

Getting Your Paper Published

by

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1. Write an excellent paper with clearly stated contributions and links to prior work

First and foremost, invest the effort needed to ensure that the paper you submit for publication is of the highest quality. By submitting a paper that is written with extreme care, you are showing that you respect the time and effort that reviewers will invest in critiquing your paper.

It is essential to state specifically the contribution of your paper. Do not expect the reviewers to determine the contribution. Unless your paper is a survey or tutorial article, you must delineate the novel elements of your paper, and cite relevant background work to place your work in perspective and show how it advances the state of knowledge. Be sure to credit relevant prior work in an accurate and objective manner. Omission of citations for relevant prior research is the most common critique during the review process.

2. Choose an appropriate journal

Different journals are directed at different groups of researchers, for example, theory versus experimentation versus computation. Furthermore, journals may have different expectations in terms of style and substance. Regardless of the potential importance of your research, the journal you choose must be suitable to the topic and style of your work. Do not underestimate the value of choosing the most suitable journal. Examine recent issues of journals, and contact the editor to ask whether your paper is suitable in terms of topic, approach, and length.

3. Improve your paper while waiting for the reviews.

After submitting your paper, continue to revise and improve the paper. If new information (such as published work), results, or ideas come to light, update the paper internally. In this way, you will be ready to revise the paper quickly once you receive reviews. If significant extensions are achieved, then this could lead to another paper without expanding the scope of the first paper. If you find a minor mistake in your paper, do not send a new version of the paper to the editor. You will be able to fix minor errors during the revision process. However, if you find a major error, then it may be appropriate to withdraw your paper.

4. Approach the revision process with a positive attitude

The purpose of reviews is to critique your paper. Although you may wish that reviewers provided more positive comments, their principal task is to find flaws and shortcomings in your work. Some of these criticisms may be appropriate and valuable, while others may be subjective. Ultimately, reviews can be extremely valuable since knowledgeable reviewers can help you improve your paper. You should be grateful for the help provided by the reviewers. This attitude is consistent with the goal of producing an excellent paper.

5. Revising your paper

Assuming that the editor gives you the opportunity to revise your paper, your highest priority is to improve the paper. Invest the effort to make all possible improvements based on reviews and your own ideas. Next, analyze the reviewers' comments to determine which suggestions will result in an improved paper, and implement all such suggestions to the greatest extent possible.

6. Composing the revision letter

The next step is to compose a letter to the editor of the journal explaining how you addressed the reviewers' comments. Keep in mind that your letter is ultimately intended for the editor, whose role is to adjudicate between you and the reviewers. In other words, it may be helpful to persuade the reviewers, but it is more critical to persuade the editor, who is the ultimate decision maker. In your letter, be sure to thank the editor and reviewers profusely for their time, effort, and helpful suggestions. Next, provide a list of all improvements in the paper, especially those that arose from the reviewers' comments. Be sure to respond to all the reviewers' concerns, providing a brief and factual response to each criticism. Be sure that the paper includes all key improvements summarized in the revision letter; remember that it is the paper that will be published, and not the revision letter.

Some comments by the reviewers may be difficult to address. If you believe a reviewer has made an error, then provide specific evidence in a tactful and factual manner. Negative reviews often arise because authors make unsupported claims or adopt a tone that antagonizes the reviewers. The most difficult comments to address are those that are highly subjective. Rise above odious or specious remarks by stressing that your paper represents novel, quality work that provides specific advances.

It is acceptable to say that certain issues are beyond the scope of the paper; in such cases, the reviewers may be satisfied if you acknowledge the need for future work in the conclusions of the paper. Neutralize remaining differences by acknowledging gaps, stressing advances achieved, and noting that additional material will make the paper significantly longer. Do not attempt to debate the reviewers.

7. If your paper is rejected

If, despite your best efforts, your paper is rejected, try to understand the reasons for rejection. If you still wish to pursue publication of the paper, be sure to use the opportunity to improve your paper by taking advantage of the reviews that you've received. Next, search for an appropriate journal, perhaps one that is more suitable than the publication that rejected your paper. It is often a good idea to contact the editor of another journal, explain the situation, inquire as to whether the journal is willing to consider your submission with various improvements, and, if so, whether the reviews from the first journal are of interest.

8. Is it worth it?

It can take considerable time, effort, and patience to publish a paper in a highly regarded journal. In contrast, a conference paper may require only a fraction of the time and effort. It is natural to wonder whether journal publication is worthwhile. Although journal publication is not a perfect process, the scrutiny involved in journal publication is the best assurance that work is correct and relevant to advancing the state of knowledge. In addition, the input of experts during the review process can lead to better papers. Without doubt, many excellent ideas have been published in conference proceedings and technical reports without ever reaching archival journal publication. Nevertheless, archival journal publication demonstrates that the research community respects your work and views it as substantive contribution to the advancement of knowledge. Ultimately, these publications are the capstone achievement of scholarly, intellectual activity.

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