On Publishing

Branislav L. Slantchev
Caveat Emptor

- Only advice about venues I know:
  - Refereed journals
  - Chapters in edited volumes
  - Refereed books

- No clue about:
  - In-house journals
  - Editorials
  - Vanity presses
  - Trade books
  - Textbooks
Generic (useless) advice

- Do competent research on an exciting topic!
- Be clear and concise
- Avoid jargon
- Spell-check & proof-read
- Write focused lit reviews
- Take care with introduction
- Think about title & abstract
- Be generous with acknowledgments
The Process

• Articles:
  • Submit -> wait $N$ months -> get rejected
  • Editors & referees are very busy
  • Top journals 5-7% acceptance
  • "Easy" journals 10-12% acceptance
  • Rejection is modal category:
    • Most papers not ready for prime time
    • Many are badly targeted
• On average,
  • Better work ends up in better journals
  • I have no evidence for that
The Process

- Books (university press)
  - Editor = feudal baron
  - Modal category: desk rejection
  - Contact editor early (perhaps get introduced)
  - 95% guarantee to kill book: admit it’s your dissertation
  - Know your audience / estimate interest
  - Proposal vs. completed manuscript
  - Multiple submissions OK (usually)
  - Takes much longer to write
  - “You don’t finish a book, the book finishes you” – K. Schultz
Strategies

Pancakes:
• Publish a lot
• Regardless of quality of outlets
• Pros:
  • Low risk
  • Long CV
  • Experience
• Cons:
  • Work often subpar
  • Reputation?

Home-runs:
• Publish less
• Mostly in top outlets
• Pros:
  • High impact
  • High visibility
  • Reputation!
• Cons:
  • High risk
  • Short CV
Strategies

• Both strategies work
• Mostly personal style / preference
• Few can pull off long CVs + excellent work
  • Some methods make it easier to publish more...
  • … but that does not mean you can do it!
• FACT: not all of our papers deserve to be in a top-3 journal
• Learn to
  • Recognize scope/importance of your idea
  • Gauge quality of your own work (might be impossible)
Selecting a Journal

- Do not auto-pilot down a list according to rankings
- Be mindful of career implications:
  - People care where you publish
  - YOU care where you publish
  - If you can turn an idea into APSR-material with more work...
  - ... do the work!
  - Don’t be lazy & dump half-assed papers into 3\textsuperscript{rd}-tier journals
- Consider carefully the audience
- Don’t worry about turn-around, at least initially:
  - For me: between 2 to 18 months (average 8 months) at places published
  - With rejections, average well over a year (still time on tenure clock)
Selecting a Journal

- In my case:
  - Modal category: published in journal of first submission
  - Second most common: published in journal of second submission
- Target properly = minimize frustration!
- Still, I’ve had:
  - 2 papers rejected by 3 journals each
  - 1 paper rejected by 5 journals
- Don’t get discouraged!
Responding to R&R

- You will get upset
- You will be grateful
- Cool off before tackling revisions
- Do not turn down R&Rs
- Treat Editor’s suggestions as instructions
- Respond to *all* comments by referees:
  - Make a list, identify points of convergence
  - Keep track of changes, with page numbers
  - Organize response letter
Responding to R&R

• The response letter
  • Is absolutely crucial!
  • Nobody will remember what they wanted 6 months ago
  • Don’t call referees idiots
  • Likely everyone will see it

• In the letter:
  • Put most important revisions first (with page numbers)
  • Resolve all criticisms you agree with
  • Do not attempt to hide or pretend to have done work you haven’t
  • If you disagree, explain (politely) why
    • Referee is demonstrably (mathematically, factually) wrong
    • Referee’s request is inconsistent with other parts of paper
    • Referee’s request is too difficult / would require separate paper (new contribution)
    • Referee’s approach will take paper in a different direction (tricky!)
Dealing with Rejection

• Happens to all of us
• Some rejections b/c Editor didn’t like idea, topic, etc.
• Even without “objective” reasons, rejections 100% final
• OK, 99% final provided:
  • Procedural problems (e.g., sent to wrong referee)
  • Mathematical/factual error is main reason for rejection
  • Referee intervenes on your behalf (exceedingly rare)
• You will never know why it was rejected:
  • Possible with positive reports if Editor does not like it
  • Possible with lukewarm reports if referees sent separate private comments
• Don’t simply go to next journal:
  • Address legitimate concerns
  • Decent chance you will draw at least one previous referee
What to Publish

- Refereed articles: YES! YES! YES!
- University press books: if relevant, YES!
- Replications: maybe, if you have a better method
- Special issues: maybe (rough ride)
- Edited volumes: avoid (probably not an issue)
- Book reviews: not before tenure (service to discipline)
- Textbooks / trade books: not before tenure (service to your pocket)
- Editorials: not before tenure (service to your ego)
- Vanity presses: no
Aside on Co-authoring

• Absolutely, yes
• Careful who with:
  • Famous advisor
  • Other faculty
  • Fellow grad students
• Establish name order early
  • Alphabetical (not so good if your name starts with ‘S’)
  • By contribution?
    • Ask everyone to estimate own share of work
    • Sum estimates
    • Result is at least 0.75 x (# of co-authors) x 100
• By footnote?
• Rotating (on large projects)?