respect.

You may not be right. As you rush to prove your points, you may not have grasped all the fine points of the original paper.

Even if you are right, the original author may lurk in the trenches where he/she can stage a counterattack and damage your credibility in the future.

You also don't like to have your errors pointed out.

Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? (Matthew 7:3)

The referee may then be negative toward all your future papers.

Communicate with the original author before you submit your comment. If you are diplomatic and fortunate, you might acquire a friend who would look at your papers with favor in the future. On the other hand, you may find an enemy who

will always find fault with your future papers.

III. WRITING STRATEGIES

III-I Cover Page and Cover Letter

1. Prepare a perfect cover page and an abstract

The cover page should contain complete correspondence information about the submitting author:

postal address

telephone and fax numbers

e-mail address

If you move, give your new address to the editorial office.

If updating a paper, give the current date (or month and year).

Do *not* mention when a paper was first written and when it was revised. The editor can tell how often the paper has been rejected, and may erroneously conclude that it should receive the same treatment. If you really need the information for yourself, you can add such things as a non-printing comment. It is probably more convenient to maintain a separate record that shows the status of all your unpublished papers.

If the referee figures out that the paper has been rejected more than once, he/she is more likely to recommend rejection.

The abstract and the paper should be prepared together.

When the paper is finally accepted, the abstract has to be written, but your memory is hazy. It is better to do it when your memory is fresh.

The abstract should appear on the second page. Then if the editor rips off the cover page, the abstract will still reach the referee.

Eliminate typographical errors in the cover page and the abstract. This is an absolute minimum courtesy. If there is an error, it is a sign of gross neglect.

Of course, you have to check the spelling for the entire paper, and you should do that every time you revise the paper.

2. Don't explain how important the paper is in the cover letter

Editors do not read it.

Maybe the secretaries do.

This is a signal that you lack experience and that you are not confident.

One or two explanatory sentences may not hurt. (You may pass the initial screening.)

III-II Introduction

3. Devote half the writing time to the introduction and conclusion

Once the ideas of a publishable paper are roughly formulated, writing should be done within a month. Otherwise, you lose interest. You may even forget about the entire paper.

About half of your writing time should be devoted to writing the main body of the paper, which should be done first.

The remainder of your effort should be devoted to writing the introduction and conclusion.

4. Get their attention early

Provide evidence of why it is interesting (i.e., why it should be published) in the introduction.

If an apple does not taste good at the first bite, one simply throws it away without giving any thought on the nutritional value hidden in the apple.

Likewise, most referees make up their mind at the first bite, i.e., within 15 minutes of reading a paper.

If the referees don't like a paper, they begin to look for reasons to justify why the paper should be rejected.

If the referee loses interest from reading the introduction, he/she might postpone reading the paper.

If a paper is set aside, it could be several months later when the referee picks up the paper again, probably if and when he/she receives a reminder about the review. This is one of the major reasons why it takes a long time to get a report.

Do not repeat the concluding remarks in the introduction.

5.The introduction should be two pages or less

If the introduction is more than two pages, it is too long.

Shorten it to 2 pages or 1/6 of the paper, whichever is less.

If you write more than two pages, then either

you are discoursing a lot about other people, in which case you are sending a signal that your contribution is minor, relative to the literature, or

you are discussing too many technical details, which do not belong in the introduction.

6. Discuss real world examples

Pass the relevance test by providing citations, statistics, or anecdotes of real world examples.

Then the referee cannot say the paper is uninteresting, the most common reason for rejection.

If the referee says it is not interesting, it is a value judgment and there is no appeal! No editors will publish an uninteresting paper.

One important purpose of the introduction is to prevent the referees from making that disparaging remark.

Without this sound footing in the real world, your paper may give the impression to readers that it provides a profound solution to nonexistent problems.

7. Imitate skillful writers

Observe how other successful writers introduce their topic, cite literature, and get on with their task.

Imitate their words and phrases, and modify them to suit your purpose.

It is easier to imitate what someone else has written than to create a totally new paragraph.

8. Do not plagiarize

The word “plagiarize” means to “steal and pass off as one’s own (the ideas or words of another).” (Webster’s Third International Dictionary, 1986)

Remember Robert Fulghum’s advice “Don’t take things that aren’t yours.”

If you do, you will pay dearly later when your work is published. You are lucky if the paper is not published!

If you are quoting statements made by another writer, use identifying quotation marks.

Some people suggest that one should not copy more than three consecutive words without identifying quotation marks. This is extreme advice that no one can follow.

Do not copy, but summarize the contributions of other writers in your own words to the extent that they are related to the subject of your paper.

Mention the cited author with year of publication in the text and give the exact source in the reference section.

9. Do not use I

Some authors do get away with I.

Referees are generally biased against egocentric persons.

Take the writing task seriously, not yourself.

"The paper achieves...." sounds softer and more humble than "I did this."

Avoid starting a paragraph with I.

10. Create a packet of related articles for each paper

All cited and other related papers must be at hand.

This practice saves time, especially when writing the introduction and conclusion, and when you revise the paper.

If you maintain the background packet, you do not have to go to the library every time you revise the paper.

11.Treat others generously

Emphasize the importance of the paper being written, but not at the expense of others. They are probably your referees and they are sensitive.

