Research in Public Management: Publishing in the Field

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Outline

- Where I work

- The craft of writing
  - Title
  - Abstract
  - Introduction
  - Conclusion
- Review Process
- What makes for a hit paper?
- Questions about field, US job market

Where I work

- Intersection of policy and administration

- Historical tendency to separate the two has created intellectual blind spots

Intellectual blind spots

- Policy studies:
  - Administration rarely considered
  - Assumed as a constant, or as a troublesome deviance (fidelity concerns)
  - Limited attention to actual beliefs and preferences of officials, tendency to make broad assumptions

Intellectual blind spots

- Public administration:
  - Policy rarely considered
  - An unvarying background
  - An object to be reconstituted by administrative actors

The craft of writing for scholarly journals

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Conclusion

Why focus on these parts of paper?

- Matter to editors and reviewers
- Most readers read the abstract, and hopefully the intro and conclusion

Titles

- A good title tells you the topic
- A very good title conveys the topic, and what was found
- A great title does this in a memorable way – It hooks a reader

- What are titles of paper you are working on?

Titles as a literary endeavor

- Find a balance between:
  - Longer titles that express more, but are less memorable
  - Putting in words that will be found in searches by community interested in topic, but don't make the title very generic
  - Conveying importance of paper, without exaggerating

- Be wary of cliché or very esoteric references:
  - "Get your tongue out of my mouth cause I'm kissing you goodbye: the politics of ideas"
  - "Of Pigs in pokes and policy diffusion: Another look at pay-for-performance"

My titles

- http://scholar.google.com/citations?user=-8qHKqUAAAAJ&hl=en

- Most academics choose useless titles

http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/02/05/academics-choose-useless-titles/

Abstracts: what wrong with this?

- This research combines various administrative and survey data with a unique longitudinal dataset of appointee vacancies to examine the direct and moderating effects that critical organizational attributes have on how career managers perceive their organization's capacity to develop intellectual capital. Trust in leadership is identified as a critical antecedent to capacity development. The findings indicate that development of intellectual capital across executive branch agencies is associated with the attributes of the organizational context in which social and informational exchanges are embedded. We find that that the temporal persistence of appointed leadership vacancies has a direct and *positive* impact on an organization's capacity to develop intellectual capital. Moreover, leadership vacancies have no discernible moderating effect on the trust that middle managers have in the leadership of their respective organizations. However, the extent to which an agency's executive and managerial ranks are layered with unilateral presidential appointees has a direct effect on intellectual capital capacity and moderates the impact

What should an abstract do?

- In the simplest language:
  - Your topic, why its important, and what you found

- Avoid:
  - Cliffhangers
  - Too much on methods or what you did
  - Having multiple ideas

Abstracts

- If you are not clear on what your paper is about, check your abstract. Still not clear, rewrite it.

- Rewrite a lot: if your paper changes, rewrite the abstract (good writing is rewriting)

- Abstract should be your "elevator speech" of what the paper is about

Introduction: essential components

- Why topic is important; what is the puzzle
  - Can talk about gap, but has to be important
- What are research questions
- What are contributions
  - Theory is most important, more practical things (e.g. new data, methods) of lesser value
- Map of the paper

What should introduction do?

- Situate paper: your field and contribution
- No longer than 2-3 pages, but whole paper
- By end, want reader to be interested, rooting for your paper
- Reviewers will have largely made up their mind based on intro – might become more negative, not more positive

Conclusion

- Hardest part of paper to write
- Possible content:
  - Restate contributions
  - Caveats
  - Future research
  - Practical policy implications
- Depends partly on whether you have a separate discussion section

Review process

What do reviews look like?

- Sample reviews:
- http://aom.org/Publications/AMR/Demystifying-the-R-and-R-Process.aspx

Before you submit

- Does the type of question, and way you present the paper fit with the journal?
  - Make sure formatting, word count etc are right
- Make sure you cite prior work on the same topic published in the journal

Before you submit

- Standard is double-blind
- Some journals considering or have moved to single-blind
- If your paper title exists as a working paper or conference paper, it may be de facto single blind for some reviewers

Submitting

- Cover letter
  - Rarely read
  - Summarize your paper and why you think its important
  - If there are reviewers you want or don't want, can mention, but editors may ignore
    - Some journals ask for reviewer suggestions
- Bigger journals have co-editors who specialize in certain areas

Who reviews your paper?

