國際期刊撰寫經驗交換

江明憲
國立成功大學國際企業研究所
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How to Prepare Your Research Paper?

Below is an article written by Professor Wolfe at the University of New South Wales, Australia, talking about how to write a Ph.D. thesis. Personally, I think that this article is interesting and helpful for a researcher in terms of research paper preparation from the beginning. Therefore, I trim that article a little bit and hope this helps your research.

1. An outline

(a) *First make up a paper outline*: several pages containing section headings, sub-headings, some figure titles (to indicate which results go where) and perhaps some other notes and comments. There is a section on chapter order and thesis structure at the end of this text. Your new aim is just to write a paragraph or section about one of your subheadings. It helps to start with an easy one: this gets you into the habit of writing and gives you self-confidence. Often the Materials and Methods chapter is the easiest to write---just write down what you did; carefully, formally and in a logical order.
(b) *How do you make an outline of a section*? Assemble all the figures that you will use in it and put them in the order that you would use if you were going to explain to someone what they all meant. You might as well rehearse explaining it to someone else---after all you will probably give several talks based on your thesis work. Once you have found the most logical order, note down the key words of your explanation. These key words provide a skeleton for much of your chapter outline.
(c) *Once you have an outline, discuss it with some experts*. This step is important: s/he will have useful suggestions, but it also serves notice that s/he can expect a steady flow of paper drafts that will make high priority demands on his/her time.

2. Organization

(a) It is encouraging and helpful to start a filing system. Open a word-processor file for each section *and one for the references.* You can put notes in these files, as well as text. While doing something for Section n, you will think "Oh I must refer back to/discuss this in Section m" and so you put a note to do so in the file for Section m. Or you may think of something interesting or relevant for that section. When you come to work on Section m, the more such notes you have accumulated, the easier it will be to write.
(b) You should also have a physical filing system: a collection of folders with chapter numbers on them. This will make you feel good about getting started and also help

clean up your desk. Your files will contain not just the plots of results and pages of calculations, but all sorts of old notes, references, calibration curves, suppliers' addresses, specifications, speculations, letters from colleagues etc., which will suddenly strike you as relevant to one chapter or other. Stick them in that folder. Then put all the folders in a box or a filing cabinet. As you write bits and pieces of text, place the hard copy, the figures etc in these folders as well. Touch them and feel their thickness from time to time---ah, the thesis is taking shape.

3. A timetable

(a) I strongly recommend sitting down and making up a timetable for writing it: a list of dates for when you will give the first and second drafts of each section. This structures your time and provides intermediate targets. If you merely aim "to have the whole thing done by [some distant date]", you can deceive yourself and procrastinate more easily.

4. Iterative solution

(a) Whenever you sit down to write, it is very important to write *something*. So write something, even if it is just a set of notes or a few paragraphs of text that you would never show to anyone else. It would be nice if clear, precise prose leapt easily from the keyboard, but it usually does not. Most of us find it easier, however, to improve something that is already written than to produce text from nothing. So put down a draft (as rough as you like) for your own purposes, then clean it up for your adviser to read. Word-processors are wonderful in this regard: in the first draft you do not have to start at the beginning, you can leave gaps, you can put in little notes to yourself, and then you can clean it all up later.
(b) As you write your paper, your scientific writing is almost certain to improve. Even for native speakers of English who write very well in other styles, one notices an enormous improvement in the first drafts from the first to the last section written. The process of writing the paper is like a course in scientific writing, and in that sense each section is like an assignment in which you are taught, but not assessed. Remember, only the final draft is assessed. Before you submitting a paper to a Journal or a conference, run a spell check and a grammar check.

How to Publish a Journal Paper?

Below are some excellent paper publishing suggestions made by Professor Choi, editor of *Review of International Economics*, to researchers in his popular article entitled "How to Publish in Top Journals?"

