

An Editor's Tips: Part 1: Planning Publications & Selecting Journals



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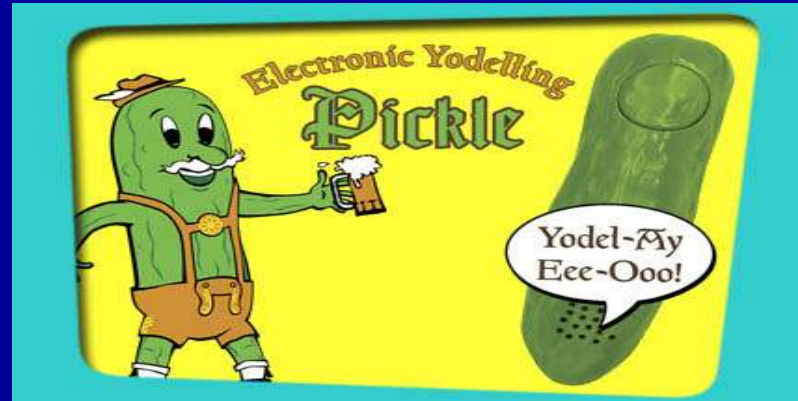
Overview

- Thinking about possible papers
- Unanticipated opportunities and “lemonade papers”
- Identifying journals
- Positioning your paper
- Backup planning

Thinking about possible papers

- Begins at start of a project, or sometimes even before
- Should be discussed with coauthors early
- Consider reviews, policy analytic papers, commentaries/think pieces, etc. as well as research papers based on data
- Keep list of paper ideas at all times

Unanticipated opportunities



- New phenomena (products, behaviors)
- Policy natural experiments
- Media coverage
- Political developments

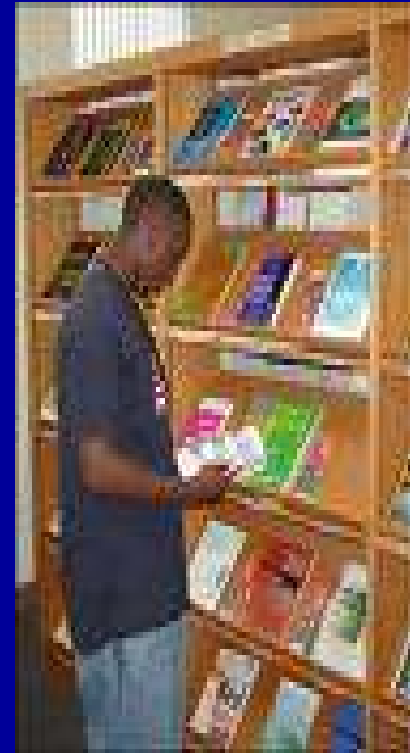
Making lemonade

- Examples:
 - IRB refuses approval for your study
 - You fail to recruit enough subjects for your trial



Identifying journals

- Scholarly browsing
- Look for similar *types* of articles
- Journal 'tone' and focus
- Journal audience/readership
- Indexing
- Impact factor
- Status within discipline
- Average time to publication



Positioning your paper

- Link to contemporary debates, trends, controversies
- Link to issues of interest to target journal
- Consider what is 'fresh' about it
- Write abstract, introduction and conclusion *last*
- Consider who might review it



Backup Planning

- Identify at least 3 journals as possibilities
- Consider journal focus/style and try for similar journals
- Consider alternative positioning if unsuccessful

DO:



- Write your paper long, then reduce it to highlight only main points
- Read the journal so you hear its 'tone'
- Be scrupulous in checking references and copyediting
- Figure out what your paper is about before submitting it

Do NOT:

- Use these terms:
 - On the other hand
 - The study found that
 - The results showed that
 - In order to
 - In conclusion
 - As noted above



Introduction

- **Catchy opening sentence**
- **Keep it short**
- **Review literature selectively**
- **Justify your study in light of above**
- **End with sharp focus: hypothesis, question**

Methods

- **Enough to permit replication; or to assess validity of findings, quality of study**
- **Tell the story: “To assess xyz, we did the hoodgie-woodjie procedure, using Blatz technique (3)”**
- **If new measures or procedures, describe in detail in appendix, or from authors**

Results

- Separate results from methods & discussion
- Report results in clear, *orderly* fashion
- Don't repeat in text what can be conveyed clearly in tables
- Show your data (appendices possible)

Discussion/Conclusion

- Explain what results *mean*
- Place results in perspective (other studies)
- Describe limitations
- Restrict interpretation to these results
- Implications for policy or research
- Don't conclude “more research needed”

Keep it short

- **Make it “lean and mean” -- make every word justify its existence**
- **Check word limit; do word count**
- **Even if o.k., shorter is (almost) always better**
- **Cut all extra words, phrases, paragraphs**
- **Prune, whittle, cut**

Next:

- Submitting your paper, and the horrors of peer review
- Reviewers: helpful angels, or evil dogs?



- Life after rejection
- The glory of acceptance

An Editor's Tips: Part 2: Submitting your paper, & peer review



Overview

- Editor queries
- Rules re paper submissions
- Formatting and other requirements
- Cover letters and abstracts
- Reviewers, and responding to them
- Rejection: Your paper is not your baby
- Success and dissemination of your work

Editor queries

- Check journal website first
- Most high profile journals do not recommend querying
- Exceptions: resubmission to same journal

Submission “Rules”

- One journal at a time
- Disclose/cite/send copies of any related publications/submissions
- May recommend reviewers Y/N
- Always disclose funding, COI
- Plagiarism
- Credit and build on work of others
- Self-citation OK, but not excessive

Formatting, etc.

