



# **REFLECTIONS ON PUBLISHING: HOW TO MANAGE THE PAPER REVISION PROCESS**

Petru L. Curseu

# PREMISES . . .

Research performance is evaluated based on the amount of publications (especially in top tier journals) and number of citations (Judge et al., 2007)

Nowadays, publishing in top tier journals in the field of Management (Ashkanasy, 2010) and Psychology (Jaremka et al., 2020) is more difficult and costly than ever

Academic jobs involve a substantial amount of stress due to harsh competition associated with getting research funds or publication and peer review practices (Kroll, 2013; Jaremka et al., 2020)

## Sources

Ashkanasy, N. M. (2010). Publishing today is more difficult than ever. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 31: 1-3.

Judge, T. A., Colbert, A., Cable, D. M., & Rynes, S. L. (2007). What causes a management article to be cited — article, author, or journal? *Academy of Management Journal*, 50, 491-506.

Kroll, D. (2013). Top 10 reasons being a university professor is a stressful job. *Forbes*, 1.05.2013.

Jaremka, L. M., Ackerman, J. M., Gawronski, B., Rule, N. O., Sweeny, K., Tropp, L. R., et al. (2020). Common academic experiences no one talks about: Repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 519–543.

Furnham, A. (2021). Publish or perish: rejection, scientometrics and academic success. *Scientometrics*, 126(1), 843-847.

# FACTS ...

Acceptance rates are extremely low (less than 10% for top tier journals and less than 30% for mid and low range journals) (Furnham, 2021; Jaremka et al., 2020)

Costs associated with publishing in well-established journals continuously increases over time (Judge et al., 2007) – journals often require complex designs & data (longitudinal, multiple source, etc)

Publishing your work requires time and resilience (rejection is a fact of life and persistence is one of keys to success!)

## Sources

Ashkanasy, N. M. (2010). Publishing today is more difficult than ever. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 31: 1-3.

Judge, T. A., Colbert, A., Cable, D. M., & Rynes, S. L. (2007). What causes a management article to be cited — article, author, or journal? *Academy of Management Journal*, 50, 491-506.

Jaremka, L. M., Ackerman, J. M., Gawronski, B., Rule, N. O., Sweeny, K., Tropp, L. R., et al. (2020). Common academic experiences no one talks about: Repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 519–543.

Furnham, A. (2021). Publish or perish: rejection, scientometrics and academic success. *Scientometrics*, 126(1), 843-847.

# TIME

Time needed to get one's research to the public is rather long

Time to decision (some of my submissions):

**Organization Science** (Teamdating paper) – 36 months (2005/2008) – final decision REJECT

**OBHDP** (Minority dissent paper) - 15 months (2011/2012) – final decision REJECT

**Interactive Learning Environments** (Power disparity paper) – 25 months (2011/2013) – published 2014

**Creativity Research Journal** (Minority dissent & climate paper) – 24 months (2020/2022) - published

**JASP** (Cognitive maps paper) – 30 months (2007/2009) – published 2011

**KMRP** (Membership change paper data collected 2012) – 24 months (2018/2020) – published 2020

**International Journal of Aerospace Psychology** (Pilot decisions during emergency situations) – submitted October 2024 still awaiting reviewers' scores

# SPACE ... (NOT EXTRATERRESTRIAL)

“Our journal receives approximately 550 submissions a year. **Papers without major flaws are often not accepted** because the magnitude of the contribution is not sufficient to warrant publication.” – 27.05.2005

“The journal is **extremely pressured for space** at present and your article has not been successful in this instance” – 12.07.2012

“However, the number of submissions has increased quite dramatically over the past few years, and **space limitations dictate** that only a small percentage of these submissions-specifically those that make the strongest contribution to the literature can be published here. This means that **many very good papers that have no fatal flaw can not be accepted**” – 18.09.2012

“Due to the high volume of submissions - about 1,500 per year - we find the need to be selective about the manuscripts we send for review. Our experience is that manuscripts with more than one substantial deficiency rarely become publishable articles unless the contents are of significance in their original ideas or findings.” – 01.09.2021

