

Getting Published: Strategies for Successfully Navigating the Publication Process

Dr. Doug Shier

Department of Mathematical Sciences

Martin Hall

shierd@clemson.edu

What's Ahead

- How you can:
 - better identify the “right” journal
 - make their presentation more appealing
 - reply constructively to the referees
 - increase their chances of publication in a suitable journal

Publishing and Prospering

1. Preparation Phase
2. Understanding the Publication Process
3. Monitoring the Status
4. Responding to the Reviews
5. Contributing as a Referee
6. Ethical Issues

Preparation Phase

- A dissertation is *not* a paper
- Research the “right” journal
- Presentation should be *appetizing*
- Electronic submission
- Submission letter

Dissertation vs. Journal Publication

- The audience is different
 - highly specialized readership
- Length constraints
 - review time grows **exponentially!**
- Limited literature review
 - unless a survey paper
- Focused contribution

Research the “Right” Journal

- Editorial board, recent issues, references
- Consult with colleagues
- Check out publication lag time/in press!
- [Impact factor](#)
- Succinct query to journal editor
 - get preliminary “go ahead”
- Avoid “trickle down” approach
- Special issue of journal?

Impact Factor

Measure of frequency of citation of a typical article in a specified journal

For example, 2006 journal impact factor

Citations in 2006 to 19 articles in 2005 and 35 articles in 2004; 47 articles published in 2005 and 54 articles published in 2004

$$\text{Impact factor} = \frac{19 + 35}{47 + 54} = \frac{54}{101} = 0.535$$

Also see www.journal-ranking.com

Presentation is Important!

- Introduction
 - explain why **relevant, important, new**
 - synopsis (what's ahead)
- Overall exposition
 - grammar, organization are your **calling cards**
- Length should be appropriate
- Give adequate references
 - not to excess
 - credit to others ... and yourself
- Conclusion
 - wrap it up, reinforce **importance**

Write with Clarity

“Academics of all stripes and flavors are not taught the fundamentals of good writing.”

It’s assumed that “ideas about form and style and structure get absorbed by the fledgling academic while she concentrates on the important stuff: content.”

Scientists should know that “if they want to attract grant money, they must be understood ... [and] find ways to make their sentences sing with the same grace as their equations.”

–Rachel Toor, “The Nature of Foul Matter,” *CHE*, June 1, 2007

Some Resources

- W. Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*
- The Economist, *Pocket Style Book*
- Oxford University Press, *New Hart's Rules: The Handbook of Style for Writers and Editors*
- Univ. of Chicago, *The Chicago Manual of Style*
- P. Silvia, *How to Write a Lot*
- W. Zinsser, *On Writing Well*

Some Suggestions (Strunk & White)

- Place yourself in the background
- Write (actively) with nouns and verbs
- Revise and rewrite
- Do not overwrite, do not overstate
- Avoid *fancy* words
- Don't take shortcuts at expense of clarity

Electronic Submission

- Check the journal web site
- Preferred formats may include:
 - Microsoft Word file (.doc)
 - pdf file (.pdf)
 - postscript, LaTeX for scientific journals
- Style sheets
- Format paper and references appropriately
 - can use RefWorks or EndNote

