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WRITING A PUBLISHABLE PAPER

No guarantees!

OUTLINE

- How can we become more successful and productive writers?
- Topic for Research
- Organization
  - Introduction
  - Literature Review/Theory
  - Scope—Data Discussion
  - Research Approach
  - Findings
  - Conclusions
  - References & Citing Them
- Writing Style
- Working with Editors and Reviewers
  - Krugman's Laments
- Overview

INTRODUCTION:
HOW CAN WE BECOME MORE SUCCESSFUL AND PRODUCTIVE WRITERS?

Writing is our trade, but

- Bad writing does not get understood
- Graduate schools: paid to educate, not to teach how to write.
- Ideas must be communicated well to be understood
  - Tesla versus Edison (speak to the audience)
  - Scholarship is not *f*(Results, Writing)
  - Process of writing informs the analytical process.
- Writing can be learned (to some degree)
  - Editing is definitely algorithmic…there ***are*** rules
  - But you may need to forget some taught by your 8th grade teacher

INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

Be clear!

- Lack of clarity makes the piece easy to put down and requires
  - Reading in fits and starts
  - Rereading
- Don’t over-punctuate
- Keep sentences shorter rather than longer
  - Brevity is the soul of clarity
  - Shorter sentences can emphasize points
- Control your tone
- Use active voice
- Be plain and concrete
- Avoid elegant variation
- Lack of clarity is the source of most reviewer misunderstandings
- Worry about clarity after your thoughts are “on paper”

INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

- Keep your spirits up!
  - Use an outline as an aid, not a constraint
  - Where the next sentence comes from is not always obvious
  - When you’re on fire, don’t let yourself get distracted
  - When you’re feeling dull, reread and edit what you’ve drafted
  - When taking a break, write down thoughts on what is to come

“HOW CAN I COME UP WITH GOOD TOPICS?”

- Everyday life
  - Newspaper and magazine articles, radio, TV
- Pick up on ideas of others
  - What are the interests of your colleagues/students?
  - Where’s the money?
- Main Principle:

  Work on research for which you have enthusiasm with people you like
  - Corollary 1:

    Some co-authors are a drag
  - Corolary 2:

    Sometimes a third person can be the enzymatic element that makes cooperation possible

CONTENT OF A PAPER: REVIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE

Summarize understanding of core items of content
(assures the author that you get the papers main points)

A. Theory being tested

B. Scope (geography and years) of the empirical test and the data that are used

C. The research approach

D. Summary of findings

REVIEWER’S PERSPECTIVE: THE CRITIQUE

A. Why might the MS be of interest to the journal. What are the innovations? What is new?

B. The quality of the paper's motivation and introduction

C. The quality of the presentation of theory and supporting

D. Appropriateness of the scope and the data used

E. Appropriateness of the research method and tests used

F. Quality of the interpretations of results. How well integrated with prior findings?

G. Are the conclusions more than just a regurgitation of the core findings? What are the broader (policy) implications of the work? What research might follow?

H. Does the abstract properly summarize the paper? Is the title okay? Could either be more succinct/clear?

ORGANIZATION: THE INTRODUCTION (2 PAGES MAX)

Introduction & abstract must be written clearly a concisely

- This is where you "hook" the reader
  - Connect the paper's topic to material the journal's basic reader likely knows
  - Challenge the reader's intuition from the get-go
  - Motivate the paper topic—Explain why it is important
  - Why should the reader care about ***this*** paper?
    - What is the question you are trying to answer?
    - What is(are) the paper's main new contribution(s)
    - What are its main findings?
      - How do they differ from those of prior work?
      - Be upfront about any ambiguous findings.
  - First sentence is the toughest. Make it snappy! General philosophical statements suck.
    - Don't write things like "Financial economists have long wondered if markets are efficient."
    - Your paper must be interesting on its own right.

ORGANIZATION: THEORY SECTION (LIT REVIEW—MAX 2 PAGES)

This section lays out the full motivation and background for your paper. It clearly distinguishes the paper's contribution vis-à-vis predecessors. Not a lit review; don't title it as such.