# TERROR MANAGEMENT THEORY ...

- **TMT is one of the most influential modern theories in Social Psychology**

Roy Baumeister invited Sheldon Solomon and Jeff Greenberg (Tom Pyszczynski could not be there) to present their initial ideas on TMT in 1984 at a symposium on “Public and Private Self” organized by the Society of Experimental Social Psychology (Snowbird, Utah) – “The symposium room was moderately full as Sheldon started his presentation ... At the talk’s end, instead of the high fives we had envisioned, we received stunned silence, shock and dismay. ... Undeterred by the chilly initial reception, we forged ahead with the chapter, which became the first written presentation of TMT. Simultaneously, we worked on a paper more fully presenting the theory and explaining its potential value as a broad explanatory framework. We were hoping that such a paper would be well received at *American Psychologist*, a publication which clamors for broad, integrative ideas. The paper was rejected unceremoniously with two reviews; one a single paragraph, the other a single sentence: **“I have no doubt that this paper would be of no interest to any psychologist, living or dead” ...**” (Greenberg & Arndt, 2011, p. 399)

Source

Greenberg, J., & Arndt, J. (2011). Terror management theory. *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, 1, 398-415.

# MORE ON REJECTION ...



“I (Kate Sweeny) submitted approximately 45 unique manuscripts a total of 160 times (yes, I know that is a lot; see my comment toward the end of my section about my “maniacal” rate of submissions). Of those 160 submissions, approximately 75 were outright rejections of the “do not send it back here” sort. ” (Jaremka et al., 2020, p.523)

“Also apparent were the rejection valleys, where negative experiences cluster together (e.g., a very successful colleague reports having 10 manuscripts rejected in a row and knowing another scholar who had around 20 such repetitions).” (Jaremka et al., 2020)

Source:

Jaremka, L. M., Ackerman, J. M., Gawronski, B., Rule, N. O., Sweeny, K., Tropp, L. R., et al. (2020). Common academic experiences no one talks about: Repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 519–543.

# POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF SUBMISSIONS

## Possible outcomes

1. Your paper is (conditionally) accepted (extremely rare, virtually non-existent in top journals) (Rynes et al., 2005; Jaremka et al., 2020)
2. Your paper is reviewed and the editor gives you the chance to revise and resubmit
3. Your paper is reviewed and the editor rejects the paper
4. Your paper is (desk) rejected

Rynes, S. L., A. Hillman, R. Duane Ireland, B. Kirkman, K., Law, C. C. Miller, N. Rajagopalan and D. Shapiro (2005). From the editors. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48 (5), 732–737.  
Jaremka, L. M., Ackerman, J. M., Gawronski, B., Rule, N. O., Sweeny, K., Tropp, L. R., et al. (2020). Common academic experiences no one talks about: Repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 519–543.

# OUTRIGHT ACCEPTANCE IN PSYCHOLOGY : 2000-2018

## ROBERT J. STERNBERG

“When I was editor of the *Psychological Bulletin*, for example, our outright acceptance rate for initial submissions was probably about 2%” (R. Sternberg, 2000)

Sternberg, R. J. (Ed.). (2000). *Guide to publishing in psychology journals*. (1<sup>st</sup> edition) Cambridge University Press.

“When I was editor of *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, my outright acceptance rate for initial submissions was around 2%” (R. Sternberg, 2018)

Sternberg, R. J. (Ed.). (2018). *Guide to publishing in psychology journals*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) Cambridge University Press.

# APA JOURNALS AND THEIR REJECTION RATE ...

Across the APA journals the average rejection rate increased from around 74% in 2004 to around 82% in 2024  
Some examples below

| Journal                                      | Rejection rate 2004 | Rejection rate 2017 | Rejection rate 2024 |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Journal of Applied Psychology                | 92%                 | 90%                 | 93%                 |
| Journal of Educational Psychology            | 83%                 | 89%                 | 91%                 |
| Psychology of Women Quarterly                | 81%                 | 89%                 | 92%                 |
| Journal of Personality and Social Psychology | 85%                 | 87%                 | 88%                 |
| Psychological Review                         | 87%                 | 86%                 | 91%                 |
| Psychological Methods                        | 85%                 | 85%                 | 87%                 |
| Psychological Bulletin                       | 75%                 | 83%                 | 91%                 |

## Sources:

Summary Report of Journal Operations (2005). *American Psychologist*, 60, 5, 560-561

Summary Report of Journal Operations (2018). *American Psychologist*, 73, 5, 683-684

Summary report of journal operations, 2024 (2025). *American Psychologist*, 80(5), 856–857.