Don’t hit people (Robert Fulghum). Do not hurt their feelings.

When mentioning the works of other persons, avoid using negative terms.

Examples:

"The deficiency of Smith's approach is..."

"The problems of these papers..."

Papers that attack others are likely to be rejected, especially when the authors or their friends become your referees.

12.Avoid predominantly citing your own works

The referees may think you are a self-centered clod. There are others who have contributed to the literature.

If the first page only mentions your past work, and not that of others, it means either

you are probably digging into an area in which no one else is interested—this implication is bad—or

you are an egotist who disregards the contributions of others, which is even worse.

13.Cite the papers of potential referees in the introduction

In many situations, whether your paper is accepted or not primarily depends on who referees it.

If you offend the referee by your thoughtless comments, this paper and many of your future papers will have no place to go.

Important references should be mentioned in the first page.

Hopefully, the editor will read the first page (or the next) when choosing the referees.

The editor may choose referees from those mentioned in the introduction and references.

Works of potential referees should be mentioned in the introduction, rather than buried deep in footnotes or the main body.

14.Give (accurate) credit generously to the most likely referees

Be generous to all authors cited, but particularly to those who are likely to be referees.

Explain why their works are significant for your analysis.

Write one or two sentences about the contributions of each of the most likely referees and how their works are related to yours.

This takes up less than 1% of the space, but it can affect the probability of acceptance significantly.

15.Find quotations from well-known authors

This strategy increases the credibility of the paper.

For instance, if John Maynard Keynes or Kenneth Arrow said something about the topic, it is difficult for the referee to argue that your paper is uninteresting.

Quoting a live, famous person is more effective; his or her students might be referees.

Do not quote dead people too often; they won't be your referees. (No pun intended.)

Do not quote yourself. This implies narcissism or lack of exposure to the thinking of other economists.

16.Do not be apologetic

You may acknowledge the limitations of the approach only once in the conclusion.

But do not apologize for what the paper cannot do.

The more you mention to the referees what the paper does not do, the less contribution it seems to make to the literature.

III-III Preparing the Main Body

17.Prepare a rough outline before writing

Sketch briefly the content of each section. Then generate the text. Smooth out the connections. Without this rough blueprint, the paper often evolves in a different

direction than you intended.

This blueprint reduces the chances that you will lose direction and dwell too much upon minor points.

This sketch needs to be changed as you go.

18.Start writing before the paper is finished in your head

The precise connection of words from beginning to end cannot be done in your head, except by a few geniuses like Shakespeare.

A 15-page paper may contain about 4 - 5,000 words. Writing a paper is like stringing pearls to make a necklace. There is an optimum order for these pearls to form a paper, and some pearls are better left out.

Begin the main body of the paper with empirical or theoretical results. Then create the introduction and conclusion.

Tables and references may be added as needed.

19.Do not read too much

Do not read too much before you begin to write. It can interfere with your own thinking and writing.

Imagine how much time a prolific writer would spend reading the contributions of other people.

It is impossible to read every paper ever written on a subject.

Remember your goal is to write and publish a paper, not to read everything.

You have other important things to do (e.g., taking care of spouse and children)!

If your family is neglected, what good is your paper?

If you read a dozen papers on a topic, you should have enough material to write a paper. Now add your own ideas to this base of knowledge.

20.Develop consistent and simple notations

Invest enough time to design efficient notations for your papers.

Do this not just for one paper, but for most of your papers. This helps you remember when you revise a paper.

If the notations are confusing, the paper cannot be very illuminating.

Each paper may have some notations that are specifically tailored for the task. But the variables should come from a well-designed and consistent set of notations so that you may readily remember what they stand for.

21.Strike a balance between theory and applications

A theoretical paper should say something about policies, applications, or empirical work.

An empirical paper should say something about the theory that led to the empirical work.

Check the preferences of the journals that you are considering.

22.Divide long paragraphs

If there are two or more ideas in a single paragraph, split them up.

Break up long paragraphs even if they contain a single idea.

Readers tend to skip long paragraphs. They discourage referees and readers from reading the paper.

The eyes of readers are subconsciously looking for open space. This is why important equations should be displayed, rather than buried in the text.

No paragraph should be longer than half a page.

As a general rule, a paragraph should have more than two sentences.

23.Each full page should have more than two paragraphs

A paragraph extending over a page indicates that you are not an experienced writer.

Referees and readers skip long paragraphs.

When there are many equations, it is easy to forget to control the length of a paragraph.

24.Summarize theoretical findings in propositions

If you do not want the referees to miss important results, repeat them in propositions.

The referees do not read every word you write. They are more likely to read the displayed items.

Minimize the number of words in a given proposition.

25.Use tables to summarize results or to compare with the literature

Tables provide another way to catch the attention of referees.

Avoid too many numbers in one table.

Do not present more than three tables, except in empirically oriented papers.

Do not present more than six tables even in empirical papers.

26.Minimize numbered equations

There should be some equations. Otherwise, the referees might think that it is a purely descriptive paper.

But do not include too many equations. A paper with more than 30 equations seems difficult to read.

Do not display every equation. Less important equations can be buried in the text.

Not all equations need to be numbered.

Use primes or other variations such as (3') or (7a), (7b), etc. to group related equations.

If there are more than a score of equations, move long derivations to the Appendix.

