Writing for Publication

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Why do we want to publish?

By publishing your research in a journal, you can not only contribute to academia (i.e., adding new knowledge) and establish your reputation but also demonstrate the education/research quality of UTSA!

Why is publication difficult?

“Publish or Perish” is real. To get tenured in a university, you have to publish a certain number of publications. Thus, you compete for limited space in journals with a large number of researchers who may belong to top schools in the US and around the world. Typically, you have to convince two to three reviewers (gatekeepers) that your work is worth publishing. The acceptance ratio of top journals is less than 10%.

Is it easier to publish at lower journals?

Yes, but there are a few critical caveats. First, lower journals tend to have lower quality reviewers (that is why we think it easier to publish). Sometimes, you need to deal with very low quality comments. Second, editorial systems at lower journals may not be well-managed (note: some top journals too). You may need to wait more than six months to just receive an unclear rejection letter. Alternatively, you can publish your work in a book edited by colleagues or close peers. In such an instance, your publication is guaranteed. However, many schools do not think such publications are “high quality,” because books do not have referees (or rejections).

What should we do to get published (beyond research)?

To convince reviewers, you have to write a paper in a way that reviewers love your work. Note that they do not know who you are or how hard you worked.

1. **Contribute**: To get published, your research has to make a contribution to the literature. What is contribution? Your work should have something **new and important**. Note that it is not **new or important**.

2. **Make interesting**: Interestingness is another key aspect of any good research paper. More specifically, when your paper shows something counter-intuitive, it is interesting and reviewers love to publish such work (see a classic by Davis, 1971).
3. **Organize**: Even if your work is both new and important, reviewers will not like your work if the paper is not well-organized (such papers are often boring and frustrating rather than interesting). Define constructs clearly and double check the flow of your logic.

4. **Be nice**: If you get an opportunity to “revise and resubmit,” you are supposed to incorporate reviewers’ comments and improve the paper. However, not all reviewers are good. Daniel Feldman, a former editor of *Journal of Management* said that “at least 50 percent of the reviewers’ comments are right on target.” That means that close to 50 percent are either not right on target or way off the mark. Yet, you still have to be nice to reviewers to convince them to see your thoughts. This is the name of the game.

5. **Edit**: Before submitting your work, you have to carefully edit. Misspelling of authors’ names and omission of references are two common mistakes. Yes, such mistakes are trivial compared to the quality of the research. But such mistakes send a signal that you are not careful and thus your research may not be carefully done.

**Getting published is like throwing spaghetti...**

That is the most memorable advice I ever had. There is a “luck” component in the publication process including the assignment of reviewers. You have to keep throwing spaghetti until it sticks. You have to keep submitting your work until you get a publication. Do not give up.

**Resources**


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This monthly web article publication, written by UTSA faculty and staff, provides our UTSA graduate students advice on how to successfully navigate graduate school. The series addresses topics on academic and professional development and career preparation. To suggest topics, contact John Shaffer, Assistant Director of Graduate Recruitment and Retention at john.shaffer@utsa.edu.