

**Writing and submitting papers to international journals:
A few guidelines and some common-sense suggestions for young scholars**
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Getting your own research work published in an appropriate academic journal can be a challenge, especially (but not exclusively!) for a young scholar or a graduate student. There are neither standard international rules nor magic formulae that guarantee success. However, some basic points, a few “tricks” and several common-sense suggestions exist that are worth considering before submitting a paper to a journal.

The main aim of these short notes is simply to share some of the experience that we have accumulated not only as authors but also as editors and referees of academic journals hoping that they can facilitate your work. Many (most?) recommendations might sound quite trivial: we apologize for this but our experience as referees suggests that many papers are rejected or require revisions precisely for such minor issues.

In any case, don't forget: these notes as well as your PhD advisor's, friends' and scholars' recommendations might prove helpful, but it will be especially your personal experience, negative and frustrating experiences included, that will allow you to learn from your mistakes, develop your thoughts, improve your writing skill, and finally lead to the publication of your paper.

Some general remarks on submission and referee process:

- Hundreds of papers are annually submitted to academic journals (not necessarily only to the top ones). These journals can only accept a limited number of papers. On average the acceptance rate for major economics journal is around 10-15% and all economists scholars who submit to journals have sooner or later experienced rejections. Thus, when you submit your paper you must consider that the probability it could be accepted is, by definition, quite low and inversely correlated to the position of the journal in the top ranking (but, of course, positively correlated to the quality of your paper!).
- According to a survey conducted by Henderson and Reichenstein (1996) and Fisher and Lawrence (1990) the major factors in rejection, in order of importance, are:
 1. Failure to make an original contribution.
 2. Communication failure: poor organization, poor structure, poorly written, faulty English, etc..
 3. Topic is inappropriate for the journal.
 4. Writing style is inappropriate for the journal.
 5. Inappropriate quantitative methods.

Scrutinize carefully whether your paper is affected by one or more of these potential rejection factors before submitting it.

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- Journals do not consider any paper under simultaneous review by any other journal or publisher. Thus, select carefully the journal to which you want to submit your paper. It could be a good strategy to have, at the start, a sort of “submission tree” (i.e. sequence of alternative outlets for your work) (Hamermesh, 1992) in mind: if you feel very confident on the quality and relevance of your paper, start with the top of your journals favourite ranking.
- Submit your paper to a journal only when you are genuinely persuaded that it is ready to be reviewed. To avoid wasting your time and work as well as those of your referee(s), do not submit your paper if it is very poor in style or still at an early stage. You should take into consideration that the refereeing work is not only a serious responsibility (at least for those who take this job seriously) but is also an unrewarding activity: a generous and constructive referee report can be crucial for improving your paper and your future research work, but the referee is not your supervisor.
- It is always a good idea to get detailed comments by a number of other scholars before submitting your paper. However, keep in mind that there is some reciprocity involved in this process of commenting. Apart from supervisors and other teachers/professors at your university, who are responsible for commenting on your work, you can't expect anyone to give a detailed opinion on every piece of your work. It is good to start by asking for comments from your peers, and also be generous with your time and energy to your own peers. If you don't offer to read, and make helpful remarks regarding their work, and take that task seriously, then you shouldn't expect other people to comment on your work either. More established scholars generally are also doing a lot of refereeing work, and you should realise that it is unlikely that they will comment on your paper.
- Before sending your manuscript to a journal look carefully and follow the specific submission guidelines on styling and procedure for submission. They are generally available on the website and/or inside the journal. A brief formal covering letter (just a couple of sentences) is sufficient to accompany the manuscript. Further, check very carefully your spelling, grammar and bibliographical details before final submission.
- The majority of (serious) journals adopt a double blind referee process. This means that your paper, which should be submitted anonymously (most journals require that you indicate your name and address in a separate sheet), will be sent for reviewing to (generally, two) anonymous referees that will prepare a referee report. In case of divergent opinions among referees, the journal can solicit an additional report from another referee or decide itself about the destiny of your paper according to the editorial policy of the journal and available space for publication.
- A typical referee report includes: a) a brief summary of the paper; b) confidential comments to the editor; c) comments to the author. Generally speaking, journals ask the referee(s) to base their evaluation on three main questions:
 1. Is the contribution to the literature substantial enough? (paper's originality and significance for the research field)
 2. Is the topic appropriate to the journal's aims and audience? (subject matter)
 3. Are writing and styling suitable?