- Importance of literature review
  - Details issues raised in the paper
  - Defines any special terminology of the paper
  - Outlines the theory tested and research approach taken, and suggests why
- More or fewer references?
  - Be as complete as possible; you are invoking the authority of "giants"
  - Select only those items useful to your argument(s)
- Set of refs will be used by editors and referees

ORGANIZATION: SCOPE—DATA DISCUSSION (1 PAGE MAX)

This section details the geography and period of study. It explains why both are worthy of study. That is, you must explain here why you apply both to the study, and the extent to which findings from them provide external validity.

- What is the ideal dataset for your hypothesis?: Compare it to the data at hand
- The period of study should not be due only to a data limitations.
  - A quasi-natural experiment: Before and after some event—(e.g., 7-1)
  - Be aware of business cycles: Compare peak to peak or trough to trough
  - Note data limitations can count if the work has not been performed previously
- Rationalizing the geography of the analysis is also important.
  - Why is a focus on São Paulo important? Why should someone in Cameroon or Luxembourg care about this?
  - This can be simply the best data are available in this locale (the light is brighter)
- Provide all sources (e.g., table with descriptive statistics).
- Discuss significant data transformations performed (price deflators, interpolation, RAS)

ORGANIZATION: RESEARCH APPROACH —THE IDENTIFICATION STRATEGY (1.5-2 PAGES)

Three most important foci of empirical work?
1. Identification, 2. Identification, and 3. Identification.
How do you estimate causal effects? To explain this, you will need to specify:

- The general method
- The functional form
- Nature of comparison groups and justification of those used
- Items that stand out in descriptive stats and correlation table
- Biases of a naïve estimate
- Endogenous variables and related strategies for instruments
- Tests for spatial multi-collinearity or autocorrelations?
- Justification for control variables applied (lit review refs is a start)

ORGANIZATION: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

How fulsome should the results section be?

- Less is more. Focus on highlights.
  - If it's boring to write, it is even more boring to read.
    - When readers get bored, they get lost and lose interest in the paper.
    - Focus on key parameters of the analysis…even in related tables (detailed versions in appendices)
    - Pay attention also to any anomalous/unusual/debated results for control variables
  - Remember, you are telling a story!
- Tables/figures should be self-sufficient. Title, subtitle, & notes can be detailed.
  - Repeating between text and notes is acceptable.
  - Use full names of variables (not Greek letters or statistical package variable name)
- Robustness checks and other tests
  - If few, put in a footnote.
  - If many, use a parsimonious table or an appendix.

ORGANIZATION: FINDINGS CONT'D

How should findings be described?

- Focus the reader's attention to the key points and in the "right" order
- The first sentence of a paragraph should identify the main point
  (1. tell 'em what your gonna tell 'em, 2. tell 'em, & 3. tell 'em what you told 'em)
- Give the stylized facts in the data that drive your result
- Give meaning to magnitude of core numbers, not just statistical significance
  - Follow the main result with graphs and tables that give intuition
  - Show how main result is a robust feature of compelling stylized facts
  - Follow it up with responses to potential criticisms and robustness
- If findings anomalous, dig deeper into data to find plausible explanations
- **"Sometimes a woman's gotta hit a man to let him know she's there."**
  Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band

ORGANIZATION: FINDINGS CONT'D

- Tables: How many decimal places should be displayed?
  - Theory of significant digits
  - "It's best to be approximately correct than precisely wrong."
  - Alter magnitude of variable to avoid leading zeros in parameters
- Figures: A good picture can be "worth a thousand words"
  - Bad ones are a big waste of space

FINDINGS: INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

- Tie/compare results to findings of works in literature review
  - Identify other different plausible interpretations.
  - Are their strong arguments for one or the other?
- Limitations of your research
- Avoid making value judgments
  - Research can only "suggest" directions for policymaking that you can think of.
  - Others are not wrong or right,
    - Features of their theory, research approach, and data can be "different" or "less compelling" ***in your opinion***
- Do findings suggest directions of future work?

ORGANIZATION: CONCLUSIONS

Make them short and sweet.

- Do not restate all your findings: just those that are key
- No need to restate your contribution; but you can summarize the reason for the study
- Make limitations of the study clear (what sort of external validity?)
- Suggest broader implications of paper’s findings

ORGANIZATION: APPENDICES

Appendix: a supplementary document. Forms part of main document but non-essential.