General Publication Strategy

1. Diversify your research portfolio

a. Average wait for an acceptance decision = 3 years.
b. Average wait for a rejection = 6 to 8 months.
c. Survival is more important than glory in the early stages of your career.
d. Diversifying the research portfolio is particularly important during the first five or six years of your teaching career when each publication counts heavily. Diversify research topics for possible publication.
e. If you have a solid hit in one area, then redouble your effort to establish your name as an expert in that field before you move into another field.
f. Writing several papers in a very narrow area is risky. It is like putting all your eggs in one basket.
g. Continuing to write papers in the same narrow area without clear evidence of success is risky.

2. Concentrate on one or two fields

a. Normally, you should not select more than two fields of specialization. Research economies of scale often may require your undiluted attention in a single field.
b. Choose, at most, two or three focused areas within your field of specialization. Then pursue those topics until you produce a couple of publications.
c. If you have published no papers in one area for three years, then consider switching to another topic.
d.

3. Generate one or two papers from your thesis

a. You invested two or more years writing your thesis.
b. Try to generate a couple of papers from the most important chapters of the thesis. This is easier than writing a totally new paper from scratch.
c. Work jointly with your advisor to help market your papers.

4. Maintain a stock of papers under review constantly

a. If the acceptance rate of the top-ranking journals is 15%, one needs about 7 papers under review at all times to have one paper accepted per year at the targeted journals.

b. If your goal is to get 10 papers accepted in the first 5 years of your career, you need about a dozen papers under review at all times.

c. Half a dozen papers should be under review at all times for untenured authors. This does *not* mean that you should write 7 new papers each year.

5. Don't put two good ideas in one paper

a. Separate them into two papers.

b. Do not try to put down everything you know about the subject in one paper. What will you do next?

c. As the paper's length increases beyond 15 pages, the chance of acceptance shrinks geometrically.

d. When a topic is appropriately split into two papers, the probability of getting at least one of them accepted more than doubles.

e. You also will get a paper accepted sooner.

6. Approach different types of journals

a. Sending all papers to top journals is risky.

b. Sending all papers to low-quality journals also is unsatisfactory. You will regret it when the papers are accepted!

c. Your curriculum vitae should contain some publications in the top journals.

d. Quantity of publications also is important.

e. Having three papers in different journals is better than three in one journal, if the relative quality of the journals is the same.

7. Write clearly

a. The main assumptions and results should be explained clearly. If there are many assumptions, present them together in one place. Do not bury them in long paragraphs.

b. Define every symbol when it is first introduced. Otherwise, the referees will be frustrated, and you won't get a favorable report.

c. If many symbols are introduced to present your model, it is a good idea to define all symbols together and display them in one place so that the referees would not waste time hunting for them.

d. Clearly state the contributions of the paper, relative to the literature, in the

concluding remarks.

8. Learn word processing skills and master other relevant software programs

a. Be independent of secretaries. They do not work 24 hours a day.
b. Word processing skills are particularly helpful when the amount of revision is minimal.
c. Researchers without computer skills will be an endangered species in this century.

9. Scan current journals

a. Keep up with the current literature (e.g., EconLit).
b. Using the potential key words, search to see if others have written papers on the same or similar subjects.
c. By not duplicating what others have done, you will save time and effort.
d. Subscribe to a couple of journals in your field of interest, rather than general journals.
e. General journals are not cost effective as a source of research information. Fewer and fewer articles in general journals are relevant for your research.
f. Utilize the libraries for other journals.
g. *Social Science Research Network* features news about papers as soon as they are accepted; you can have the latest information about publications in your field.

10. Present papers at conferences before submission

a. Present your papers at regional, national, or international conferences. You may get surprisingly valuable feedback.
b. This also is an important way for you to become familiar with others working in the same area.
c. Presenting papers within one's department is not effective. Except in top schools, most of the faculty in a typical department with 20 or fewer members are not familiar with the subject, and with due respect to their expertise, they generally are not qualified to make substantive comments on your topic.

