Publishing: art or science? Reflections from an editorial perspective

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Background on journal and manuscripts

* This presentation conveys insights into the 'journal process' gained through experiences serving in an editorial capacity.
* Here, three basic messages emerge.
* **First**, if a study is to be successful, it must address an interesting and important topic and then investigate it in a rigorous, scientific and robust manner.
* **Second**, the study must be communicated in a sufficiently transparent and accessible fashion so that the gatekeepers can critically evaluate the work, and ultimately so that it influences the readers of the journal.

Background on journal and manuscripts

* Finally, authors are strongly advised to subject their work to external scrutiny before submitting it for peer review, by exposing it to colleagues and/or by presenting it in public forum such as conferences or workshop seminars.

Review process and outcomes

* Of the 38 manuscripts received, I rejected 10.5 per cent without sending them out for review (sometimes called a ‘desk rejection’) because it seems wasteful reviewing papers that are not suitable for the journal

Review process and outcomes

* Based on blind reviews, the authors were informed the manuscript was either accepted (5.3 per cent), conditional on amendments being implemented, or rejected (47.4 per cent), were asked to revise and resubmit (23.7 per cent) the manuscript, or were asked for a major revision (13.1 per cent).

Content analysis

* The **introduction** to a manuscript provides an outline of the paper and often provides a summary of the results and the structure of the paper. It is the part of the manuscript to describe the objectives of the study (what is done), the motivation (why it is interesting) and the contribution (what it adds to the literature).

Content analysis

* The lack of an appropriate theoretical base lowers the internal validity (i.e. the strength of the story) and the external validity (i.e. the ability to extend the empirical results beyond the particular empirical setting) and reduces the manuscript to a descriptive study. More than one reviewer suggested that without an appropriate theoretical base, the manuscript should be consigned to a practitioner journal rather than a research journal.

Data

* Sixteen reviews considered the sample selection was inappropriate; either because it was ‘too narrow’, it was ‘out-of-date’ or there was ‘self-selection’, ‘survivorship bias’, or ‘confounding events’ had occurred

Analysis

* Reviewers' comments on statistical issues were varied; ranging from simple requests for a correlation matrix to be reported to questions over the choice of models, disagreements with the statistical tests

Results

* Reviewers' comments on results included requests for policy implications, complaints of interpreting beyond the sample and suggestions for a more balanced interpretation of the results. However, the description of results is not a major cause for rejection.

Pre-submission checklist

* **Peer review**
* Has the paper been presented at a conference or workshop (and has the manuscript been revised taking into account suggestions or comments)?

Editing

* Is the manuscript in accordance with the author guidelines (consider headings, tables, footnotes)?
* Is the terminology used to describe events, variables and tests consistent?
* Is the structure of the manuscript consistent with published articles in the journal of choice?
* Consider getting the manuscript professionally edited?

Pre-submission checklist

Journal choice

* Is the manuscript being sent to the most appropriate journal? (Consider: Journal rankings;
* Does the manuscript extend literature in the journal?
* How many times you have cited the journal? Are citations to the professional literature rather than the academic literature?)

Pre-submission checklist

Title

* Is the title appropriate? (i.e. Does it indicate what you are investigating?)

Objective, motivation, contribution

* Does the introduction describe what was done, what was found, why it was done (i.e. why it is an interesting issue) and what it adds to the literature?
* Is the introduction less than four pages? (Four pages is not a strict limit but the manuscript should not overwhelm the reader with too much detail).

Pre-submission checklist

Story

* Does the story create expectations?
* Does the preceding discussion lead to the hypothesis?
* Can hypotheses be formulated even if they are not stated in the paper?
* Are the hypotheses directional?

Pre-submission checklist

Data

* Is there a convincing reason why the data and sample selection criteria are suitable?
* Are the data and sample selection criteria well described?
* Is the treatment of outliers described?
* Is the partitioning of data into sub-samples described and justified?
* Does the number of observations change from table to table? Why?

Pre-submission checklist

Analysis

* Are all variables described?
* Is there a table of descriptive statistics (including means and medians)?
* Is there a correlation matrix?
* Does the statistical analysis test the stated hypotheses?
* If data are pooled consider year-by-year regressions as sensitivity analysis.
* Is the order of the description of variables in the text, the same as the model, the tables and the discussion of the results?
* Are the reported table headings and content consistent in style?

Pre-submission checklist

Results

Are the tables and figures self-contained?

Does the manuscript include any policy implications? (This may be linked to the ‘so what’question in the introduction).

Do the reported results include conclusions beyond the sample included the study?

Thank you!

Questions?