- For documentation of how your dataset was formed. For example, how you wound up with the limited set of observations.
- For lengthy formal proofs.
- For specialized code used to estimate new measures or econometric technique (often now included only with online version of the article when published)
- For a core set of robustness checks
- For correlation matrix or reporting variance inflation factors (VIFs)

PROOFREAD: CHECK, TIGHTEN, REARRANGE, AND FIT

- Assurethat
  - Words are properly spelled (especially given spellcheck)
  - Text matches demonstrations in tables and figures
  - Verb tense in a given paragraph is the same
  - Terminology is consistent
  - All acronyms are defined
  - All references are cited and all citations are referenced
- Improve word choice and punctuation
  - To avoid any misinterpretation
  - To improve general readability
  - To reduce the reading load (if it is possible to cut a sentence or word, do so)
- Make sure your grandmother can read and understand
  - The Abstract
  - The Introduction
  - The Conclusions
- Have a least one friend read it
  (especially if you are unsure of the quality of your English)

CITATIONS AND REFERENCES

- Don't worry about matching a journal's style until after your paper's been accepted
- Use "et al." (et alias = and others) to cite when there are more than three authors.
- When storing references, keep the first names of all authors and editors.
- Cite when
  - Using another's idea
  - Making a strong statement
  - When citing some data fact
- This can be taken to unnecessary extremes…
- When in doubt, err on the side of citing!
- Direct quotes need citation with page number(s)…
  If more than 50 words, use a block quote

CITATIONS: PARAPHRASING BY EXAMPLE

In paraphrasing is you rewrite and explain information from another author via long passages, tables, charts, or diagrams. That author is still cited.

Quote: "New tracks aside, the challenge is at the bare minimum to bring light and air into this underground purgatory and, beyond that, to create for millions of people a new space worthy of New York, a civic hub in the spirit of the great demolished one, more attuned to the city's aspirations and democratic ideals." (Kimmelman, 2012)

Reference.

Kimmelman, Michael. (2012) "Restore a Gateway to Dignity," *New York Times*, February 8, accessed November 22, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/arts/design/a-proposal-for-penn-station-and-madison-square-garden.html.

CITATIONS: PARAPHRASING BY EXAMPLE

Plagiarism by overquoting:

Kimmelman (2012) suggests that as a doorway to a major city Penn Station should be redesigned so that its architecture brings "light and air into this underground purgatory." It should be "a new space worthy of New York, a civic hub in the spirit of the great demolished one, more attuned to the city's aspirations and democratic ideals."

Issues:

1. Kimmelman's quote is a bit wordy and muddled, so using his words is probably not the best idea. Quotes are best used when what you are quoting is particularly profound and it is important for your readers to hear the author's voice.
2. The words "underground purgatory," while catchy, are insufficiently important to warrant quoting.
3. The second quoted phrase contains many different thoughts. It is not clear why it is being quoted; as a result the quote raises more questions than it answers. What is a civic hub? Why was the prior Penn Station demolished? What are New York City's democratic ideals? What are its aspirations?

CITATIONS: PARAPHRASING BY EXAMPLE

Cut and paste plagiarism:

The challenge at Penn Station is to bring in some light and air into the current underground purgatory, which should instead be a civic hub that is more attuned to the aspirations and democratic ideals of millions of New Yorkers in the spirit of its now long-demolished predecessor.

Issues:

1. No citation.
2. The main thoughts are hardly condensed. The highlighted sentences are cut and pasted with minor revisions.

CITATIONS: PARAPHRASING BY EXAMPLE

Bad paraphrase:

Besides replacing railroad tracks, the toughest part is to at least bring air and light into Penn Station. All New Yorkers deserve a civic hub constructed with the same civil philosophy as the one that stood there before it long ago. Further, this development should draw on current local civic aesthetics and ambitions. (Kimmelman, 2012)

Issues:

1. The thoughts in the paraphrase do not flow well.
2. The citation is meant to pertain to the contents of the entire paragraph. At a minimum this is bad form, and at its worse is misleading since the reader is likely to assume the citation refers to only the final sentence.
3. The paraphrase's conceptual structure is overly similar to that in the original. While some key words may be different, they are essentially synonyms.
4. The term "civic hub" is not in quotes and should be since it is a term that probably has been invented by Kimmelman, and you clearly learned of it from his article.