11. Only the tough get going

a. One gets rejection letters more often than not. This is inevitable!
b. Develop a thick skin and be a good loser. This game is not for the fainthearted. If you cannot swallow rejection easily, don't submit papers.
c. A good paper deserves at least three chances at publication in ranking journals.
d. If you ignore a rejected paper more than one month, you are likely to lose interest. Do something about it.
e. Bad luck eventually comes to an end.

12. Get to know one hundred people active in your field

a. There are about a hundred people in your field who are likely to be referees of your papers.

b. Prepare a list of one hundred active people in your main research areas. Try to meet them within a five-year period.

c. Present papers at, or at least attend, two professional meetings a year.

d. When presenting papers or attending regional, national, or international meetings, try to get to know these people. How? (Think!) This is your best opportunity for networking.

13. Maintain contacts

a. Maintain contacts with other economists via telephone, fax, or e-mail. Do not send copies of your papers to them unless requested to do so.

b. What to do when they don't respond? Think!

c. You also need these contacts later: they can write letters of recommendation when you seek promotion and tenure.

Choosing Topics

14. Do not waste time on dead or dying topics

a. If your most recent references in a projected paper are ten years old, it will be difficult to publish it. It is a dead issue. Do not start such a paper (until you get tenure)!
b. If the most recent references closely related to your paper are 5 years old, it is a dying issue. Editors are reluctant to accept such papers, even if the referees recommend publication.
c. It is difficult for the editor to find suitable referees for outdated topics.
d. Your inability to find sufficient references indicates: (1)You have not read the literature. (2) Others are not interested in the topic, hence, it is unlikely to get published. (3)No problem! Dig further.
e. If the work is completed already, cite some papers that are more recent.

15. Do not write papers with breakthrough ideas at first

a. Avoid writing about your breakthrough ideas, at least in the early stage of your career, unless your mentor is the editor of a major journal.
b. Papers with breakthrough ideas are not often published.
c. Wait until you get tenure to tackle breakthrough ideas.
d. "I told my own young colleagues that they should preferably start off with the received wisdom with some changes until they get their tenure." Douglas North, 1993 Nobel Laureate in Economic Science (see Nyaw and Yu, 1995).
e. If you do advance breakthrough ideas your papers will be rejected, and they might reappear in a modified, clearly written paper by someone else later.
f. After you are established, perhaps you can tackle breakthrough ideas, and become better known, instead of publishing many papers with minor ideas.
g. Or as you gain more experience, you may find that the ideas turn out to be trivial.

16. Extend existing literature

a. The bulk of papers published today are modifications of the existing literature or tests of existing theories.
b. Something in the paper must be original.
c. Duplication is not an extension of knowledge.

17. Write something creative

a. A journal's primary goal is to publish original ideas.

b. A good journal is interested in disseminating new ideas, not in publishing papers that elaborate some existing ideas or examine the implications of a minor change in assumptions.
c. These papers only show that some results do not necessarily hold. Such efforts are basically a comment on someone else's paper.

18. Mix ingredients of other papers

How does one extend the literature? Suppose there are two important papers in the literature,

$$p_1 = \{A, B, C, \text{and } D\}, p_2 = \{C, D, \text{and } E\}$$

where *A*, *B*, ... are ingredients.

Let $p_{new} = \{A, B, E\}$ be a new paper.

a. Does the new combination make sense? Does it describe an important economic phenomenon in a certain country or does it capture an interesting situation?
b. If $p_{new} = \{A, C, X\}$ where *X* is totally new, and if it makes sense, it may be an original idea.
c. Original papers add something new and dare to eliminate some old notions. Do not worry about compatibility with old papers.

19. Write on interesting subjects

a. There must be an interesting story, a story that nonexperts—who would skip all the equations—would find intriguing.
b. Equations should not dominate the paper. People lose interest.
c. Controversies and debates stimulate reader interest.
d. Before writing, answer the question: what new ideas or results does this paper offer?
e. You have to demonstrate that there is some interest in the topic on which you are working.