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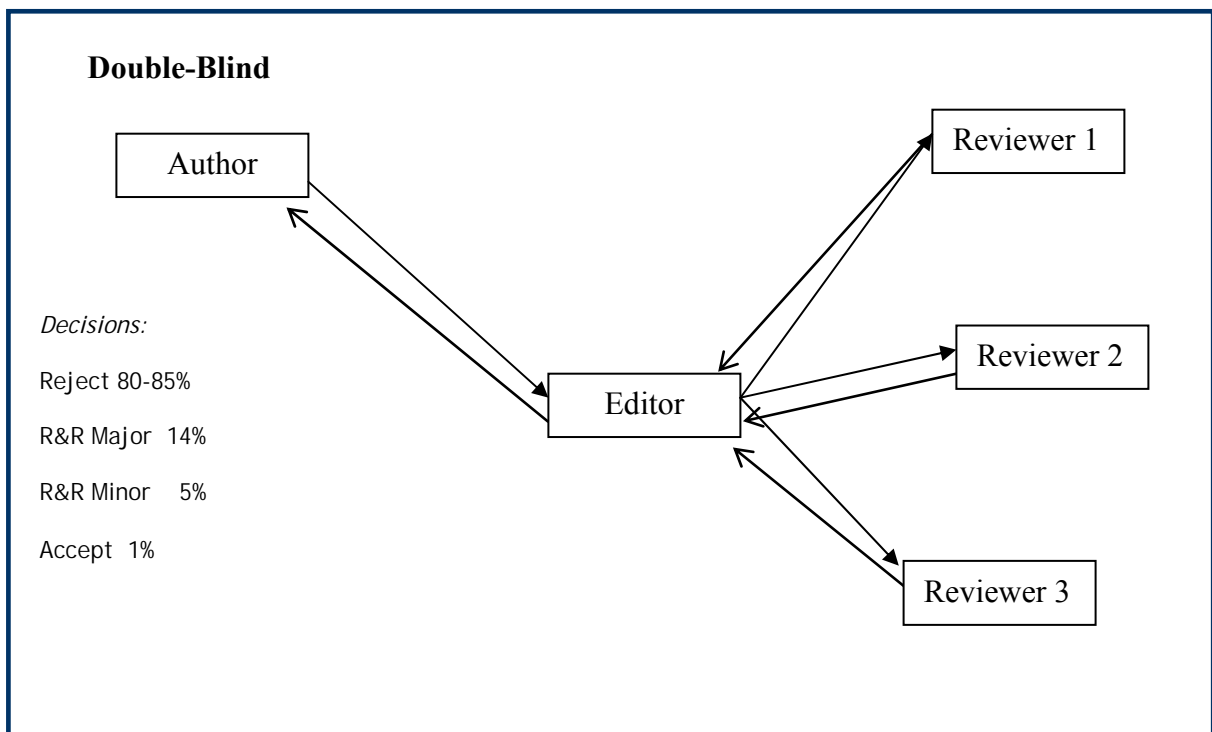
Refereed Journals and the Journal Review Process

Q. What is often aggravating, infuriating, and humiliating, but can be enlightening, encouraging and gratifying?

A. The review process at academic journals.

But journal publishing is also professionally required, like it or not.

The Review Process at Refereed Journals



The review process is “double-blind”: editors know who the reviewers are, and the identity of the author, but the authors and the reviewers do not know each other’s identities. It is not a perfect system, but it probably produces better work, on average, than any other system in place.

Reviewers are selected usually on several key criteria:

1. Scholars the author cites in the bibliography.
2. Scholars not in the bibliography but who know the subject area well.
3. Scholars who are willing to do reviews for the journal.
4. Scholars who represent the readership/audience for the journal.

Simultaneous submissions to more than one journal are not allowed.

The review process can take from two-months to eight months, depending primarily on the editor's management style. *Most* journal editors are responsible enough not to leave you hanging for longer than that. You have the right to withdraw your submission if reviews have not been returned in a timely manner. I am pushing for a code of ethical responsibilities that editors and reviewers owe to authors, including the duty to provide timely turnaround.