# OUTCOMES 2 TO 4

Your choices (build on Altman & Baruch, 2008):

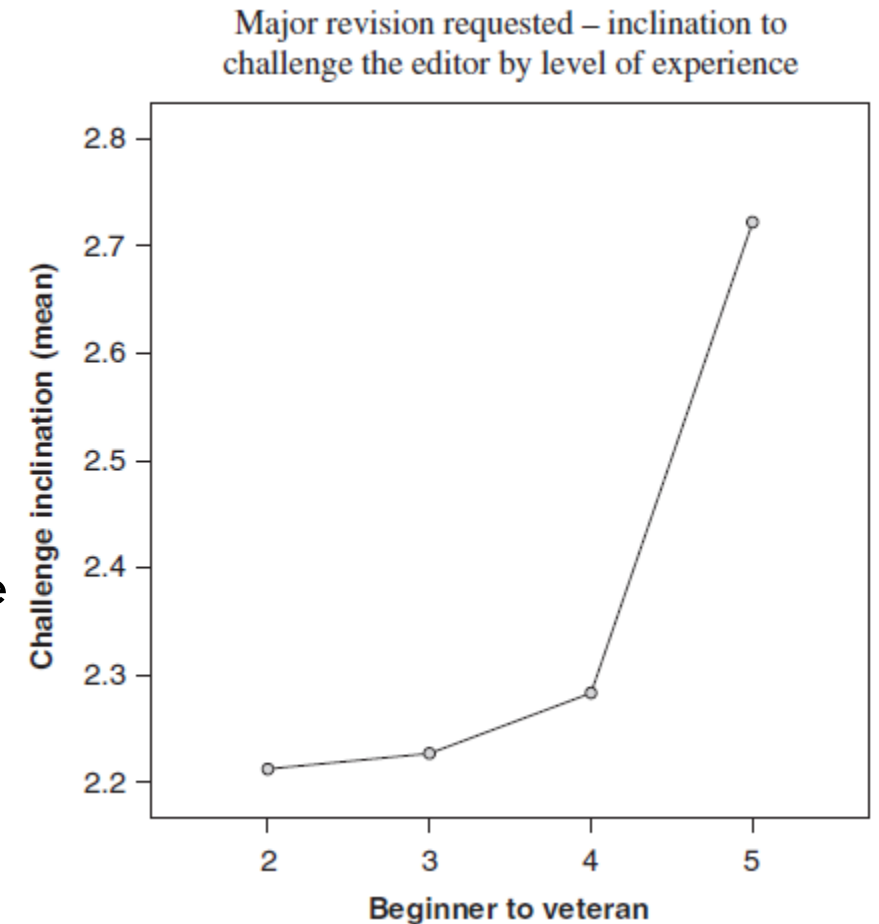
1. Challenge the editor's decision
2. Discard the paper
3. Submit 'as it is' to another journal of similar or better standard;
4. Submit 'as it is' to another journal of lower standard;
5. Revise and submit to another journal of similar or better standard;
6. Revise and submit to another journal of lower standard;
7. R&R to the original journal;

Altman, Y & Baruch, J. (2008). Strategies for revising and resubmitting papers to refereed journals. *British Journal of Management*, 19, 89-101.

# CHOICE 1 – CHALLENGE A DECISION

When you challenge

1. Wait a few days after the decision – to cool down (Don't write on impulse)
2. Make sure you write a constructive message and avoid emotional or harsh remarks
3. Give the editor the choice of reconsidering his/her decision (don't make/push this choice on him/her) – yet you should be clear that your aim is to get him/her think about changing his/her mind
4. Be precise and cogent
5. Be prepared for a negative outcome ....



Altman, Y & Baruch, J. (2008). Strategies for revising and resubmitting papers to refereed journals. *British Journal of Management*, 19, 89-101.

# CHOICE 2 — DISCARD THE PAPER ... THE ULTIMATE CHOICE

## When to discard the paper?

When reviewers or the editor points to insurmountable mistakes (quality of the data, misfit between what you hypothesize and what you can do with your data)

When you feel you are unable to work with reviewers'/editor's comments

When the editor points towards the fact that the paper has no important contribution to the literature ...