27.Simplify figures

A (good) figure is worth a thousand words.

Do not use too many curves, lines, or labels.

Ten years after publication, readers may not remember anything about a paper, not equations nor derivations. But they may recall a figure.

As a general rule, a paper should not contain more than two figures and rarely more than three.

Too many figures suggest that the paper represents a low-tech research effort.

III-IV Conclusion

28.Summarize the contribution briefly in the conclusion

A paper needs a concluding remark. A note does not, but it may include such a remark.

Mention the limitations of the results (without being negative).

Discuss how the theory may be extended in certain areas.

The referees may be interested in writing a related paper. If they are honest, they would need your paper as a basis, and hence are likely to recommend acceptance. That—stimulating a reader to extend your research—is your contribution.

Compare your results to those in the current literature.

If the literature does not have comparable results, discuss how your paper is related to the literature.

Do not repeat some portion of the introduction in the conclusion.

29.Discuss policy implications

Explain how the theory applies to real world examples.

Example: In practice, A is used, but you recommend B, etc.

Do not rehash what you already said in the main body of the paper. Especially, do not copy and paste it in the conclusion.

If you do, the referees will know you are not articulate.

Present the bottom line. Mention the implications for policy makers, practitioners, or other researchers.

III-V Abstract and Title

30.Write a provokative abstract

Write the abstract only after the conclusion is written.

The referees read it more often than any other paragraph in the paper.

In 15 seconds, you have to convince the referees (and readers) that they should proceed with the rest of the paper.

So do an excellent job here.

If it is boring, your paper is hopeless.

31.Choose an interesting title

Give the paper an eye-catching title.

If the title is boring, readers will avoid your paper even when it is published. The paper won't generate many citations.

Never try to squeeze the content of the paper in the title.

Giving a title to a paper is like naming your child. The title should be short.

One line is best. Never use more than two lines.

Avoid "On the...". It implies that the paper is actually a note. Because it is on a well-known subject, the editors are led to believe that the paper probably contains little that is new.

III-VI Reference

32.Minimize references

An inexperienced writer rarely resists the temptation to cite all papers that have ever been written on the subject.

This practice may be appropriate for a doctoral dissertation, but not for a journal paper.

An ideal number of references is one dozen. A practical upper limit is twenty.

For all papers, follow the reference style of a well-known journal in the field.

Do not revise the reference style each time you submit the paper. The acceptance decision is not based on the style of your references.

After the paper is accepted, you can use the style of the journal in question.

33.Include references to authors who are known to like your papers

Perhaps they might become referees.

Include references to people with whom you have had favorable correspondence.

This is not to bias opinions, but to get a fair hearing.

Referees have to make a conscious effort and must be alert in order to be fair to unknown authors.

Include liberal references to famous economists, dead or alive, who are unlikely to be your referees.

34.Delete or hide the references to undesirable potential referees

Even with double blind reviews, one can often guess the identity of the referee from the report because of references and writing style, etc.

Editors often select referees from your references.

If some referees consistently recommend rejection of your papers, drop their papers from your references (in the initial submission).

You can add them later (after the paper is accepted).

This may require rewriting the introduction with a somewhat different perspective, but it is probably worth the effort.

Depending on the journal, you may ask the editor to eliminate some persons from the pool of referees. But you should ask informally (e.g., via e-mail) in advance if it is okay.

35.Cite your own articles

An article is considered "important" if it is cited 30 times or more by others.

Cite your own related papers, provided that they were published or are forthcoming in a prestigious journal. Others may look up your other papers and

cite them.

But do not cite too many.

If you have a good reputation, this practice can be useful because the referee may figure out that it is your paper.

Do not cite your own unpublished papers or publications in an obscure journal. The editors and referees may conclude that the current paper also should be published in such journals.

Do not cite your dissertation. The referees will know you are inexperienced.

Do not cite someone else's dissertation. The referees may erroneously conclude that you are him or her or a close associate, all of whom are inexperienced.

III-VII Endnotes and Appendix

36.Put technical, detailed comments in notes

Combined endnotes, tables, references, and appendix or appendices should be smaller than the main body of the paper. Otherwise, readers wonder "where is the beef?"

The main text should be free from technical details, and the major ideas should emerge from reading it.

Intellectual clutter should be relegated to closets, i.e., notes.

Use notes to insert references and to make points that do not distract typical readers.

No more than 10 endnotes should be provided. Avoid them like the plague (Horowitz, 1995).

Notes should be short, not exceeding a page and never more than two pages.

37.Put long derivations in an extended note or an appendix.

Long derivations of an essential result or an equation which may be over half a page can be included in an extended footnote, if there is risk of boring readers.

If there are two or more extended notes, they should be converted to an appendix.

If the derivation is purely mathematical without apparent insight, it should be in an appendix.

38.Notes intended for referees should not be in the appendix.

Anything intended for referees' eyes only should be explained in the notes.

Do not detach such notes from the paper, but write "Not for Publication" on them. If you detach the notes from the paper, they may not reach the referees.

39.Your paper should not exceed 25 pages

If this is difficult, at least keep the text within 20 pages (Horowitz, 1995). This is the amount the referees would read.

As the length of the paper increases, the probability of acceptance decreases. The referees are more likely to find something wrong.