Editorial Decisions

The editor will render a judgment on the basis of two, three, or more, reviews. The decisions are usually as follows:

1. Reject – The modal response.
2. Revise and Resubmit, with major revisions.
3. Revise and Resubmit, with minor revisions.
4. Accept without revisions, or just technical changes.

Editors are not strictly bound by the reviewer reports, but they find it difficult to go against uniformly positive reviews, or uniformly negative reviews. The editor is not to blame for your negative reviews.

Still, editors do wield discretion and power. In marginal cases, they will be the deciding factor.

Revising and Re-submitting

If you are invited to revise-and-resubmit, and proceed with revision, you should follow any editorial instructions, and attempt to please the reviewers to the letter. Commonly the same reviewers will be called upon to re-examine the paper upon resubmission. The editor will request a memo be attached to your resubmission that will detail the changes you have made in response to the referee reports. In this memo, you can explain how you dealt with conflicting advice, or any other difficulties.

You are not required to accept the invitation to revise-and-resubmit. Some R&Rs are just too difficult, or not worth the additional time and effort.

Editors and reviewers are not required to positively review, much less accept your revised manuscript. At the most highly selective journals, only 25-35 percent of resubmissions are actually accepted for publication.

Ten Most Typical Reasons Papers are Rejected (by Reviewers)

Reviewer patience and tolerance is a finite resource. You are only allowed to make a certain, though variable, number of mistakes before the reviewer recommends rejection.

1. The paper doesn't add sufficiently to the existing body of literature. You have failed to move our understanding, or sell your results to the reviewers.
 - 1a. Simple replications are seldom published.
 - 1b. Unexciting findings, or null findings, are seldom published.
 - 1c. Dull writing about exciting findings is a common problem of bad salesmanship.
 - 1d. Overselling weak results is also a problem, but less often than 1c.
2. The empirical work (the data analysis part) is undertheorized.
 - 2a. The scholar found an intriguing collection of data, typically a survey, but has no theory to underpin the results.
3. The theory and data analysis do not mesh well.
 - 3a. The theory sets up hypotheses that your data cannot test.
 - 3b. The data and hypothesis tests tell a story, but not the one your theory suggests.
 - 3c. Your data analysis does not answer the question you pose up front.
 - 3d. Your data analysis is framed by the wrong literature and theory.

These are *exceedingly common problems* and ones that I personally struggle with in my own work even after 14 years in the business. You must ensure that your theory and your data fit well together. If you have a psychological theory, you should try to use individual level data to test it. If your theory goes way beyond the hypothesis-testing capacity of your data, you may need to pare your theory back, or change it completely, or go find a different data set.

4. You have omitted important elements of the literature pertaining to your topic.

5. Your methods are inappropriate, incorrect, or not up-to-date.
 - 5a. Sometimes authors have a technique in search of a topic, rather than the other way around.
 - 5b. Sometimes authors do not correctly use methodological techniques.
 - 5c. Sometimes a better technique exists than the one employed in the analysis.
6. Poor writing and bad organization of the paper. Reviewers easily lose patience with bad writing.
7. Too much data – data overkill. This can be distracting to readers. Think of theory and data as a ratio that must be kept in appropriate balance.
8. Data analysis decisions and coding of variables are poorly described, unclear, or confusing.
9. Measures of key constructs (independent and dependent variables) are inappropriate, unconvincing, or just wrong.
10. Topic of study is too narrow, not interesting to specific journal readership.

General Organization of the Journal Article

Like it or not, there are pretty standard conventions that govern the structure and writing of journal articles. You might want to do it differently, but experience has shown that going against the grain only makes it difficult to get your work into print.

Here are some general guidelines for standard, empirically oriented papers (not methods papers). Page length for each section is approximate, but not far from what is commonly expected.

