Dos and Don’ts in Academic Writing: Surviving the Peer Review Process

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Review process: how does it work?

Which journal to choose?

Points to pay attention to when preparing your paper

Plagiarism: take it seriously!

Conference proceedings: sometimes a trap...

How to reply to a referee report?

Conclusions
Review process: how does it work?

START

Paper submitted to journal

Administrative office checks paper

Author is asked to make changes

Paper OK

Yes

Administrative office sends paper to one of the editors

Editor screens paper
Editor rejects paper

Paper OK

Editor sends paper to Associate Editor (AE)

AE screens paper

Paper sent back to editor who rejects it

Paper OK

Yes

Paper sent to referees who read paper in detail and write report
Referees send their report to AE, who writes recommendation for editor

Editor takes decision based on reports of AE and referees

Paper OK

Yes

Paper sent to administrative office and then to publisher

No

Paper OK

Yes

Editor invites authors to prepare revision

No

Editor invites authors to prepare revision

Authors submit revision

Editor rejects paper

No
Variations on a theme and some remarks

- Screening committee
- Some journals do not have associate editors
- Keep in mind the different steps in the review process when you are impatiently waiting for the decision of the editor ;-) 
- Most statistics journals do not give any honorarium to the editor, associate editor and referees.
- Some journals ask authors to pay a submission fee.
Which journal to choose?

- Look at webpage of journal for "Aims" or "Scope" or "Description", e.g.:
  
  *The Annals of Statistics aim to publish research papers of highest quality reflecting the many facets of contemporary statistics. Primary emphasis is placed on importance and originality, not on formalism. The journal aims to cover all areas of statistics, especially mathematical statistics and applied & interdisciplinary statistics.*

- Look at recent issue of journal

- Decide which audience you like to address

- Take into account other important issues, like
  - Average time to decision
  - Current editor and associate editors, etc.
Which journal to choose?

- Look up impact factor of journal (ISI Web of Knowledge):
  
  Impact factor in 2011
  
  \[ \frac{\text{Nb citations in 2011 to papers published in 2009 and 2010}}{\text{Nb papers published in 2009 and 2010}} \]

- How to find it? At UCL:
  - Go to website of UCL Library
  - Choose "Ressources électroniques"
  - Choose "Journal Citation Reports"
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Points to pay attention to when preparing your paper

- Take care of the presentation, English grammar, general flow of the paper!!
  - Paper can get rejected purely on the basis of the presentation!

- "Sell" your paper as good as you can, but don’t be too negative towards other papers.
  - The authors might be referee of your paper!

- Don’t forget important references.
  - Referees are sensitive human beings!

- And of course: make sure the scientific contents is correct!

⇒ Writing a paper involves much more than proving a good theorem!
Points to pay attention to when preparing your paper

- Be a fair author:
  - The order of the authors: a delicate but important issue!
  - Don’t forget to mention in the acknowledgments someone who has helped you considerably with the paper.
  - Even if you only give a sketch of a proof, you should make sure that you have the full proof available.
  - Don’t cheat (too much...) in your simulations!

On the other hand: being too honest and modest can be harmful...

⇒ Finding a good balance is important!
Plagiarism: take it seriously!

- When is a paper considered to have crossed the border of plagiarism?
  - Hot topic of discussion among journal editors!

- The term "plagiarism" not only covers the fact of (auto)copying scientific results, but also (auto)copying whole paragraphs of text!

⇒ It’s a very serious issue!!
Some examples:

- Authors whose level of English is poor often tend to copy texts from other papers.
  - Is this plagiarism or simply a way to use correct English??

- Authors submit two very similar papers at about the same time to two different journals, without citing the other paper.
  - If both papers are sent to the same AE of referee, the plagiarism is easily detected, otherwise the two papers might get accepted...
Some examples of measures taken by certain journals:

- University authorities will be informed of the plagiarism
- Authors will not be allowed to submit any paper to the journal for a number of years
- ...

