

HOW NOT TO GET YOUR ARTICLE PUBLISHED¹

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Why do you want to publish articles? Presumably to maximize your utility function, which includes income with a big weight attached to it. The reason most of us write articles is to get tenure, promotion and salary increases. A mass of empirical studies show that there are substantial rewards from publishing. Some of you at schools with zero or negligible salary increases over the last few years may doubt this finding.

Our founding father, Adam Smith, wrote: "People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices." This session today has been organized to help us conspire to raise the price for which we sell our labor.

I have two major qualifications for the task of telling you how to optimize your publication activity. First, I have edited the *Journal of Macroeconomics* since 1979 and have made decisions on almost 3000 papers. Second, I write a lot of articles and I am willing to wager a considerable sum that I have had more papers rejected than anyone in this room. So I have received more ridiculous, stupid, biased, unfair, incompetent and unintelligible referee reports and letters from editors after waiting months and months and sometimes years and years, than anyone else here. I can give you lots of horror stories from the trenches.

How can you ensure that your article will be rejected?

1. First, send it to the wrong journal. Don't bother researching what type of articles different journals publish. Don't bother asking for advice from your friends. Send a paper on microeconomics to the *Journal of Macroeconomics*.
2. Make sure that the paper is very long. Referees love reading a 50- or 60-page paper and immediately put it on the top of the pile. It takes me less than 30 seconds to recognize a paper that is part of a Ph.D. dissertation. New Ph.D.s have to realize that article writing is different from dissertation writing. Don't expect a referee to take a chunk of your dissertation and convert it into an article — that's what dissertation supervisors are for.
3. Make sure that physical aspects of the paper are unsatisfactory. Don't bother to proofread it. Don't bother using your word processor's spell checker or grammar checker — put in many grammatical errors, misspellings and typos.

¹ These rather informal notes were prepared for presentation at a session at the Eastern Economic Association meeting, Boston, March 1994.

Especially ensure that you misspell the names of the authors you cite. If they turn out to be your referees they'll like that. And if the editor has written articles that are relevant to your paper don't cite him — editors are always terribly embarrassed to receive papers that recognize the brilliance of their own articles.

4. Don't type the paper in the journal's house style. Use another journal's house style so that the editor knows at once that the paper has just been rejected elsewhere. Remember, editors are like Santa. They know.
5. Make several controversial points in the one paper so that you can be sure that the referee will hate something in the paper. Even if the referee says that three quarters of the paper are correct and good, the editor may concentrate on the negative part of the report and reject the paper. So don't split your paper up into several papers because all might be accepted. Also, you should consider that some journals only use one referee while others use two. If the paper is controversial it may be difficult to find two referees that simultaneously like it — so to increase the likelihood of rejection don't send the paper to a journal that only uses one referee.
6. Journals often use economists listed in the references as referees. So make sure that the reference list is replete with enemies.
7. Don't have any up-to-date references. This is 1994. Don't have any references later than 1989. This will make it clear to the editor that you have been shopping the paper around for a few years and haven't revised it. And personally I don't like papers that cite Irving Fisher, Keynes and Pigou and nobody else. I'd love to get referee reports from Fisher, Keynes and Pigou, but I've had difficulty contacting them.
8. If the paper is full of math, make no effort to provide any intuitive explanations. Make it difficult for the reader to understand what you are doing without ploughing through all the math. Better still, make it impossible for the reader to understand the paper even if he is an expert mathematician. There is an exception to this rule. Often when the math is translated into English, it is apparent that the paper is trivial. To ensure rejection of such a paper you should translate it into English.
9. Suppose you get a revise and resubmit letter from the editor. How do you make sure that the revision is rejected? Don't write a cover letter explaining how you have dealt with the referees' criticisms. If you haven't done everything the referees wanted, don't explain why. If you do write a letter or a response to the referees, explain in detail why the referees and the editor are incompetent idiots and why they should be shot for wanting changes in your masterpiece.

10. If the paper has been rejected and you send it to another journal, don't make any improvements suggested by the original referees even if they are sensible and you can make them. Remarkably frequently the paper will end up on the desk of an earlier referee.
11. Be a really lousy referee yourself. Don't referee any papers sent you and don't tell the editor that you aren't going to referee a paper. Then complain to the editor about slow turnaround time. Do this just after having a paper accepted that the editor and a pair of referees have spent a lot of time on making publishable. I have heard an editor mutter about the possibility of losing galley proofs — and I am not usually a vindictive person.
12. My final piece of advice is don't give up. Even if a journal occasionally accepts one of your papers, there are lots of journals out there ready to reject the next one.

Postscript: *Nota bene.* HMM.