As the length of the paper increases,

You are more likely to make mathematical errors.

The chance that the referee thinks you made a mistake increases (even when you are right).

You are more likely to make statements that will offend referees.

IV. PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION

IV-I Preparation for Submission

1.Sit on the finished version for one week

After the paper is completed, do not immediately submit it to a journal. (It is not finished yet.)

You invariably will find many small errors in text, notations, explanations, or missing references, etc. in your finished paper.

2.Reread the introduction, conclusion, and abstract before submission

Reread these three parts carefully before you submit the paper to a journal and eliminate all typographical errors and other embarrassing mistakes.

A typographical error on the first page of introduction or abstract indicates that the author is careless.

Such errors tend to lead referees and editors, rightly or wrongly, to conclude that the paper should be rejected. They conclude that the author is likely to be sloppy in substance as well. And they might be right.

If you don't proofread your own introduction, why expect the referees to spot and correct all the errors?

3.Use, but do not rely totally on spelling checkers

One should always check spelling before submission. But there are no substitutes for reading the papers personally.

Spelling checkers do not check word meanings.

4.Do not arouse envy

Do not use fancy fonts or expensive bond paper.

Do not cite too many of your own papers.

The referees might feel that you have published too many papers.

The referees might feel justified to recommend rejection of your paper.

Especially when he/she received one recently.

Do not thank famous people in the acknowledgment, at least not in the first submission. The referee's contacts may not be as good as yours.

Do not thank family members. This is understandable, but it is unprofessional.

5.Use common sense

It is not a good idea to send a hand-written submission letter. The submission letter contains critical information about the author (address, telephone number, e-mail address, etc.) Your scribbling may be a challenge to the deciphering ability of the editors or their assistants. A small typographical error in the address might make a letter to the author undeliberable.

Use a sturdy envelope, especially, if you are sending a manuscript to a foreign country. An enclosed check might be missing from the package by the time it reaches the editorial office.

6.Consider electronic submission if allowed by journals

Journal offices increasingly are more willing to receive electronic submissions.

Electronic submissions are faster and safer.

Word processor files can damage the hard disk of the journal office. For this reasons, they prefer PDF files.

When submitting to journals that adopt double-blind refereeing process, submit the cover page and the main body separately. Remove your name in the document property (Your computer may record it automatically.)

Experienced people report that Acrobat PDF Writer does not always produce dependable PDF files.

Use the dependable Acrobat Distiller. For instance, after the Acrobat is installed, you can print a Word document using Acrobat Distiller and save it at a desired drive. You can then e-mail the file.

After a PDF file is produced, go over it to see if all symbols are properly represented. If a symbol is not properly converted by Adobe Distiller, try retyping it using another font. Avoid using nonstandard symbols, because Acrobat Distiller may not convert them properly.

Visit the NSF site concerning problems you encounter when creating PDF files, http://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/a1/pdfcreat.htm

IV-II Working Paper

7.Present an early version as a working paper

If a paper contains enough substance of a roughly sketched idea, you may offer it as a working paper, just for the record.

Distribute it to a dozen trusted friends in your field to get feedback.

But do not distribute it widely.

Working papers can attract coauthors, and a revised version may be published

later. When you are up for promotion and tenure, the working papers provide evidence that you have started the work.

8.Do not submit your working paper to an electronic journal

Get ready for the future of publishing. Most journals will become available electronically over the coming years. Hard copies may still be available, but they will be expensive because of limited print runs.

You may submit abstracts to journals on the Internet, but it is not advisable to post the actual articles.

For legal purposes, the electronic publications may be treated as publications. But for tenure and promotion purposes, they do not count as publications. This is a problem.

It is easy for someone to manipulate the electronic copy (even PDF or PS files), modify it a little, and submit it to another journal under a different title.

IV-III Acknowledgment

9.Remove negative clues from acknowledgment

In the acknowledgment, remove any reference to when the paper was conceived or written.

Editors of journals that adopt the double-blind review procedure are not likely to send papers to persons mentioned in the acknowledgment.

Do not thank in the acknowledgment the people whom you would like to serve as referees. Acknowledge them after the paper is accepted. Otherwise, they are likely to be left out of the review process.

Once you receive an invitation to publish, include an acknowledgment to the referees, whether anonymous or not.

IV-IV Submission

10.Eliminate any trace of prior rejections

Do not indicate when the paper was first written. If the original version was written a few years earlier, the editors and the referees clearly see that it has been

rejected a few times.

Do not indicate how often the paper has been revised. This suggests you do not listen and properly modify the paper to make it more publishable.

In the references, eliminate any references to papers that were "forthcoming" a few years back. This not only indicates that your paper was previously rejected a few times, but also that you are sloppy in updating the references.

11.Submit your paper to a rising journal

Good specialty journals are rising.

The acceptance rate may be higher. Payoff is greater later.

Identify and avoid the declining journals whose acceptance rate is low with a diminishing payoff later.

General journals, except for a few at the top, are expected to decline because of increased specialization and the resulting drop in demand for them. In general journals, "readers are confronted with a decreasing probability of finding at least one important article" (Holub, Tappeiner, and Eberharter, 1991) in their field.

In the 1970s, the top ten journals were general journals.

In the 1990s, half of the top ten journals were field journals.

