

ST 810A, SPRING 2005
PREPARATION FOR STATISTICAL RESEARCH
TIPS FOR PUBLISHING IN STATISTICAL JOURNALS

Submitting your paper:

- Examine papers published in a recent issue of the journal for style, level of technical detail, topics.
- Become familiar with the Editors and Associate Editors of the journal by studying the mast head; one of the AEs will be handling your paper (and thus will have a major say in its fate). If it seems likely that a certain Associate Editor might handle your paper, be sure you cite his/her work appropriately if it is relevant to do so!
- Follow the instructions for submission of papers *exactly*, including those on mathematical conventions, tables, and figures. Such instructions are available in the journal (see *Biometrika Notes for Authors*, for example) and on journal web pages.
- Submit a *short* cover letter (see below). If there is a potential reviewer with whom you may have a professional disagreement (e.g. someone with a different approach to your problem), note this but do not dwell on it.
- Keep it short – remember Davidian’s Rule of Thumb – no more than 20 double-spaced pages (including references), no more than 4 tables/figures. Reviewers/editors will almost *always* (i) look unfavorably on a paper that is too long (how would *you* like to read someone else’s 35-page paper?) and (ii) ask you to reduce the length and number of tables/figures. If you can’t say what you need to say within this limit, consider writing more than one paper. Long papers are generally *bad* papers that are long because they are too wordy and redundant, they are written poorly (too much flowery language and embellishment), and the authors have not spent adequate time refining them.
- Spend time *before* you submit your paper getting it into the best shape possible. Time spent up-front refining and streamlining the exposition, doing careful research of the literature, and being judicious regarding how much detail and information you present is generally worth it – papers that are well-written generally evoke more positive feelings for reviewers!

What to do when you receive reports: Papers are almost *never* accepted as-is in statistical journals. If your paper is not rejected, you can count on having to revise the paper according to reviewers’ comments and submitting it again *at least* once. Several things can happen:

- *If your paper is rejected outright:* The Editor’s letter should make this very clear
 - You will be upset and feel that you have been treated unfairly! Once you calm down...
 - Consider the reviewers’ comments carefully and the particular points raised in the Editor’s letter to you that led to the unfavorable result.

- Generally, the reviewers’ comments will be sensible and justified (although you may find this difficult to accept). In this case, your best bet is to try to address the ones you feel are most reasonable/important, and try submitting to another journal. Sometimes reviewers explicitly suggest an appropriate alternative outlet.
- Sometimes, reviewers do make mistakes. If you truly believe a reviewer’s criticism is simply *wrong* and that a reviewer’s misconception is the primary reason for the rejection, you may wish to write a letter to the Editor explaining your position and asking for reconsideration. *HOWEVER*, do not whine, criticize, or go on for pages and pages in a letter asking for reconsideration. Editors really hate that! Editors do not have time to read every paper the journal receives in detail, nor are they experts in every area in which the journal receives submissions. Thus, a long-winded diatribe is likely to make an Editor negatively disposed. S/he will likely decide not to consider your request or pass on the diatribe to the Associate Editor, who will also not take kindly to a long-winded series of complaints. If you have a legitimate complaint, be gracious and to-the-point! *ASKING THE EDITOR TO RECONSIDER YOUR PAPER SHOULD NOT BE A ROUTINE PRACTICE!!* You should only do this if the criticism of your paper is based on reasoning that is outrageously incorrect and you can show this clearly. Asking an editor to reconsider a paper is something you should only do once or twice in your whole career, at most! There are *lots* of journals, so, in general, if you are unsuccessful with one, your best bet is move on to the next appropriate outlet for your work.
- *If your paper is rejected but with encouragement/invitation to resubmit:* Different Editors and journals have different styles in terms of how they invite you to submit a revision of your work. One style is to *reject* the paper, but then to invite a revision. When you first read the Editor’s letter, you may feel the paper has been rejected; you must read carefully to realize that the Editor has given you an opening to send a new version of the paper. Receiving an invitation to resubmit is a good sign, *but not a guarantee*. The Editor may in fact state this explicitly, particularly if the revisions requested by the reviewers are *major*.
 - Consider the reviewers’ comments carefully and the particular points raised in the Editor’s letter to you that s/he notes as the key issues that need to be addressed.
 - Most often, the reviewers’ concerns will be valid. Address them as best you can in preparing a revision.
 - Prepare a *brief* point-by-point description of how you addressed each specific concerns of each reviewer and where in the revision the modifications may be found. Reviewers often number their comments, so it is helpful to structure your response so that it corresponds to these numbers. In any event, be very clear to which comment by which reviewer each of your responses corresponds, and do not ignore or fail to respond to any comment.
 - If a reviewer’s comment seems unreasonable or unclear, say so in your point-by-point summary, and justify why you feel that way (in a nice way).
 - In your letter and the point-by-point response, be *gracious!*
 - If the Editor has placed any specific restrictions on the revision, such as length, number of tables and figures, size of type and spacing, follow these *exactly!* If the Editor has given you a page limit, it is likely because the original version was too wordy and unfocused, and s/he wants you to pay better attention to quality of your writing.
 - Resubmit as soon as possible (see below).