CITATIONS: PARAPHRASING BY EXAMPLE

Better paraphrase:

As a key gateway to one of America's greatest cities, Penn Station should be resurrected in a way that better reflects the values and ambitions of New Yorkers—both today's and tomorrow's (Kimmelman, 2012). In my opinion, the station could contain more of the monumental, airy ambiance of Philadelphia's 30th Street Station; the lively, modern feel of London's St. Pancras Station; and the graceful experience of Grand Central Station. Of course, moving or removing Madison Square Garden would be the crux of the solution.

Key takeaways:

1. This example achieves the two key aims of paraphrasing; it effectively 1) synthesizes and 2) condenses the original (lengthy) quote
2. Moreover, this example extends the paraphrase by providing further evidence or examples. Notice that the author clearly distinguishes his or her contribution from Kimmelman's by saying, "In my opinion".

WRITING STYLE

Content and expression are not separable!
(Good writing can be learned.)

- Writing is thinking. Don't wait until the research is finished to start writing.
- Three aspects of classical rhetoric
  - Invention: The framing of arguments
  - Arrangement or organization
  - Style: Rewriting with an eye toward fluency. It is "proper words in proper places."
- Rules of essay and paragraph formation critical at first composition.
  (Each paragraph should have a specific point it is trying to make.)
- Rules of sentence structure & word choice only important when proofreading

WRITING STYLE

- Good writing, like teaching, is a performance; takes some acting.
  - Be true to yourself; don't be pompous and unintelligible (stage fright?)
  - Keep your mind on how the audience will react
    - Don't try to impress people who likely understand the material
    - Use a reasonable tone to explain to those who do not now understand it.
- Be concrete: say what you mean
  - Eschew obfuscation
  - Avoid abstraction
- Brevity is the soul of clarity.
- Good prose has a rhythm and cadence
- Writing should hang together, cohere…it is "transitive"
  - Implies words may need to be repeated
  - "It doesn't matter what your first sentence is; it doesn't even matter what your second sentence is, but the third damn well better follow from the first and second."

WRITING STYLE

- Keep your writing personal. Remind readers how economics affects their lives.
- Favor present tense, and at least maintain tense within each paragraph
- Favor the active tense; avoid passive tense
- Repetition is boring. Repetition is boring. I mean it is really boring and unnecessary.
  - Restatement of the well-known bores the reader
  - Overelaboration bores the reader
  - Excessive introduction and summary bores the reader
- Jargon limits readers who will understand.
- Get words aligned with ideas and stick to them; don't "mix it up"
- Keep sentences short. Long ones apt to be a source of consternation.

WRITING STYLE

- Use footnotes for comments that would interrupt the flow of the argument if in the text. Clearly footnotes may be skipped. Think of them as digressions.
- Avoid “of course”, “clearly”, and “obviously”. Clearly, if something is obvious, that fact will, of course, be obvious to the reader. The word very is very often very unnecessary.
- Use “I” and “me” when referring to yourself, and use “we” and “us” only when you are referring to something every reader might appreciate.
- Avoid adjectives and verbs that are overly dramatic.
- Reserve non-economics comments for the first paragraphs and conclusions. Otherwise avoid them or divert them to footnotes.
- Avoid using a “table of contents” paragraph
- When reading your Results section, readers will tolerate less than scintillating prose for the sake of clarity

WORKING WITH EDITORS AND REVIEWERS

Editor Responsibilities toward the Scientific Community

- Maintain the journal's integrity
  - Assure timeliness of unbiased, well-founded decisions
  - Attract quality manuscripts for review
- Assure consistency of editorial style

Editor Responsibilities toward Reviewers

- Assign papers to reviewers with an appropriate interest/expertise
- Assure confidentiality of reviewers
- Allow a reasonable review period
- Do not overtax any reviewer
- Encourage authors to document responses to all reviewer comments