As you become more specialized, an increasingly smaller fraction of papers in general journals become relevant to your research. Accordingly, demand for general journals is likely to decline.

Increased specialization is more likely in the future.

12.Keep a log of research papers

In the first two or three years when the number of articles under review is small, it is easy to remember the status of your papers. Later, as the number of articles increases, a log will prove invaluable.

The purpose of a log is to

know when to send a reminder to the editor,

prevent resubmission of a rejected paper to the same journal, unless of

course, it is your intention to resubmit the rejected paper to the same journal (after a change of editors), and

avoid multiple submission of several papers to the same journal within a short period of time.

For each paper, note the pool of potential journals.

When a paper is rejected, do not lose time resubmitting the paper to another journal.

Keep a log of the life history of each paper.

13.Do not submit two papers to the same journal in two months

Especially if the two articles are related.

Other things being equal, editors prefer to publish two articles by different authors, rather than two articles by the same author.

You may submit more papers to the same journal simultaneously if there is more than one editor. They do not often communicate with one another. In this instance, acceptance of one article by one editor does not adversely affect the chance of another being accepted by a different editor.

14.Check for related articles in the journal being considered

Try to find some related articles in the journal to which you wish to submit your paper.

Authors who published a paper on a related subject are likely to be referees. The editor's memory is still fresh.

Obviously, you need to say something about, or at least cite, their papers.

Even if they are marginally related, try to incorporate their references. Make some effort to explain how your work is related.

15.Avoid the journals which consistently reject your papers

Haven't you learned your lesson yet?

Avoid (temporarily) the journals which have rejected your papers consistently,

say three times in a row.

The editor still remembers all those bad remarks about your papers.

Wait until a new editor is appointed.

First and middle names, as well as last name, often reveal the sex, race, or nationality of the authors.

If you have reason to believe that you are being discriminated against on the basis of sex, race, or nationality, you may consider using initials instead of spelling out the first and middle names.

You may reveal your full name after the paper is accepted.

16.Use professional editorial assistance

Particularly if you are not a native English speaker

Editors will not publish papers with grammatical errors.

It is safe to assume that referees are biased; they have an excuse to recommend rejection when grammatical errors are detected.

You can easily find a copy editor who charges a reasonable fee.

Editorial help is available in the English department of any university in the United States or the United Kingdom. If you live elsewhere, you need to invest some time to develop friends located there. You may be able to check and expedite the editing process through them.

17.Know the preferences or biases of journals

If a journal rarely publishes empirical papers, do not send one there.

Similarly, if a journal rarely publishes theory papers, do not submit one there.

If you suspect discrimination, check the past issues of the journal in question. This will reveal surprising insights.

Preferences are known; biases are difficult to detect.

There are three types of journals:

Association journals (AER, Econometrica, etc.)

University journals, managed and edited by university faculty (QJE, JPE, etc.)

Journals published by commercial publishers (Blackwell, North-Holland, etc.)

Problems of Journals

Association journals: Editors change every few years, and they tend to accept more papers by colleagues and friends while they are at the helm. Since the editors are chosen from among a few major institutions, they tend to get a larger share of publications than under ideal academic conditions. Subsidized by associations.

University journals: Promoting truth and knowledge is *not* necessarily the primary concern of these journals. The universities need to protect their own interests. They should set a good example by announcing that their editorial standards are not compromised to protect their own interests, but do they have the courage? Subsidized by universities.

Commercial journals: To maximize profits they are least likely to have preferences or biases. However, they cannot survive without reader subscriptions.

Clan Power and Publication

Roughly half of the papers published in some 40 high-ranked economic journals are never cited by others (Holub, Tappeiner, and Eberharter, SEJ 1991). Journals included in their studies were: AER, CJE, EJ, EER, IER, JDE, JEL, JET, JMCB, JPE, JPubE, OEP, QJE, RES, REStat, SEJ, Econometrica, Economica, and Economic Inquiry among others.

Even their referees would not cite these papers. This indicates that they did not place a high value on the papers. Why would these referees then recommend their publication?

This finding suggests that in each field there may be small groups that exert some influence by recommending publication of the papers by their clan members.

The clan members, implicit or explicit, are rent seekers. They recommend publication of their own papers at the expense of nonmembers.

An effective way for a newcomer to beat the clans is to join them by collaborating with a clan member.

The double-blind review process tends to reduce the power of clan members.

Even with the double-blind review process, referees often know or guess the identity of authors because papers are circulated prior to submission.

Circulation of working papers prior to acceptance effectively reveals the identity of the author and increases the rent that accrues to clan members.

How long to wait for results

18.Contact the editor after six months

Editors do not have an alarm clock that goes off for each paper after a certain period of time has elapsed.

If it has been six months from the date of acknowledgment, you should contact the editor.

If you are counting from the date of your submission, allow seven months.

Remember that the editors of many top journals are older and lack computer skills. So e-mail is not an option. If this is the case, write a polite letter.

If you do not get a response within two months, send a second inquiry.

Call the editorial office or inquire via fax.

If you still get no reply after a third inquiry, you should not submit a paper to such a journal again.

An e-mail inquiry is okay, if the editorial office is so equipped.

Note that e-mail inquiry is less formal and e-mail traffic is increasing.

E-mail messages are less reliable; they may not reach the editorial office.