Before submitting your paper, try to give your (honest) answers to these three questions.

- A referee process usually requires a long time: from two to six months, on average, but long waits - close to one year - are becoming, unfortunately, quite common. You might take into account this time horizon when considering your future plans and career projects. You might want to contact the editorial office 6-7 months after the date of submission to check on the proceedings of your paper. Now, some journals are using an online submission system that allows to save time and to keep track of your manuscript. Check on the Journal website if this option is possible.
- Typically, the referee reports you will receive can classify your paper in three main categories:
 1. Accepted subject to minor revision. Great! Revise your paper according to the referee report and send it to the journal immediately.
 2. To revise and resubmit with more substantive changes. You still have a chance (about 50%). Revise your paper trying to take into account as much as possible (if you think they were appropriate!) the comments/suggestions received by your referee(s). Resubmit your paper within maximum three months (but not in few days if you worked on it full time: the editor may think that you have not devoted a sufficient amount of time to the revision) with a detailed response to individual referee(s) explaining what you did or did not do in response to every comment. Wait for a new referee report. Your new version will not necessarily be reviewed in this second round by the previous referee (s), so don't worry if the new comments/suggestions you receive conflict with the old one: reviewing a paper is not a precise science!
 3. Rejected. Rejection does not necessarily means that your paper must be definitely put in your paper bin (even eminent scholars get rejection letters) but if your paper is rejected for 3 or 4 times that could be the right solution... Read carefully the referee report(s) and try to learn as much as possible from the referee(s) critique and comments. If a referee misunderstood your paper, it could be your fault. The most common explanation for wrong interpretation by the referee is that you just have not been enough clear and coherent in your argumentation. Yet, if you believe that the referee's points were indeed wrong and misplaced, give clear and politely expressed reasons (Creedy, 2002). Revise and circulate the new version of your paper and investigate carefully whether another journal could be interested in publishing it.

More specific comments on style

- Have something to say to the journal's readers (keep your intended audience always in mind!) and say it clearly are crucial criteria for publication success (see Boonpramote, 2000).
- There is no single appropriate style but there are several universal golden rules of good writing, and among them are the most important simplicity and clarity. Simple, direct statements communicate more effectively than complex, boring and verbose

sentences. Try to be both precise and concise, if you can. As Thomson (2001:1) writes “Do not assume that if your ideas are interesting, you will be read whether or not you write well. Your paper is competing for attention with many others that constantly land on the desks of the people you hope to reach. If they cannot see at a glance that they will gain something from reading it, they will not even start”.

