
How to Publish in Top Journals

Kwan Choi, Editor, RIE

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In response to popular demand, 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 some useful suggestions for today's authors. The goal is to "foster the greatest good to the greatest number of people."¹ If this note is useful to you, please tell your friends about it. If you follow most of these rules, the probability of obtaining tenure or promotion may increase significantly. If most authors acquired the basic skills mentioned here, they would then be competing in terms of the truth, goodness, and beauty of their ideas, not in terms of cosmetic skills.

Disclaimer

Please note that the advice contained here may not necessarily improve the chances that 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.

Contents

Introduction: Next section.

[General Publication Strategies](#): This section covers 28 long-term, general suggestions.

[Writing Strategies](#): This section explains 39 helpful recommendations about writing papers.

[Preparation and Submission](#): It covers 18 dos and don'ts to follow when submitting a paper to a journal.

[Rejection and Revision](#): This section includes 12 ways to deal with rejection and how to revise manuscripts when you receive an invitation to revise.

[Being a Good Referee](#): Of course, you have to be a good referee to become a successful writer. 11 rules to guide good reviewing are offered here.

[Questions and Answers](#): Here are some questions raised by readers.

Comments or Questions

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

Acknowledgment

I thank all those who made helpful comments and suggestions. The usual caveats apply.

Note

1. The Urantia Book (p. 1488)



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.

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.

Why is the journal acceptance rate so low?

- 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.
- 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).
- 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.

Why is your acceptance rate lower than others?

- You may lack experience. However, this can be remedied.
 - You may need to submit more papers. Volume also increases the acceptance rate because of learning by doing.
 - 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.
 - You may not be able to eliminate existing biases, but you can avoid them.
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