V. REJECTION AND REVISION

V-I Rejection

1.When rejected, try again

Even Nobel Laureates get rejection letters.

Papers lying dormant in the file drawer do not bring any good news!

Submit the paper to another journal within one month. But wait!

If a referee points out a major problem, you need to address it.

You do not have to revise a paper every time it is rejected.

But if a paper is rejected 4 times, there is a serious flaw in the paper. Find and fix the problem.

Make a modest effort to incorporate the valuable suggestions of the referee before submitting to another journal.

Why? The same referee might get it again.

Do whatever possible to make sure the negative referee does not get the paper again. You are entitled to new referee reports.

2.If a "stupid" referee misunderstood your paper, it is your fault

Truth hurts sometimes, but listen anyway.

Some referees spend as little as 15 minutes reading your paper. Your paper should be clearly presented, and it should be comprehensible by such referees.

The typical referee spends two hours or more on your paper. Moreover, he/she is an expert in the field. Find out why such an expert has trouble understanding your paper and correct the problems.

This "stupid" referee problem will not disappear until you correct it.

There must be something valuable in those reports. Salvage and incorporate them freely in your paper. (And you do not have to thank them.) This is not plagiarism.

3.Do not get angry

Do not brood over ways to get even with the referees or the editor. Your energy then would be devoted to a counterproductive and unhappy task.

Writing a rebuttal letter to the editor rarely reverses the decision. The referee has to defend it, even if it was a bad report.

The editor already has a stack of such complaints. One more is not likely to change the editor's decision, albeit there are exceptions.

When the referee successfully defends the report (in the eyes of the editor), you lose any capital you may have accumulated.

Write only if it is a simple matter.

Instead of trying to prove that the referee is wrong on several points, explain why you might deserve a second or third opinion.

Example: argue that there is no mathematical error, contrary to the report.

V-II Revision

There might be a time limit for resubmission, usually six months to a year from the date of the invitation letter.

If you do not intend to revise and resubmit the paper for whatever reason, let the editorial office know of your intention (via e-mail/fax).

Remember that for all practical purposes this is probably your **last** chance to revise the paper. The probability that you will succeed is about 50%, depending on the journals. Sloppy, rough revisions will surely result in rejection. The editorial office will not continue to provide mediation between the referees and authors because there are other papers demanding attention.

You received an invitation to revise the paper because it might contain a publishable idea. However, papers will not be accepted unless they are presentable and polished enough for publication.

4.Be optimistic and get excited

Don't blow it. (If you do, you may wait three more years to get another favorable letter.)

Take the time to do a good job. The goal is to ensure acceptance, not to minimize the effort.

Do not save your effort. Go the extra mile. You have a chance (about 50%).

5.Write a detailed response to individual referees

Take every comment of the referee seriously.

In a note to be transmitted to the referee, first thank him or her.

Number all relevant comments and respond to those (explain what you did in the revised paper).

Indicate that you are doing everything possible and more.

If you cannot accommodate the demands, thank the referee for the suggestion, but offer explanations why they are beyond the scope of the paper or why it is not possible at the time.

6.Do not attack referees

Generally, it is not a good idea to berate the reviewers. Don’t lash out at the referees.

Although they may not have a favorable opinion of your paper, they took the time to read your paper!

Do not say: "The referee's idea is bad, but mine is good."

Better to say, the referee has an interesting notion, but the proposed idea is also good, particularly in light of this or that fact.

If the referee makes a valid point (you can almost always find conditions under which the referee's points are valid), explain why, due to this or that difficulty, you are not pursuing that course in the paper.

7.Resubmit the revised paper within three months

Remember that this invitation is based on reports by some referees who had good first impressions about your paper. Do not wait until that positive aura vanishes.

Do not resubmit the revised version in one month, even if you worked on it full time.

If you do, the editor may think that you have not devoted a sufficient amount of time to the revision.

8.Write just one paragraph a day if you hate to revise

The referees or editors have asked you to do an impossible or dreadful task. Then just write one paragraph a day. You can do that!

This works when you know you can do it, you should do it, but you cannot get excited. The situation requires careful self-inducement.

As you write a little bit at a time, before you know it, you get fired up.

9.Listen to what the editor says

It is important to glean the true message from the editor's letter.

Do not try to bargain with the editor (unless he/she starts it).

Share the editor's letter and referee reports with experienced colleagues. They may have surprisingly different interpretations.

V-III Resubmission

When your revision is completed, you should send the following to the editor:

copies of the paper (as many as requested)

cover letter

packet for each referee.

10.Check the Revised Paper

The cover page should contain complete contact information about the author: (i) address, (ii) telephone and fax numbers, and (iii) e-mail address. This allows the editorial office to contact you quickly should the need arise. If you anticipate moving, provide your forwarding postal and e-mail addresses.

The cover page of the revised paper should include the current date (or month and year) of revision; you do not want the office to send an old version to the referees by mistake.

If there were any complaints about the writing style, try to get some editorial assistance. Remember that many papers are rejected because of writing style problems.

Eliminate typographical errors in the cover page and the abstract. This is an absolute minimum courtesy.

Last, but not least, make sure that there are no pages **missing** in any of the copies.

Cover Letter

11.Explain succinctly how you revised the paper

The purpose is to convince the editor that he or she should not send the paper back to the referees.