- Clear exposition requires revising, revising and revising again (Thomson, 2001). Suggestions and constructive critiques by persons who have experience in the same research field will help you to identify weaknesses and strengths in your paper.
- Organize your thoughts and try to achieve a logical order in your presentation: sometimes reorganizing sections and paragraphs in your paper allow you to organize your arguments and make your paper more convincing.
- As the paper’s length increases beyond 15-20 pages the chance of acceptance can rapidly decrease. It would be better if your paper does not exceed 25 pages. Editors and referees like short papers and the referee report will be returned faster (Choi, 2002).
- The introduction should be two pages or less (but it also depends on the topic of your paper as well as on the kind of journal): it should mention important references (that could be potential referees!) and should provide evidence of why your paper is interesting and thus why it should be published. If the referee (and the future potential reader) loses interest from reading the introduction, your paper will be set aside until he receives a reminder about the review.
- Conclusion should briefly summarize the paper’s contribution, point out the limitations of your results (without being too negative) and discuss what could be the next steps in your research. Do not repeat or copy and paste what you have already said in the introduction or in the other sections body of the paper.
- Write a stimulating abstract (only after the conclusion is written) and choose an eye-catching title (one line is best and never use more than two lines). Abstract should not be too long and some Journals require a maximum number of words (i.e. no more than 200) or characters.
- A long list of references is appropriate for a PhD dissertation but not for a journal paper (Choi, 2002 suggests one dozen of reference as ideal number and possibly no more than 20 but again it largely depends on your paper as well as on the journal). It would be better to avoid to cite your dissertation as well as someone else’s dissertation. Also avoid citing your own works (in particular in the introduction).
- Do not ruin your starting career in the academic world by plagiarism. Of course, it should never happen intentionally but be aware that it could happen accidentally, so learn the art of giving adequate references to your sources.
- There is nothing worse than finish a paper and find that somebody else published a similar idea years ago! So, scan current journals and keep regularly up with the

current literature (e.g. Econlite). Social Science Research Network features news about papers as soon as they are accepted.

- It is important that preliminary versions of your paper are presented at seminars, workshops and conferences and circulate as a working paper, discussion paper, etc. Ask other scholars for comments, and give comments to others. Networking and building up contacts is highly important and Choi (2002) recommends to present papers and to attend at least two professional meetings a year. This can also allow you to get to know the people in your main research area who might be your future referees.
- While English is the international language, many of us are non-native-English-speakers. Ask a native speaker (better if familiar with the topic) to revise your paper before submitting it to the Journal.

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A partial list of international journals that are interested and suitable for submitting papers on the capability approach and human development:

Heterodox economics:

Cambridge Journal of Economics
Review of Social Economy
Feminist Economics (if the paper touches on gender issues)
Journal of Socio-Economics
Economics and Philosophy
Review of Political Economy
International Journal of Social Economics
Journal of Economic Issues

Mainstream economics:

Review of Income and Wealth
Economic Journal
Oxford Economic Papers
Applied Economic Papers
Economic Theory
Journal of Economic Theory
American Economic Review
Quarterly Journal of Economics
Economics and Philosophy
Social Choice and Welfare
Journal of Economic Inequality
International Economic Review
Journal of Development Economics
Journal of Development Studies
Economica
Pacific Economic Review
Mathematical Social Sciences
Canadian Journal of Economics
European Economic Review

Development journals:

World Development
Development and Change
Oxford Development Studies
Journal of Human Development
Journal of International Development
Ethics and International Affairs (focus on development ethics)
Economic and Political Weekly (India-based)
Studies in Comparative International Development
Population and Development Review

Political theory/philosophy:

Journal of Political Philosophy
Economics and Philosophy
Philosophy, Politics and Economics
Political Theory
Philosophical Topics
Constellations
European Journal of Political Theory
Utilitas
Philosophy and Public Affairs (absolute top journal -- extremely hard to get in!)
American Political Science Review (absolute top journal -- extremely hard to get in!)
Political Studies
British Journal of Political Science
Government and Opposition
Political Quarterly
Philosophy

Philosophy and Public Affairs

Ethics/moral philosophy:

Ethics and Economics (on-line)
Journal of Political Philosophy
Ethics
Journal of Moral Philosophy
Journal of Religious Ethics

Education:

Theory and Research in Education
International Journal of Educational Development
Journal of Philosophy of Education

Other journals, if applicable:

Social Indicators Research
Economy and Society
Basic Income Studies
Journal of Religion
Social Sciences and Medicine
British Medical Journal
Foreign Affairs
Bioethics
Journal of Economic History
Signs (top feminist journal -- extremely hard to get in!)
Hypathia (feminist philosophy)
Journal of Social Policy
European Journal of Social Policy
The Lancet (health)
Health Economics