Publishing Tips

- The length of time it takes from submission to publication can take years. That’s why it’s useful to think about publishing early.

- Don’t underestimate yourself. Think of class papers, MA theses and other pieces of writing as an opportunity to publish. If possible, structure them as if they were a first draft for a publishable paper.

- Pick the destination of your article carefully, since it will be tied up in a single journal for months (simultaneous submissions are forbidden). If at all possible, select the journal before you start the writing process—as the destination will affect the structure and content of your paper.

- Be familiar with your intended journal destination. This can be achieved in a variety of ways: look through past issues to gain a sense of the sorts of articles that are published. Look through the work of the editors, the associate editors, and the review board. Have you missed out important and relevant books and articles? Signing up for ‘email alerts’ is a good way to familiarize yourself with a journal over time. These can be accessed online. Think about your first audience when writing (the reviewers and editors). Is this paper the kind of work one would expect the journal to publish?

- Every journal is different. Familiarity with the nuances of each journal (and its audience) can make the difference between acceptance and rejection. It will also affect whether or not empirics are important and how long the manuscript needs to be (check out ‘author guidelines’ on the journal’s website).

- Never submit a ‘draft’. Always submit what you take to be a finished, polished, and professionally-presented paper. This includes graphics. Having friends and colleagues read your work is invaluable—even if they have different research interests. Once accepted, be sure to acknowledge the assistance of those persons who provided input into the paper.

- Expect the review process to take between four to six months (although this can be shorter and longer). After six months, it’s okay to drop the editor a friendly note of inquiry.

- The introduction to your paper needs to be very carefully written. Within a few paragraphs you need to convey the importance of this paper’s contribution. Rejected papers are very often unclear in their objectives. Clarity is important. Ask yourself, what question or problem you are trying to answer, and then frame the introduction like this: as a problem, a unique situation...that your paper engages with or ‘solves’. This can sharpen the analytic ‘bite’ of your paper.
• Write the paper with an ‘audience’ in mind. Who are you trying to address? This will help focus and narrow your contribution, and frame the literature you include.

• Keep it interesting! Never underestimate the value of well-written work. Keeping the reader’s attention is important, and this can be achieved by a well-structured paper that pays attention to pace and narrative. Give the reader breadcrumbs throughout the paper – never give the cake all at once, otherwise, why would they continue?

• Think of your reader, a person that has never read your paper. Give them ample space within the paper to reflect on what you are writing. A summary sentence at the start and end of each section signaling where you ‘going’ and where you ‘been’ works wonders. The same can be said of a good paragraph. The first sentence should state what will follow within the paragraph. Paragraphs that do not connect with each other and start and end with a ‘thud’ can be jarring.

• As a general rule of thumb, the bigger the ‘claim’ you make, the more evidence (empirical, theoretical) you will need, and the more you invite criticism. Keep your paper’s contribution focused around a key issue. Don’t take on the world, unless you really want to.

• Make sure there isn’t a great big divide between your ‘theory’ and ‘empirics’ sections. They should be connected in meaningful ways and should refer back to each other. Otherwise papers can end up being cut straight down the middle.

• Keep the writing interesting – perhaps study a favorite author or paper and assess why it stands out.

• Pay attention to structure. No matter how brilliant the content, if it is not put together coherently, it may alienate your reader.

• Avoid ‘straw-person’ arguments.

• Have fun. Writing is a creative process that can be very rewarding. Never get overly frustrated, and remember to share the highs and lows with friends and colleagues—it’s likely we all share similar experiences.

• Papers get rejected, and reviewers can be harsh. Try not to take things personally, and remember that a revised paper is always stronger.

• Be willing to revise and revise again. It is rare that an article is accepted the first time around. Revisions should be strategically focused: make a list of the main points for revision, synthesize them, and ensure you address them. Equally important is the letter you craft when sending the revision back to your journal. Editors will often make decisions based on the reviewers’ comments and your letter of revision, without having read the original paper.