If the editor already indicated that he or she would send the paper back to the referees, then your letter also should explain how well you followed the suggestions of the referees.

Referee's Packet

12. Prepare a packet for each referee

Regardless of whether the editorial office is well-managed or not, you should prepare a packet for each referee. Each packet must include everything a referee might possibly need. Specifically,

A copy of the original (or latest) report. The referee might have lost the file or might not remember even vaguely what he/she asked you to do. A copy of the report not only helps the referee remember what he/she said about your paper, but it also constrains the referee not to deviate too much from the earlier report. The editorial office also has copies, but you want to ensure acceptance even when the office is not well staffed.

A copy of the revised version. Make sure you have responded to every comment of the referee.

A response to the referee's report. Do not forget to thank the referee. Explain what you did or did not do in response to every comment.

If the referee said something which you and the other referee did not agree on, include a common response to the referees. This might calm down the problem referee.

VI. BEING A GOOD REFEREE

VI-I General Guidelines

You are performing a valuable service to the profession. It is worth doing well. It also is good for your spirit when you have done something worthwhile for society.

As soon as you receive a manuscript, make sure it is something you are qualified to judge. If you had agreed to review because of a misleading title and you are not qualified to do the job, return the paper to the editor as soon as possible.

A referee report consists of two parts:

a cover letter with the manuscript number/title and your opinion, and

the report itself intended to be transmitted to the author(s).

E-mail reports are acceptable to most journals. If the editorial office is modern and the journal is well-managed, e-mail reports should be preferred to reports by fax or snail (regular) mail, because snail mail often unduly retards the editorial process and fax reports often are difficult to read because of low resolution and small letters.

Consider sending the report via e-mail or fax particularly when the editor is on a different continent. International mail is generally less reliable than its domestic counterpart.

To expedite the refereeing process, you may fax your cover letter and comments. Use high resolution mode, if possible. Just in case, also mail the report.

If regular mail is chosen, include two or three copies of the report.

Lost the manuscript?

If you lose the manuscript, apologize and ask the editor to send you another copy. Editors understand that referees who travel frequently lose manuscripts occasionally.

Do not wait six months to ask for a replacement copy or to tell you never received the manuscript.

If you do not receive the manuscript

If within four weeks (six weeks for international mail) you do not get the manuscript you agreed to referee, contact the editor. The manuscript is either lost or has not been sent out.

How Does One Become A Referee?

Here is a brief answer in response to this frequently asked question. If you are well established, you will probably get a fair share of articles to referee. If not, there are two ways to become a referee:

Submit articles to journals. If you write an article on a given subject, editors often assume you are an expert in that area. You might become a referee for papers on similar topics.

Write a letter to the editors. You can express your willingness to serve as a referee in the areas of your choice. It is a good idea to enclose your curriculum vitae.

1.Do it promptly

Nothing is more appreciated by the editor and the authors than a prompt referee report. The future career of the author depends on your timely service.

Do it in 4 to 6 weeks.

Don't be too prompt! Otherwise, you may get too many requests.

Prompt and sincere reports are your line of credit. You may need it when you submit a paper to that journal.

Hard copies are acceptable, but you may e-mail the report.

If it would take you more than three months to complete the review, inform the editor about the delay.

2.Be a fair and constructive referee

Do not react even if the author attacks your previous contributions.

Remember the days when you were a tadpole and the referees were gentle to you.

Focus on the merits, not on the immaturity of the writer. Science advances because the next generation is immature and willing to experiment.

If you are unfair or sloppy in a referee report, the authors may strike back. The

editor will remember the incident, even if the decision is not reversed.

If it is outside your area of expertise, promptly return the paper.

If the topic is in your area, studying the paper carefully may lead you to write another paper.

3.Do not plagiarize

Make sure that you do not plagiarize and steal the ideas in the paper, either consciously or subconsciously.

For instance, examine the motive of a referee who says to himself: "Hm.... I can do better than this author without making all these stupid mistakes. In fact, I am going to do it."

If you want to borrow some ideas from the paper, even if it is badly written, make sure you recommend its publication and explain how to revise it. If the author gave enough ideas to you to write a related paper, perhaps you should recommend its publication. Ask the editor when the paper will be published so you can cite it.

It is unethical to recommend rejection of a paper which gives you creative ideas to write another paper.

VI-II Cover Letter

You can reduce untold amounts of frustration you may impose upon authors and help the profession immensely if your cover letter includes:

the manuscript number (it takes extra time to locate the manuscript without it).

the title (in case there is an error in the manuscript number, this ensures that the editorial office locates the manuscript).

your postal address

your permanent e-mail address

your summary opinion

A. Accept in present form or with slight changes.

B. Accept for publication after minor revision, with a suggestion about the length.

C. Reconsider for publication after extensive revision.

D. Reject, with suggestions for possible submission elsewhere.

If you did not recommend one of the above, your letter is not well written.

4.Cover letter should be brief, not technical

Explain the reasons why you recommend that the paper be accepted, rejected, or revised.

If you would like the editor to accept the paper, your recommendation must be strong.

If you consistently recommend rejection, then the editor recognizes you are a stingy, overly critical person. Do not assume that the editor will not reveal your identity to the authors. In the long run, there are no secrets.