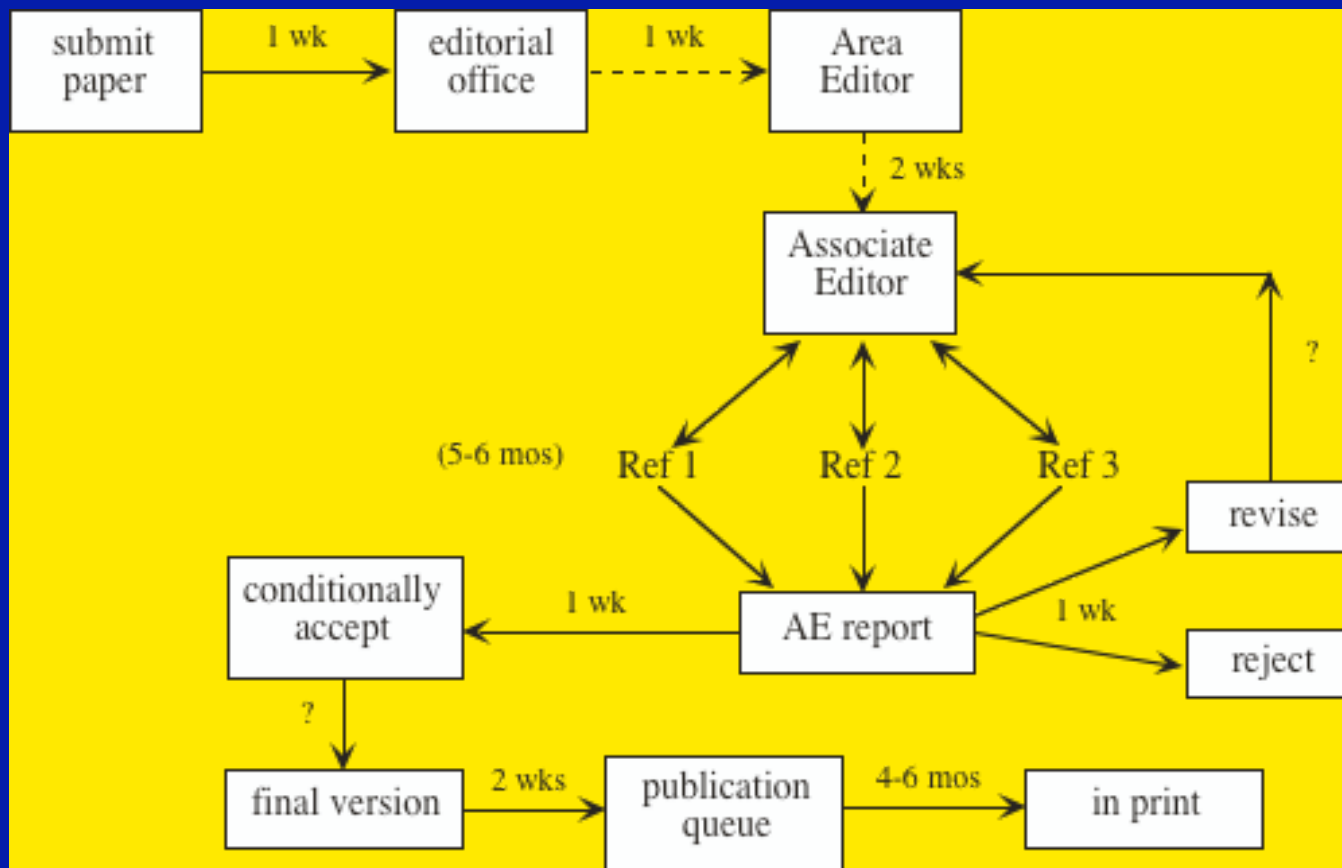
Submission Letter

- A few paragraphs in length
- Why this journal?
 - previous published work in the journal
 - within general scope of journal
 - identify specific niche (helps the editor)
- (Rarely) suggest “impartial” referees
- Timeliness: for promotion/tenure decisions
- Contact information/corresponding author
- Not published, submitted elsewhere
- Request confirmation of receipt

Some Ethical Issues

- Submission to one journal at a time
- Conference proceedings vs. journal
- Re-using blocks of text verbatim
 - never someone else's
 - not even your own (copyright infringement)
- Obtain permissions
 - e.g., figures, tables

Anatomy of a Paper



The Waiting Game

- **Don't** pester the editor
- **Do** make cordial inquiries
- **Do** use email
- **Don't** expect an immediate response
 - queries need to follow the chain of command
 - not everyone is as e-prompt as you
 - travel plans intercede

Responding to the Reviews

- Expect variations in referee reports!
- Accept responsibility
 - your job is to transmit ideas **clearly**
 - optimality is a mirage; seek **improvements**
- Respond professionally to comments
 - written responses to referees are helpful
 - “know when to hold, know when to fold”
 - “know when to walk away...”
- Don't take it personally
 - NSF survey: acceptance rates vary (<10%, >40%)

Understanding the Review

- Often contains probing comments, suggestions
- “Brutally honest”
 - but can be viewed as a gift
- Structure of a review
 - what is the big picture, significance?
 - is the argument convincing?
 - missing relevant literature?
 - writing style and organization

Leon Fink, “Unearthing a Genre,” *CHE*, May 18, 2007

The Five Cardinal Sins

1. Sloppy English and grammar
2. Failing to explain the relevance and importance of your work
3. Failing to respond in writing to each and every reviewer's comment
4. Suffering over a negative referee report
5. Being confrontational with a reviewer

Some Myths of Publishing

- Selecting a journal after the article is written
- Assuming your contribution is “obvious” to all
- Not acknowledging prior related research
- Dismissing the “oddball” review
- Recycling your prior sentences, figures, tables, ...
- Not consulting with colleagues on a rejected paper
- Resubmitting without revising

Aleda Roth, “Avoiding Publication Traps: 7 Myths”

Revise and Resubmit

- “Responding to reviewers requires subtlety.”
- Always write a “thank you for your time” note.
- Do easy corrections first, then harder ones.
- A response letter is **essential**:
 - detail changes or justify why not made
- R & R requires “as much due diligence as preparing the original submission.”

– David Perlmutter, “Taking Time for R & R,” *CHE*, January 8, 2008

What Editors Want

- Be familiar with the journal
 - scope, formatting, submission requirements
- Avoid grammatical/typographical errors
 - paper should be in final form
- Comprehensive citations
 - especially those articles previously published in the journal
- Revise calmly and professionally
 - don't burn your bridges
 - don't argue with the editor

– Lynn Worsham, *CHE*, September 8, 2008

Being a Referee

- Refereeing is a professional duty
- Increases your visibility — volunteer!
- Helps your own paper writing
- It's a great way to learn new areas
- A caution
 - use adverbs sparingly
- Ethical issues

Publication Is ...

- A lot about **communication**
- A research activity itself
 - know your target journal, audience
 - requires **planning**
- A learning process
 - as apprentice, author, referee
- An investment in your future