- *If you are invited to submit a revision:* Some Editors simply tell you that they would like to invite a revision. The tone may be more positive, but you should follow the same guidelines as above.
- *Important:* If you are invited to resubmit, do it *as quickly as possible*. After a certain amount of time (6 months for many journals), your resubmission will be considered as a *brand new* paper and will be sent to different reviewers, who might have a different perspective!

Once your paper is accepted:

- You will receive a letter from the Editor noting the acceptance of the last version of the paper you submitted. The letter will contain specific instructions on what to submit as the “final” version – *follow these instructions precisely*.
- For some journals, you may submit the final version as a L^AT_EX file (or word processing file; as many journals are typeset using L^AT_EX it is advantageous to submit your paper in L^AT_EX). Many journals now do this by e-mail or the web; some may still ask for a disk to be mailed. In fact, a few journals still do not work from electronic files, but want hard copies of the paper to be mailed, from which typesetters will prepare the paper manually for publication. This is becoming rarer, thankfully.
- After some amount of time (weeks to months depending on the journal), you will receive *galley proofs*, usually as pdf files by e-mail (a few journals still do this by regular mail, but the number is shrinking). This is your paper typeset as it will appear in the journal. Usually, there will be corrections from a copy editor, who has already spotted (usually stylistic) problems. There may also be questions to you, the author, usually marked by “Au:” followed by the question. Answer these as directed on the proofs.
- Warning: copy editors are *not* statisticians. Thus, sometimes they will rewrite sentences for style and end up obscuring the technical meaning. You must read the proofs carefully; do not assume that text will remain exactly as you submitted it!
- Make any additional corrections, but note that *major* corrections are not permitted (you may have to pay for them – read the accompanying material when you receive the proofs)
- After you make all corrections/answer questions, make a copy for yourself
- Return the proofs as soon as possible in the manner directed (mail or e-mail) to avoid delays in publication.

Cover letter and corresponding author: When you submit the original and revised versions of your paper, you should send an accompanying brief cover letter.

- If the paper has multiple authors, one of these should be designated as the *corresponding author*, to whom all correspondence regarding the paper will be sent. Generally, if the letter is signed by one author, the journal staff will assume that the signer is the corresponding author henceforth. If a particular author other than the person sending the paper is to serve as the corresponding author subsequently, this should be explicitly stated and the contact information for that author should be provided. For example, if you are finishing your degree

and are job-hunting and submit a paper around this time, it may be likely that you will have moved to a new address by the time the reviews are completed. In this case, you might wish to name your advisor as corresponding author so that the reviews will not be lost in the mail. Typically, most statistical journals still send correspondence by regular postal mail.

- Most journals encourage if not require submission of manuscripts to be electronic. Some require you to upload the file to a web site; others ask that you send the paper as an attachment to an e-mail message. Most have restrictions on the types of files they will accept (e.g., pdf is always acceptable, postscript may not be). You should also send or otherwise provide the cover letter. If you submit on a web site, there should be a provision for this; if by e-mail, you can just place the text in the body of the e-mail message to which the submission is attached.
- If there are no “special circumstances” (see the next item), your letter may be very brief; see below.
- If you feel that there is a certain reviewer with whom you have a professional disagreement, you may ask that s/he not serve as a referee. *However*, note that such a request does not guarantee this; moreover, the circumstances should be exceptional. If you do make such a request, make it short and be gracious.

Typical cover letter: If sending by e-mail, simply place in the body of the message to which your paper is attached

Professor Xihong Lin, Co-Editor, *Biometrics*
c/o Ms. Ann Hanhart, Editorial Assistant
Biometrics Central Office
Department of Physics
The University of Texas at Arlington
P.O. Box 19059
Arlington, TX 76019-0059

Dear Professor Lin:

I would like to submit the enclosed manuscript, “Analysis of categorical data from family studies with missing covariates,” by Ernie Douglas and myself, for consideration for publication in *Biometrics*.

(Optional paragraph pointing out conflict; generally not a part of the letter unless absolutely necessary) We would like to point out that our work offers a competing approach to that advocated by Professor Donald Hollinger of New York University in his 1997 *JASA* article (volume 92, pp. 1678–1686), and we have had a long-standing professional disagreement with Professor Hollinger on the issue of missing covariates addressed in both papers. We hope that this disagreement may be taken into account in the selection of reviewers for the manuscript.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Your name and contact information

including e-mail, regular mail addresses
and phone/fax