1. Statement of the question of the research and 2-3 paragraphs on why it's important. Page 1.
2. Previous literature and theory that guides expectations and hypothesis formation for your study; pages 2-9.
3. Data used in your research; pages 10-11.
4. Methods used in your research; pages 11-13.
5. Presentation and description of research findings; pages 13-17.
6. Discussion of research findings, implications, and what they tell us that's new; pages 18-22.
7. Concluding summary; pages 22-23.
8. Sources (Bibliography); pages 23-24.
9. Tables; Figures, other back matter; pages 25-30.

Additional Reminders and Rules-of-Thumb from my Editorial Experience

1. Avoid going over 40 pages. Some journal editors will return work un-reviewed if it exceeds 40 pages.
2. Don't present your data before page 6, or after page 16. If you begin presenting data before page 6, you probably don't have a theory. If you present the data after page 16, you've droned on too long.
3. Reviewers have a variable but finite amount of patience for detail. Stick to the big picture, and emphasize the parts of your analysis that highlight your contribution.
4. Avoid presenting more than 4 tables. Reviewer fatigue sets in after 4 tables of results. If you have more than 4 tables, you might have more than one paper!

5. If you have figures, maps or graphs, don't go overboard. They take up space, and they are also subject to fatigue and impatience on the part of reviewers.
6. Probably better to err on the side of overselling your results rather than underselling them. Far more papers are rejected because reviewers cannot see the contribution than are rejected because the contribution has been grossly exaggerated.
7. Having mentioned 6., do remember the limitations of your research, and be honest about them at the conclusion of the paper in a couple of lines.
8. Shorter is commonly better. Don't resent editors/reviewers who ask you to cut length. They are often doing you a favor.

Journal Rankings in American Politics

There are three top general interest journals that American politics scholars strongly prefer: *APSR*, *AJPS* and the *JoP*.

Below these in standing are more specialized journals that reach audiences in particular subfields of American Politics. Their prestige, selectivity and visibility depends on their paper flow (how many submissions they receive), and the prestige and visibility of the authors who publish in these areas.

According to the 2002 Giles and Garand study of journal rankings, journals that commonly publish American politics articles can be ranked as follows:

Rank	Title	Overall Rank
1	<i>American Political Science Review</i>	1
2	<i>American Journal of Political Science</i>	2
3	<i>Journal of Politics</i>	3
4	<i>British Journal of Political Science</i>	6
5	<i>Political Research Quarterly</i>	13
6	<i>Political Science Quarterly</i>	15
7	<i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>	16
8	<i>Legislative Studies Quarterly</i>	19
9	<i>Public Administration Review</i>	21
10	<i>Polity</i>	23
11	<i>American Politics Research</i>	24
12	<i>Social Science Quarterly</i>	25
13	<i>Political Behavior</i>	34
14	<i>Electoral Studies</i>	40
15	<i>Publius</i>	41
16	<i>Political Psychology</i>	43
17	<i>Urban Affairs Quarterly</i>	46

From: Giles and Garand. *P.S.: Political Science and Politics*. April 2003. pp. 293-308

Rank	Title	Overall Rank
18	<i>Public Choice</i>	53
19	<i>Political Geography</i>	54
20	<i>Party Politics</i>	58
21	<i>Women and Politics</i>	59
22	<i>Journal of Urban Affairs</i>	71
23	<i>Presidential Studies Quarterly</i>	77
24	<i>Policy Studies Journal</i>	79
25	<i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>	81
26	<i>Judicature</i>	82

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Note that these rankings do change, and a new survey is due next year. The top five or six journals are not likely to change their standing by very much.

Also remember that the college or university department that hires you will have its own standards and rankings and you should act quickly to learn what standards the locals prefer to live by. These survey results are never universally accepted without qualification.

Remember, above all, persistence is key. Very few people hit homeruns their first time at bat. Just getting on base a time or two might be your initial goal. If you keep practicing, and continue to swing at the ball, you *will* eventually connect.