

How to Write (and Publish) a “Good” Research Paper

Scott Chapman

Sam Houston State University

November 13, 2018



Prologue

Some Resources:

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- [2] Steven Krantz, How to write your first paper, *Notices Amer. Math. Soc.* 2007, 1507–1511.
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It depends on who you ask.

Disclaimer 1: Anything you hear in the next hour or so is my subjective opinion. There is no one way to write a “Good” research paper. Many different methods work well. I am going to go into detail about how I approach (and evaluate) such things.



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The true test of your paper is not what you think of it, but what others think of it.

Hence, while it is important for you to be happy with what you write, it is more important that your readers are happy with it.

Moral II: You are not writing this paper for yourself. You are writing it to disseminate your work to the broader mathematical/statistical community. **Be open minded to other’s opinion of your writing. Strive to improve your writing based on other’s comments and input.**

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The Journey Begins

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With high probability, people who write “good” papers have read a lot of papers.

Corollary

If you want to write a “good” paper, then you better read a lot of papers.



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- What do you like most about each of these papers?
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What to do before you start

- READ AND EVALUATE PAPERS (already explained).
- TALK TO PEOPLE (especially your advisor).
- GO TO SEMINARS.
- WRITE YOUR RESULTS UP (homework style). MAKE SURE THEY ARE CORRECT!
- IF YOU DON'T KNOW IT, LEARN LaTeX.



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Make it descriptive:

- **BAD TITLES:**

- Some probability calculations.
- A theorem on Euclidean geometry.
- On a theorem of Carlitz.

- **BETTER TITLES:**

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 - Any additional necessary background or historical context.
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The introduction might be the most important part of your paper.



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- The Main Body with Results and proofs.
 - **The paper should consist of complete sentences.**
 - Use standard notation only.
 - Display complicated expressions and equations. Refer back to them by number. This often greatly simplifies your writing.
 - Consider the structure of your main result. Can the proof be broken into more easily understandable lemmas which lead to the main result perhaps as corollaries. Try to make the arguments complete but not with too much detail (omit common mathematical calculations that are easily checked).
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- Most journals have a summary of their scope and focus, on their webpage.
- You don't want to send an algebra paper to a complex analysis journal.
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- Even though most journals use some form of online submission system, the better journals still want cover letters. Be prepared to write one.
- Be clear if the journal you are submitting to uses double-blind refereeing. If yes then all possible identifying material needs to be scrubbed from the paper.
- Be certain that you co-authors know what your doing.



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4. The Hardest Part— Now you Wait.

- If the journal immediately rejects your paper (usually called a “summary rejection”) don’t be offended - they have likely done you a favor.
- If the paper is refereed, it may well be four to eight months (or more) before you hear anything from the Editor.
- There are a lot of factors that go into this waiting time that the author does not see. For instance, securing a referee (or referees) might be difficult.
- When is appropriate to contact the Editor concerning the status of your work? I think it is premature to do this before six months to submission has passed. After six months, I think a short reminder every three months is acceptable. I again emphasize that these requests be polite.



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- Your paper will come back with one of three decisions: Accept, Reject, or Revise.
- **Revise is not equivalent to accept.**
- You may receive one or more referee reports. They could be extremely short and ask for only esoteric changes, or they could be extremely long and contain a request to essentially rewrite the paper.
- Don't react too quickly. Read the report extremely carefully, and think about the contents for several days.
- There is a good chance you will not agree with all the suggested changes. Do your best to make the referee happy. Having requested a revision, the referee is clearly on your side.
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I will begin this section with a lemma, presented without proof, but valid based on my nearly 30 years of publishing.

Lemma

You probably won't win an argument with an Editor.

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Good Luck!