Advice on the Publishing Process

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This Session

- Given the research you have done:
  - What can you do to increase the chance of getting it published?
  - How to make the publication experience more productive

- This session is meant to be useful to you so please ask questions.

1: Preparing a Paper for Submission

A. Know your audience: who might want to read your paper?

B. State your contribution/relation to the literature precisely: a new method/result or an old method/result applied to a new situation/data?

C. How clear and well-organised is it?

D. How focussed is it?

1A Know Your Audience

This affects where you should submit:

General Interest
Top 5
Econometrica, AER, REStud, JPE, QJE
Second Tier
Restat, IER, EJ, JEEA, QE, TE, AEJ,…Science…

Field
JDE, JET, JFin, JPubEcon, JoLE, JMonEcon, Rand etc.

1B State Your Contribution Precisely

- What does general interest mean?

- Contribution often turns out to be very different to the original motivation for a paper
  - Know your place in the literature
  - Literature review ≠ listing findings

- What is novel?
  - Why should the reader care?
- What is not novel?
  - Why does this matter?

- Many PhD papers are: "an old method/result applied to a new situation/data''. The natural home for this kind of paper is a field journal.

1C. How clear/well organized Is it

- Writing an academic paper is <u>not</u> like writing a thriller.
- The contribution of the paper should be the first thing you say and (if possible) the first result you state.
- What is written should be readily understandable by any of your fellow students.
- Use standard terminology and structure for papers

"If it doesn't look easy you haven't worked hard enough."

1C. The Chetty Production Function

- **COWEN:** If we look at your papers, they're about topics people have already thought about. The data work is completely state of the art, but I don't think it would be said you're doing something other people can't do, and yet several times a year, you come out with papers of great import that make a big splash, and the results seem to hold up. So what in fact is your competitive advantage?

- **CHETTY:** That's a tough question. Part of what we try to do is exactly as you said: take old questions. I think some of the most important questions in economics and social science have not yet been fully answered, and the recent availability of big data of various types allows us, for the first time, to tackle those classic questions. What our research group tries to do is bring those two things together.

- **COWEN:** But those both sound replicable, right? What's the non-replicable asset?

- **CHETTY:** What hopefully our contribution and scale is, is showing how you can take those large datasets and not get lost in them, and bring out the key lessons that are relevant for thinking about these classic questions.

- It's very easy — students often have this reaction, that all I need to do is get access to this big dataset, and then I'm going to be all set for my thesis. And what you end up finding is that that is often not the case. It's very easy to write a paper that is not that good, even with cutting-edge data and modern techniques. So one of the things that I try to do — and the easiest way to see this is if you internally, within our research group, see the iterations of the papers we've been working on — where we start out is often very far away from the papers that people see as the finished product. We work hard to try to write a paper that ex post seems extremely simple: "Oh, it's obvious that that's the set of calculations you should have done."

1D. How Focussed is it?

"Do one thing and do it completely." R. Blundell

Do not try to do many things at the same time (this usually is a result of lack of faith in the original idea).

No kitchen sink - do not write all you know about a subject.

"Keep the paper short" Imran Rasul

A submitted paper is not the same as a chapter of a PhD nor is it a JMP.

Strip out all non-essentials in Appendices

Section lengths indicate section importance

Frank Hahn: *"if the structure of DNA can be described in 6 pages why do you need so many?"*

1. Additional Considerations

Once you've an idea about the journal you want to submit to, then look carefully at the journal

- Editors are appointed because of two traits:
  - competence
  - tastes

2. What Happens Behind the Veil?

Step 1: Submission

What you should submit is:

A paper (does not need to be typeset ready).

A short letter of submission. Some journals allow you detail the submission history of the paper and any previous referee reports you want to share with the editor (e.g. EJ)

Be aware up front of data policies (e.g. IRB, replication etc.)

2. What Happens Behind the Veil?

<u>Step 1: Submission</u>

The paper gets allocated to an editor. The editor skims the paper and decides whether to screen reject the paper or to send it to referees.

2. What Happens Behind the Veil?

Step 1: Submission

Why screen reject?

Paper is not suitable, or the paper is so poor as to not have a chance with regular referees.

The introduction is important here – the editor needs to get a quick idea of what your paper does, that it is interesting, that the authors understand the contribution.

Do not be discouraged by a screen reject decision
- screen rejection rates of 50-80% not unheard of

2. What Happens Behind the Veil?

Step 1: Submission

Send to Referees?

Here the bibliography and any google cites are important.

General interest: assign to some referees outside the field

2. What Happens Behind the Veil?

<u>Step 2: Referees</u>

These are trying to figure out:

      1. whether they learned something new from your work
      2. whether this result should be shared with others

Clarity, Focus, Contribution, Legibility all matter here.

Do not underestimate how annoyed editors/referees become with lack of professionalism

Referees write <u>reports</u> and <u>letters</u> to the editor.

The editor shares the report with the author but not the letter.

2. What Happens Behind the Veil?

Step 3: Editor's Decision

After 3-6 months reports are returned to the editor.

She has maybe 6 documents: 3 reports & 3 letters.

She must now decide whether to

1) Conditionally Accept

2) Offer a Revise and Resubmit

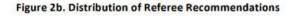   Editorial letters should aim to minimize uncertainty

3) Reject

   Reject and resubmits
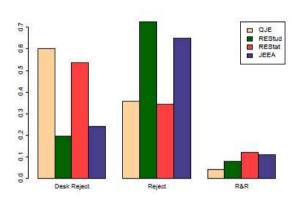
What do Editors Maximize? Evidence from Four Leading Economics Journals*

David Card
UC Berkeley and NBER

Stefano DellaVigna
UC Berkeley and NBER

Figure 2. Summary Statistics

Figure 2a. Distribution of Editorial Decisions

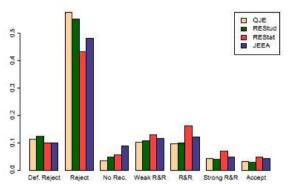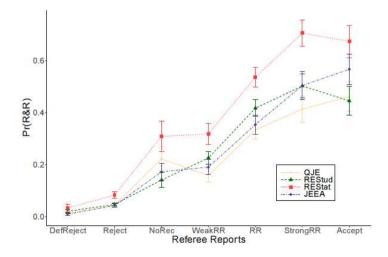### Figure 2b. Distribution of Referee Recommendations

Figure 4. Referee Recommendations and the Probability of Revise and Resubmit

Figure 4a. Referee Report and R&R Rate, By Journal

3. How to Deal With a R&R

Read the reports *very* carefully – then walk away and reflect for a week

Plan how to respond to all comments, if they are inconsistent it is OK to ask the editor for guidance (can also approach senior colleagues)

It's *not* usually a good idea to complain

If the referees didn't understand something – it's your fault!

Prob(accept | returning revision) <1
Prob(accept | not returning revision) =0

3. How to Deal With a Rejection

Every rejection is an R&R

Remember: pool of referees is small
      people don't like their advice to be ignored

Don't get disheartened – <u>everyone</u> gets rejected.

Anything Development Specific?

- Primary data collection increasingly important
  - More/less scope for revision?
  - Mary Ann Bates and Rachel Glennerster on *The Generalizability Puzzle*
    - https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_generalizability_puzzle?utm_content=buffere9f9f&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

- Gold standard for empirical work constantly moving
  - quality, not quantity is what ultimately matters at all top departments