If you recommend acceptance of all papers, then the editor knows you are not a discriminating referee.

VI-III Report

Prepare your comments that include your reasons, suggestions, and concerns.

Comment on the manuscript's originality, clarity, contribution to the literature, and relevance to real world problems.

Make suggestions about its length, organization, tables, and figures.

The bottom line is this: If there is an important idea in the paper, make constructive comments (e.g., how to streamline the arguments, what parts should be cut) and help the authors publish the paper.

If not, say so frankly. There is no point in beating about the bush. If the paper is clearly below the journal standards, detailed comments are unnecessary.

If you e-mail your report, go to Document Property and delete your name. Your computer may automatically record your name as the author of the report, which may be accidentally transmitted to the author.

5.When you write a negative report, avoid citing your own papers

Like animals, referees often leave their marks in their reports.

If you vote against publication, do not cite your papers. Someday the author will become a referee and return the "favor" in the next round.

The paradox of refereeing is this: When you are a referee, you are the expert. When the other person becomes a referee of your paper, he or she becomes the expert. Circumstances can change.

Do not say in the report whether the paper should be accepted or rejected. This belongs in the cover letter.

Be careful with your negative reports. Do not demoralize the authors.

If you consistently recommend rejection of all papers in your area, people will stop doing research in your area. Soon the topic becomes obsolete and so do you.

Moreover, soon the negative word gets around and people in the profession might figure out who you are.

If your published paper is relevant, you may cite it, but it should be done without hinting at the identity of the referee. Do not cite your unpublished papers.

6.Write more than one paragraph

If you do not, you are not a sincere referee, whether you are famous or not. You should have given the job to others who would devote more time and care to the review.

Remember the authors have spent several months to years to complete the paper. They deserve more attention.

Remember the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

7. If there is a new important idea, help the author to publish it

Your recommendation should be independent of whether the authors have cited your papers or not.

Do not use the report as an opportunity to force the author to cite your paper if it is tangentially related. This is unethical.

Divine beings don’t write papers (What would be the point?) All papers written by mortals have problems. Your role is not in finding all the faults in the paper.

If the author can fix the problems with reasonable effort, do not overemphasize the faults. Then recommend publication (in the letter).

8.Write something good, something bad

Mortals cannot write "perfect" papers. Even the best paper has some problems, and you can ask the author to make improvements.

You also can say something nice about the worst paper. Remember you are dealing with a person, and your report should not inordinately demoralize the author.

Remember the days when you were a tadpole before you write a nasty report.

You can recommend rejection for good reasons and still be kind to the author.

9.Reports should be based on the ideas in the paper

The first paragraph should be a summary of the contribution. The editor is not knowledgeable in all areas.

Your evaluation should be based solely on the merit or ideas contained in the paper,

And not on who wrote the paper.

Do not make comments demoralizing the author in the report. Thomas Edison's mother was reportedly told by his teacher that Thomas was "addled" and will never amount to anything.

If there is a writing problem, it should be noted.

Remember that English is spoken by only 8% of the world population.

A righteous referee shows no favoritism. There is no justification for favoritism.

10.Avoid pointing out mathematical errors

Unless you are absolutely sure.

If you are wrong, the author will protest, and the second referee might agree.

If you lose credibility, your future papers also are suspect.

Instead of saying the authors made a mistake, you can say you cannot obtain the same result.

But if you are certain, say so and explain why.

11.If it is hopeless, say so, and save the authors from further misery

Don't try to be too nice in order to salvage an unpublishable idea.

Being a good referee does not mean you try to help everybody publish in that journal.

Inherent capacities cannot be exceeded. Regardless of your suggestions, the author cannot improve the quality of the paper more than 50%. Remember this when you recommend revision.

Positive recommendations should be based on the quality of an anticipated revision.

VII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If you have comments or questions, please contact Kwan Choi at kchoi@iastate.edu.

1.The corresponding editor resigned. What should I do with the revised paper?

While I was preparing a revised version, I noticed that the co-editor who oversaw my submission is no longer a co-editor of that journal. In this case, how would this affect the status of my paper in the near future? Is it possible to go through a new round with another editor and his/her own choice of referees? (Jaejoon Woo, OECD)

Usually the corresponding editor is responsible for editorial decisions for papers he or she received for about a year. Submit the revised version to the editor who made the initial editorial decision.

The resigning editor still wants to relinquish his responsibility quickly. The revised version should be submitted within a few months.

Otherwise, the editorial decision may be delegated to a new editor who may not be as favorable toward your paper as the first editor.

2.Professional technical editors are helpful

I have found that a professional technical editor is also very helpful for struggling beginning writers who have English as a first language (Bob Coleman).

Professional technical editors can make many useful suggestions. You can accept some or all of their suggestions. It does not really matter whether English is one's first language or not.

3.Where do I find a copy editor?

Since I am not a native speaker, I want somebody to help me to check the grammar and polish the paper. I understand that the service is not free, and I am willing to pay. In fact, I am willing to pay a premium, if the work can be finished before Thanksgiving. (Xioayan Zhang).

Contact the English department of your institution to locate copy editors. There should be many editors who can help you. They usually charge $10 - 20 per hour. Even graduate students in English department are very good. Sometimes retired professors are willing to copyedit papers or theses.

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