WORKING WITH EDITORS AND REVIEWERS

Editor Responsibilities toward Authors

- Provide a clear statement of the journal's scope
- Treat all authors with fairness, courtesy, objectivity, honesty, and transparency
- Protect the confidentiality of authors
- Offer a system for effective, rapid peer review
- Make decisions in reasonable time
- Communicate decisions clearly and constructively
  - Adjudicate across referee statements
  - Make clear what is required versus what is preferred in a revision

WORKING WITH EDITORS AND REVIEWERS

Peer Review

- The role of the Editorial Board
- Selecting referees
  - Board members
  - The problem of curmudgeon and easy referees
  - Dimensions: Overlapping disciplines and Method/Theory/Application/Data
  - The role of the above-average field reader
  - Developing "good" referees
  - The editors' club
  - Watch your references and acknowledgements!
  - How many?

WORKING WITH EDITORS AND REVEWERS

Reasons manuscripts are rejected

- Lack proper structure
- Lack the necessary detail for readers to fully understand the authors' analysis
- Contain no new science: old wine in a new bottle
- Do not clearly distinguish new science from what is known
- Lack up-to-date references
- Contain theories, concepts, or conclusions that are not fully supported by arguments, and information
- Yield insufficient detail on materials and methods to allow replication
- Lack clear descriptions or explanations of:
  - Hypotheses tested
  - The experimental design
  - Sample characteristics and descriptive statistics
- Experimental designs are poor or faulty, or statistical analyses are lacking
- Have poor language quality

WORKING WITH EDITORS AND REVIEWERS

Editorial decisions: The author's perspective

- Write the editor for a decision after 14 weeks, unless they give a better sense of their journal's decision response time. But don't be too persistent!
- What should I do if my paper is rejected?

1. It happens to the best of us…Krugman (Gans and Shepard, *JEP,* 1994)
2. Deal with your feelings…don't read the details until you calm down.
3. Read the letter and set(s) of referee comments like instructions to get cash after winning a lottery.
4. If it is a desk rejection, be thankful (if it took little or no time).

   The issue of Plagiarism

5. What if some points are unclear?
   a) Have a close colleague read it; you may be too entwined.
   b) Write to the editor for adjudication/clarification
6. The review process has flaws
   a) Submit to another (more suitable?) journal
   b) Rewrite some and submit to another journal
   c) Resubmit only if invited (perhaps because some component was missing); check before doing so

WORKING WITH EDITORS AND REVIEWERS

I got a revise and resubmit. What exactly are the implications of this?

- What to do with 2-3 set of referee comments and the letter from the Editor?
  - After 3-6 months (at least) of waiting for a decision, the offer is tough to refuse.

Principle #1: The referee is always right.

- Most authors opt to become prostitutes; they sell their souls to meet every referee demand.
- This is particularly true for high impact factor journals. Scarcity forces behavioral adjustments.

Principle #2: Even when the referee is clearly wrong, s/he is right.

- Most of the time it is a misunderstanding of what you have written. Be clearer!
- If not a misinterpretation, then give greater emphasis to the point.

Principle #3: Assume each referee has veto powers

- You can ask for a new referee. But you again meet the fate of lady luck and start all over.
- You can try to logically petition the Editor and Referee A.

Principle #4: Reply to every referee point, especially if you disagree.

WORKING WITH EDITORS AND REVIEWERS

How to respond to a request for revision

- Perform any additional experiments or analyses the reviewers recommend
- Address all other points raised by the editor and reviewers
- Mark all revisions in the text, either with a different color text, by highlight the changes (yellow preferred), or with Microsoft Word's Track Changes feature
- Describe the general nature of the manuscript revisions in a response letter to the editor
  - In this letter, politely and frankly point our to the editor or comments with which you disagree
- Provide separate responses to each referee report
  - Include the reviewer's original comments/suggestions
  - Follow each with a description of how you responded to each using a different font
  - If you did not respond in the text, politely explain why you opted not to do so
- Return the marked revised manuscript, a clean version, and the response letter with all response reports within the period allotted by the editor. You can ask for more time.

QUESTIONS?

REFERENCES

Gans, Joshua S. and George B. Shepherd. (1994) "How Are the Mighty Fallen: Rejected Classic Articles by Leading Economists," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 8(1) 165-179.

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