- Journals generally do not
  - Send reviewers multiple manuscripts at one time
  - Like to send more than 3 or 4 papers to a reviewer per year (usually only board members do that many)
- Reviewers decline a lot, especially busy authors
- Your reviewers may not be who you think, especially if they are very busy
  - Less true for smaller niche areas

Who reviews your paper?

- Good chance board member reviews
- Editors read title, abstract, introduction, and references as clues for who to send it to
  - Who do you cite that has already published in the journal?

Submitted and waiting

- Reviewers generally asked to get reviews back in 30-45 days
- It is ok to send email after three months if nothing is back to query status
  - Might prompt editor to send additional reminders

Decision and reviews come back

- Desk rejection
  - Quick, by co-editor or editor
  - They see big problems, sloppiness, or poor fit
  - Usually between 25 and 50% for a good journal
- Rejection with reviews
  - Read reviews, see what you can get out of them: what are valuable points versus idiosyncratic preferences
    - Reviewers in next journal may have different preferences
  - If you are angry or upset, write a letter of response, but don't send it (at least for a few days)
  - Don't sit on paper for too long

Revise and resubmit

- Hurray!
- Reviewers rarely agree – modal set of R&R reviews is 2 fairly positive reviews and one negative
- Read editors letter – does the editor simply summarize reviewer points, or prioritize certain issues

Writing a response

- Editors don't like to overrule reviewers, you are writing to reviewers primarily

- Cover letter highlighting main changes to editor, plus any concerns you might have

- Detailed response to reviewers; two approaches
  - Integrative
  - Reviewer-by-reviewer, Point-by-point

Don't

- Expect reviewer to remember your paper or their comments from six months ago
- Write short, vague reviews
  - As a reviewer, I want to know what you have done without rereading the paper
- Overtly disagree with the reviewer if at all possible
- Resist change – your paper is not perfect

Do

- Thank the reviewers for their time and effort; if a comment is helpful, tell them
- *Show* reviewers you have read their comments, taken them seriously, and changed the manuscript as a result
- Make changes if you can
- If you disagree, explain your logic as politely as possible

Do

- Write a response letter first – what are the changes you can make – and then revise the paper

- Use that as a means to communicate with co-authors (first authors job to take the lead on response)

- Don't submit response immediately, but don't wait too long (1-6 months)

Typical exchanges and responses

- You should cite so and so
  - If you can, do
  - Might tell you who reviewers are
- Paper is missing this theoretical framework
  - Can you add it to complement your approach?
  - Mention word count as a constraint
- Methodological questions/problems
  - If you have data to respond, do so
  - Can you provide persuasive reasons why it is not a problem
- Something was not clear
  - Apologize, make clear

The troublesome third reviewer

- May not be willing to convinced
- Be responsive and polite:
  - Explain why concern is not a problem
- Signal to editor problem with their reviews

How to be a good reviewer?

- Say yes when asked to review papers
- Write detailed, helpful reviews
- Be reasonably prompt
- Be civil and kind even (perhaps especially) when review is bad – sarcasm, showing off are not welcome
- Don't say one thing in review and different thing in note to editor
- Never commit to a review, and then not deliver
- Editors remember good, and bad, reviewers

Finding an audience for your paper

What makes a hit paper?

- Most papers are never cited

- A good paper
- Nature of field - Are lots of researchers going to benefit from your insight, or a few?
- Nature of contribution – is their room for others to expand, build on?
- Timing – where is the field at?
- Reputation – author already well known?
- Presentation – abstract and titling, writing
- Dissemination

Dissemination

- Present at conferences
- Put paper online within copyright constraints
  - Working paper series, SSRN
- Social media
- University press office
- Email signature, twitter
- Wikipedia
- Don't promote working paper too much unless you are sure findings will not change

The American university system: your questions answered

- Job market

- Tenure