- Follow journal's author guidelines *to the letter.*
- *Period.*

Abstracts and cover letters

- May be the *only* things an editor in chief will examine before making initial decisions
- **MUST** be prepared to journal style and within word count limits
- Should show not only what you did, but why it matters

Cover Letter Example

- Dear Dr. Northridge,
- While several studies have documented the tobacco industry's targeting of African Americans, their support of Black leadership groups, and their longstanding ties with African American organizations, no previous studies have explored the tobacco industry's relationship with the community's major media group, the National Newspaper Publishers Association. In this paper, we show for the first time how the tobacco industry cultivated relationships with the Black press under a "quid pro quo" arrangement, expecting editorial support for industry positions in exchange for advertising, journalism scholarships, and numerous other types of monetary support. When advertising dollars dropped, however, Black newspaper publishers became "threatening," in the words of a tobacco industry executive. The relationship continued across decades, even as the evidence of tobacco's harmfulness accumulated.
-
- We believe this paper's findings will stimulate further dialogue within the African American community about the dynamics of organizations' continuing relationships with tobacco companies and the inequitable "quid pro quo" arrangements many have made with the industry.
-
- Thank you for your consideration of our work.
-

Abstract Example

- Community-based participatory research (CBPR) addresses the social justice dimensions of health disparities through engaging marginalized communities, capacity building, and encouraging more egalitarian relationships between researchers and communities. Yet, CBPR may challenge institutionalized academic practices and understandings that inform Institutional Review Board (IRB) deliberations and, indirectly, prioritize particular kinds of research. In this case study of our attempt to use a CBPR partnership to study cigarette sales practices in an inner city community, we examine, using critical and communitarian perspectives, implications of the university IRB's refusal to approve the study. CBPR requires expanding ethical discourse beyond the procedural, principle-based approaches common in biomedical research settings. The current ethics culture of academia may sometimes serve to protect institutional power at the expense of community empowerment.

Reviewers: helpful angels, or evil dogs?



Sometimes both! But assume the former.
Remember, you may someday be
reviewing *their* paper.

Awaiting a decision

- Be patient until estimated time has elapsed, then query
- Remain optimistic!





Responding to reviewer comments

- Take a deep breath. Allow dust to settle. Consider remote possibility that reviewers may be *right*.
- *Interpret extensive comments as engagement.*
- Read each comment through several times; discuss with coauthors.
- Prepare written response to each comment, even those with which you disagree. Provide rationale for those not addressed.
- Follow journal instructions for revisions.

Tone for response to reviewers

- “Miss Manners”:
 - unfailingly polite and gracious
 - thank reviewers for raising good points
 - confident and specific
 - avoid defensiveness
 - assume you did not adequately convey what you thought you conveyed
 - may request another review if review blatantly biased, unfair or inaccurate

Always remember:

‘Your paper is not your baby.’

—Drummond Rennie, MD, Deputy Editor, JAMA



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Being a reviewer

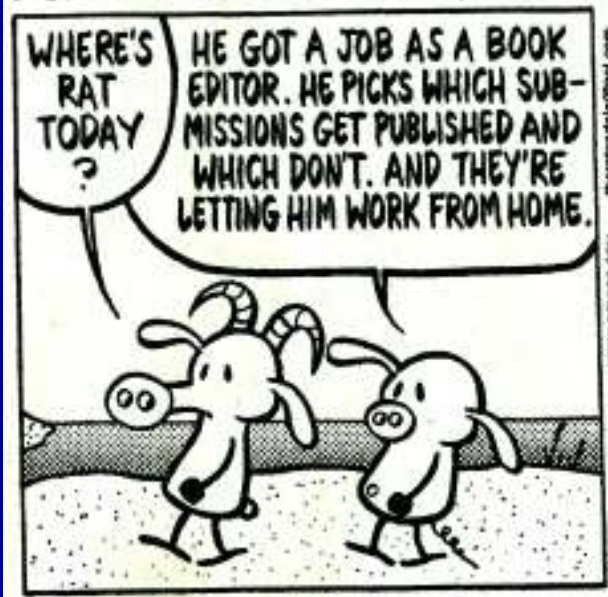
- An expectation of all published authors
- Involves ethical and scholarly obligations
- An opportunity to learn from others
- Reviewing contributes to your reputation in field
- Honor time commitments
- Identity disclosure issues



A good review

- Highlights both strengths and weaknesses
- Suggests ways to address weak areas
- Is not personal in tone
- Should help an author even if the paper should be rejected
- Considers both content and structure within the context of the journal itself

Pearls Before Swine Stephan Pastis



Feeling Rejected?

- Brush yourself off and take stock
- Consider whether to make revisions before submitting to another journal—often wise to do so
- DO resubmit elsewhere before paper languishes too long
- Realize that journals have limited space
- All highly published researchers have been rejected multiple times

Inside 'tips'

- Do not request advance opinions or special consideration
- Can request individuals *not* review
- Consider submitting reviewer comments and responses to next journal
- Negotiation is sometimes possible, but do not badger editors

Acceptance! *YES!!*

- Additional steps: checking proofs, working with copy editors—be scrupulously accurate and careful
- Embargo dates
- Disseminating your work—what is OK, what is not
- Press releases, blogs, listserves
- Celebrate your success! (and keep going)