...

Learn to live with rejection ... !

# CHOICES 3 AND 4 — SUBMIT AS IS TO A DIFFERENT JOURNAL

Make sure you know the journal and the type of papers published in it

Make sure you refer to work published in the journal around the topic of your paper

Check whether journals have special issue calls for topics similar with the one of your paper

Usually it does not make much sense to “go up” in terms of IF - although sometimes papers initially rejected are published in better journals – example the BJSP (IF=2.05) paper initially rejected in EJSP (IF=1.59)

When you get 2-3 rejections try to reconsider revising the paper ... helps, but it involves a significant effort most of the times

Some journals are explicit about resubmission and if the paper was submitted previously to another journals (e.g., Journal of Research in Personality), the editor may request the reviews received in the previous submission and a letter explaining the way you have worked with the reviewers' comments

# CHOICES 5 AND 6 — REVISE AND RESUBMIT

## Reasons to resubmit

### Why to resubmit?

If you are invited to resubmit this is in itself an accomplishment as 75-95% of the papers submitted to journals are rejected after the first round

90% of the papers that survive a second revision will eventually be published

| Rationale \ Agency | Self-centred                                                                                                                                                       | Community-centred                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    |                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                |
| Instrumental       | Q1<br><i>'This is the most cost-effective way to publish. I aim to maximize my research output' ...('though it may not be worth the effort')</i><br>[94 responses] | Q2<br><i>'This is how the system works, and I have to comply. These are the "rules of the game"... (however, 'I may try to "beat them"')</i><br>[52 responses] |
| Ethical            | Q4<br><i>'Peer reviewing makes me a better researcher, improves the paper, and enhances scholarship'...(but 'I don't trust the process')</i><br>[30 responses]     | Q3<br><i>'This is "fair-play", the decent thing to do'...(alas, 'it is a political game')</i><br>[16 responses]                                                |

n = 192; some responses were classified under two quadrants.

Figure 2. A taxonomy of R&R reasoning

Altman, Y & Baruch, J. (2008). Strategies for revising and resubmitting papers to refereed journals. *British Journal of Management*, 19, 89-101.

# HOW TO REVISE A PAPER?

Make an inventory of things you think are relevant (correct) and things you can/want to address and ... proceed to work:

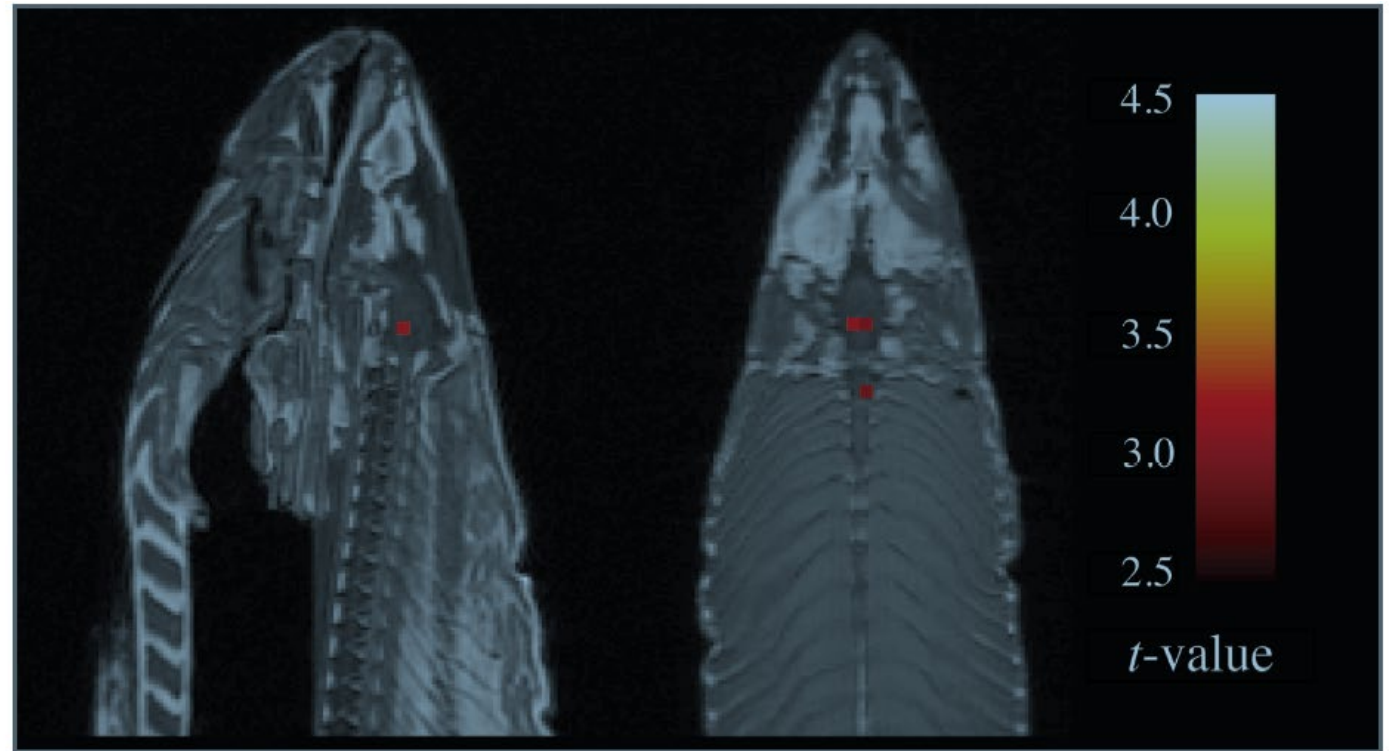
1. Most reviewers suggest ways to improve your paper – try to implement as much as possible (ideally all their comments)
2. If you are unable to work with their comments explain clearly why and offer alternatives (supplementary analyses to refute their assumptions, alternative analyses, etc)
3. If you disagree with the referees, give clear arguments why you do so ... maybe the editor will be on your side ...

