

What I Wish I Knew about Writing and Publishing Journal Articles 20 Years Ago

Scott Irwin

University of Illinois at Urbana-
Champaign



#1 Rationalize Your Expectations

- Calibrate your research program to simple acceptance math
- If the acceptance rate at the AJAE is 20% you should plan on submitting 10 papers to publish 2 articles in the AJAE
- Beware of the Lake Wobegon effect!



#2 Move Quickly

- If you receive a positive review, return revisions within 6 months
- Re-submit a paper to a different journal as soon as possible after a rejection
- Arguing with journal editors not only slows you down but also can create bad karma with respect to future submissions



#3 Cut Your Losses

- Do NOT agonize endlessly over rejections
- Rejections are the norm in publishing not the exception!
- The reviewing process has a large error variance
- My rule: I do not fundamentally re-think a paper until it has been rejected at 2 or 3 journals



#4 Do Your Homework

- Large incentives to achieving above average acceptance rates
- Different journals and ESPECIALLY different editors prefer different types of work
- Try to figure out which journals and which editors like your kind of work
 - Network with editors or associate editors as much as possible
 - Pay attention to what has been published lately



#5 Quality Pays Big Dividends

- Articles in flagship journals have a high career impact
- Start submission process at high level journals as much as possible (e.g., AJAE)
 - Better quality reviews
 - Will raise your expectations and effort
- Find an honest and knowledgeable critic to help you improve over time



#6 Learn to Manage Your Emotions

- Kahneman and Tversky were right!
 - Rejections hurt much worse than acceptances satisfy
- Take a long-run view as much as possible
- Nasty fights with reviewers and/or editors almost always damage the author the most

