Tips on Preparing and Publishing Journal Articles

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Success in publishing is influenced by:

1. Ability to identify important topics / gaps in our understanding
2. Visualize holistically the various stages: linking interesting questions to theory to methods to generating findings and interpreting them
3. Technical skills (your toolkit)
4. Teasing out the implications of the findings in meaningful ways, e.g.,
   - implications for the discipline
   - new understanding of how a system works
   - Implications for policy
### Three general types of articles

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<tr>
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<th>Problem solving</th>
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**examples**
Three general types of articles

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### Three general types of articles

| Disciplinary | Is the induced innovation theory of Hayami and Ruttan correct?  
| Test of the rational vs. adaptive expectations hypothesis of price expectations |
| Subject matter | How are African farming systems responding to climate change?  
| What will be the skills sets demanded of university graduates in 2035? |
| Problem solving |  |
# Three general types of articles

| Disciplinary     | Is the induced innovation theory of Hayami and Ruttan correct?  
|                  | Test of the rational vs. adaptive expectations hypothesis of price expectations |
| Subject matter   | How are African farming systems responding to climate change?  
|                  | What will be the skills sets demanded of university graduates in 2035? |
| Problem solving  | Strategies for protecting hard-hit communities from the effects of Ebola  
|                  | Is liming a cost-effective investment for farmers on acidic soils? |
1. Topic selection

1. Accelerated rate of change in the world is rapidly opening up new topics – major opportunities!

2. Problem statement: what is the problem? Why does the problem need analysis?

3. Discover the current cutting edge by talking to the academic leaders in the field -- ask them about their current research activities

4. Identify early which kind of contribution(s) you are aiming for:
   – Disciplinary
   – Subject Matter
   – Problem Solving

5. Research questions/objectives/data/methods *jointly determined*, not linear
Consider the “big picture”

• Identify the big picture story that your research relates to
  – If there isn’t one, that doesn’t necessarily mean that your topic isn’t worthwhile, but it helps if there is!

• Familiarize yourself with the politics behind the issues. It is almost never the case that one can tackle big economic questions without understanding the politics behind them.
2. Get a feel for the data

• Make sure that the data can address the objectives

• Plot distribution of all variables of interest
  – Skewed? outliers?
  – Distribution of dep var and main RHS variables: 10\textsuperscript{th} – 25\textsuperscript{th} - 50\textsuperscript{th} - 75\textsuperscript{th} - 90\textsuperscript{th} percentiles of distribution
  – Example: market access article -- distance from farm to point of sale

• Rough out “dummy tables”
  – Then fill in – usually tables of the distribution, bivariate relationships
3. Iterate back and forth on 1 and 2

• Once you settle on the right set of research questions/hypotheses/issues, then nail down:
  – your conceptual framework; theory
  – estimable models and how you derived them
  – Other data to be employed
4. Introduction

1. Funnel concept: broad to narrow
2. Problem statement
3. What’s the likely outcome if the problem remains unresolved
4. How has previous literature addressed this issue, and how is it deficient in some way.
   – Identify the “knowledge gap” that needs to be filled/improved upon
   – Explain why building on the literature in this particular way is important
5. Clear presentation of objectives
   – How will your analysis help to resolve the problem?
   – If a quantitative analysis, use terms like “determines”, “estimates”, not fuzzy verbs like “explores”
6. How you will achieve these objectives? i.e., methods
7. Who will benefit? / who will care?
Common reasons for rejection:

The National Institute of Health (NIH) analyzed the reasons why over 700 research proposal applications were denied:

• **Nature of the Problem (41%)**
  – doubtful that new or useful information will result from the project (34.5%)
  – basic hypothesis is unsound (6.5%)

• **Approach to the Problem (38.9%)**
  – research plan is nebulous, not designed carefully or not presented in concrete detail (20.4%)
  – planned research is not adequately controlled (3.7%)
  – proposed methods will not yield accurate results (8.8%)
Optional:

- Whet the reader’s appetite by giving main gist of findings
- Road map of remainder of paper

Length of intro: 600-800 words for typical article
5. Flesh out the outline

- I develop my outline usually after producing a draft of the Introduction.
- Conventional approach for article where model and estimation results feature prominently:
  1. Introduction
  2. Conceptual Framework
  3. Methods / model(s)
  4. Data
  5. Results: descriptive results – estimation findings
  6. Conclusions and Policy Implications
6. Conceptual Framework

• Def: description of the system under examination, the relevant variables, and how they interact

• Very important to integrate prior literature on the topic

• I am not fond of a “lit review” *per se*, but describe how understanding, theory, and/or viewpoints have evolved over time by citing the relevant studies

• The conceptual framework should have a purpose – it tells a story consistent with problem statement and sets up the rationale for your analysis

• The CF Identifies the deficiencies/knowledge gaps in the existing literature – this sets up the contribution you are going to make in the remainder of the paper
7. Methods / model

• This section links the conceptual framework to the generation of findings

• Draw from economic theory, where appropriate, to derive your model (*ad hoc* models -- major red flag!)

• Go through checklist of threats to internal and external validity:
  – omitted variables, selection bias, attrition bias, etc.
  – Are the results generalizable?

• Best to state limitations and caveats, so that the reader is aware that you are aware
8. Conclusions

• Ensure that your conclusions are derived from the evidence presented in the paper

• Question: is it OK to speculate beyond your results to “project” possible implications for policy?
9. Addressing reviewer comments

- Provide point-by-point responses
- The editor will be looking to see how receptive you have been to incorporating the reviewer’s comments
  - Most the time, they are constructive attempts to improve your paper
  - If possible without weakening the paper, best to respond positively to reviewer suggestions
  - If you conclude that taking a reviewer’s suggestion is not in the best interests of the paper, then provide compelling reasons why you decided not to incorporate their suggestion
- Take the high road
- Cover letter to editor -- context-specific
A few random remarks:

- Think of the most salient 3-4 debates in your particular field. If your study doesn’t have clear links to at least one of them, then think hard about whether/why your topic is important.

- How does your study build on current understanding, what is the contribution?

- Use topic paragraphs, topic sentences.

- Write a clearly and simply as possible.

- Don’t overstate the importance of your findings – red flag.

- Look for unnecessary repetitiveness and cut it out.

- “How the mighty are fallen” - JEP.