|                                  |                      | Ability to solve it                               |                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                  |                      | Able to solve it                                  | Not able to solve it                                                                                 |
| Relevance of reviewers' comments | Relevant/correct     | Change/rewrite/explain<br>(1)                     | Give a honest explanation why you cannot implement the change;<br>Offer sensible alternatives<br>(2) |
|                                  | Irrelevant/incorrect | Answer to reviewer(s) with clear arguments<br>(3) |                                                                                                      |

# NO RESEARCH IS ERROR FREE ...

## The dead salmon story ...

“One mature Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*) participated in the fMRI study. The salmon measured approximately 18 inches long, weighed 3.8 lbs, and **was not alive at the time of scanning**. It is not known if the salmon was male or female, but given the post-mortem state of the subject this was not thought to be a critical variable.”  
(Bennett et al., 2010, p.2)



**Fig. 1.** Sagittal and axial images of significant brain voxels in the task > rest contrast. The parameters for this comparison were  $t(131) > 3.15$ ,  $p(\text{uncorrected}) < 0.001$ , 3 voxel extent threshold. Two clusters were observed in the salmon central nervous system. One cluster was observed in the medial brain cavity and another was observed in the upper spinal column.

Bennett, C. M. Baird, A. A., Miller, M. B. & Wolford, G. L. (2010). Neural correlates of interspecies perspective taking in the post-mortem Atlantic Salmon: An argument for proper multiple Comparisons Correction, *JSUR*, 1,1, 1-15.

# THEREFORE

Any scientific paper contains errors (...if your errors are not caught before publication, you will eventually have to write an erratum afterwards)

Learning points:

Don't wait too long before sending the paper out for review ...

Don't try to make it perfect ... It has errors anyhow

Perfectionism and procrastination are “deadly” sins in getting your research published ... (Schneider, 2011)

# THEREFORE ...

Editors and reviewers are interpreting your work ... The more you write the more they have the chance to project themselves into your work

Learning points:

Know your readers beforehand and if possible the editor too ... read and cite his/her work!

Be explicit in text (do not let the reviewers to fill in the leaps in the reasoning with their fantasies)!

Be concise ... especially novice authors write long papers – my first submitted manuscript had 50 pages (12000 words) ... it took 7 years to see it published ... in a somewhat shorter version ...

Clumsiness and verbal diarrhoea are two “deadly” sins in getting your research published ... (Schneider, 2011)