Are we evolving to a "black list"?

Make sure you can trust your co-authors!

Recently, many top journals in statistics started using the software "CrossCheck" to check plagiarism.
CrossCheck: Plagiarism report

Similarity Report

As of: Mon Sep 10, 2012 09:45pm BST
10,146 words - 182 matches - 149 sources

Mode: Similarity Report

Similarity Index

17%

sources:

1. 108 words / 1% - Internet from Tue Jun 21, 2011
   www4.stat.ncsu.edu

2. 46 words / < 1% match - Internet from Tue Jun 22, 2010
   www.statslab.cam.ac.uk

3. 38 words / < 1% match - Internet from Sat Nov 13, 2010
   cran.fhcrc.org

4. 32 words / < 1% match - Internet from Tue Mar 30, 2010
   www.stat.uiowa.edu

5. 28 words / < 1% match - CrossCheck
   Shao, J., "Variable screening in predicting clinical outcome with high-dimensional microarrays", Journal of Multivariate Analysis, 200709

6. 27 words / < 1% match - CrossCheck
   P. Buhlmann, "Variable selection in high-dimensional linear models: partially faithful distributions and the PC-simple algorithm"
this example is to illustrate the prediction performance of our method over a variety of data sets. For comparison we have included two quite popular predictive methods: Random Forest and Boosting. Our focus mainly concentrates around the high to higher dimensional (n < p) data sets. Some of the data sets are related to each other. For example, data set names "dat.I" indicate that "dat" data set is modified to include all pairwise interactions, as well as B-spline basis functions (up to six degrees of freedom), for all original variables. The data sets with names "dat.I!" are modified similar to "dat.I", in addition, all real valued variables are mapped to dummy variables representing a factor with three levels and all pairwise interactions of these dummy variables are added to the design matrix.

Finally we have added 200 independent and identically distributed standard normal noise variables to make all the data higher dimensional. Brief description of the data sets are available in the Appendix.
CrossCheck : Plagiarism report

CrossCheck report should be interpreted with care:

- Percentage of overlap can be very misleading!
- It’s very difficult to detect *scientific* plagiarism with this software.
- The software scans the internet and the journals that have agreed to give access to CrossCheck.
  - Lots of published articles are not scanned at all.
Conference proceedings: sometimes a trap...

- Most statistics journals adopt the policy not to publish any paper that has already partially been published elsewhere, including refereed conference proceedings.
  - Take this into account before you submit a paper to a conference proceedings!

- In some other communities (like e.g. in machine learning), it is very common to first publish an idea in a proceedings, and then an extended version in a journal, but this is not done in statistics!
  - A conference proceedings might be a real trap!

- Again, some authors try to publish voluntarily in the proceedings and in the journal, without telling the journal about the conference proceedings.
  - Plagiarism or not?
How to reply to a referee report?

- Take a diplomatic position, e.g.:
  - Don’t say to a referee that he is "wrong", but rather say that you have a "different point of view".
  - Thank referees for "useful suggestions and comments that improved the quality of the paper".
  - If a referee suggests to add a reference (maybe his own reference?) and that reference is somehow relevant (but maybe not for 100%), just add it to make the referee happy.
  - ...

⇒ Being a bit diplomatic can make the difference between seeing your paper rejected or accepted!
How to reply to a referee report?

- Be fair in your revision
  - Don’t add new material to the paper without mentioning it in your reply.

- Sometimes referees are too demanding
  - You can consider not doing everything he/she is asking, but motivate why.

- Supplementary online documents: pro or contra?
  - In any case, more and more publishers are encouraging journals to use it.
Conclusions

- Publishing scientific papers is a real art on its own!
- The chances of success do not only depend on the scientific quality of your paper!
- The rules are harsh, and the punishment for not following them can be hard (or become hard in the future).
- Replying to referee reports is a delicate issue ...
- And finally... : Be nice to your fellow statisticians. The referee of your paper might be sitting next to you :-) !