Paper writing and submission

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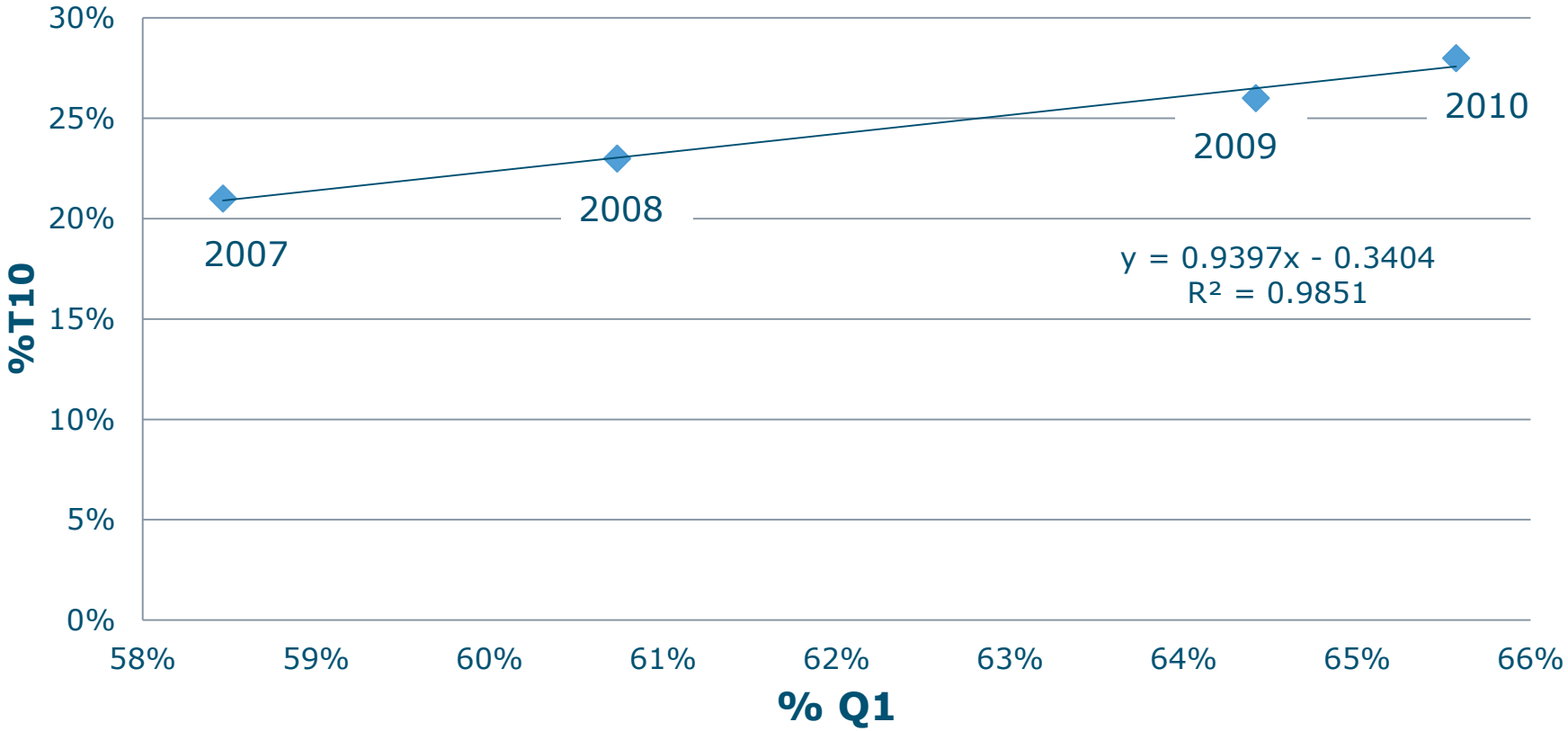
What characterises an excellent paper?

- Innovation:
  - In new empirical material (more than new data confirming earlier data)
  - In new subject
  - In new theory
  - In new approach
- Well-embedded in existing, state-of-the-art, knowledge
- Multiple layers of understanding
- Well structured and written on different levels (paper, sections, paragraphs, sentences)

In which journal to publish?

- Scope of the journal subject category WoS, aims jorunal, reference list, editorial board
- Acceptance/rejection rate
- Costs
- Time: review process, acceptance to publication
- Open Access
- Journal circulation
- Journal performance (IF)

High IF correlates with high citations



But: IF= journal; citations = papers!

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Realist estimations

- Make a realist estimation on the quality of your paper
- Do not submit to a too high-level journal
- All decent journals are overloaded with manuscripts; do not give them easy reasons to reject
- Cite papers form the journal you submit to
- If you can give suggestions for reviewers, always do so

A good paper

Title

- Only one main idea in title
- Use understandable and indexed words
- Be concise
- A title is a label, not a sentence
- Check whether the title matches the final paper version
- If possible: make the reader interested

Abstract

- Why was this research being done: background & objectives
- How was the research done: methods
- What are the important results
- What are the main conclusions
- Consider maximum length abstract

Do not:

- Use unexplained abbreviations
- Use concepts and terms that might be unfamiliar
- Overload the abstract with numerical results
- Spent much text on future research

Introduction

- Start with explaining the background and the relevance of the issue
- Tell how other researchers dealt with the issue and what they found (short literature overview)
- Tell what is new about your research (approach)
- Eventually delineate your research: what was done, scope
- Give clear objective(s) of the research
- If the structure of the paper is not standard: explain
- Move from general to specific

Clear paper structure

- Follow any guidelines from the journal
- A standard structure has a reason: the reader knows where to find what

Who should be co-author on a paper?

- Three relevant scientific activities
  - Conception and design of the research
  - Data collection, data analysis, model building, model calculations, interpretation results
  - Writing of the manuscript
- A co-author should contribute substantially to at least two of the three research activities
- Co-authors accept full responsibility for a paper
- Co-authorship is sensitive! Make arrangements beforehand

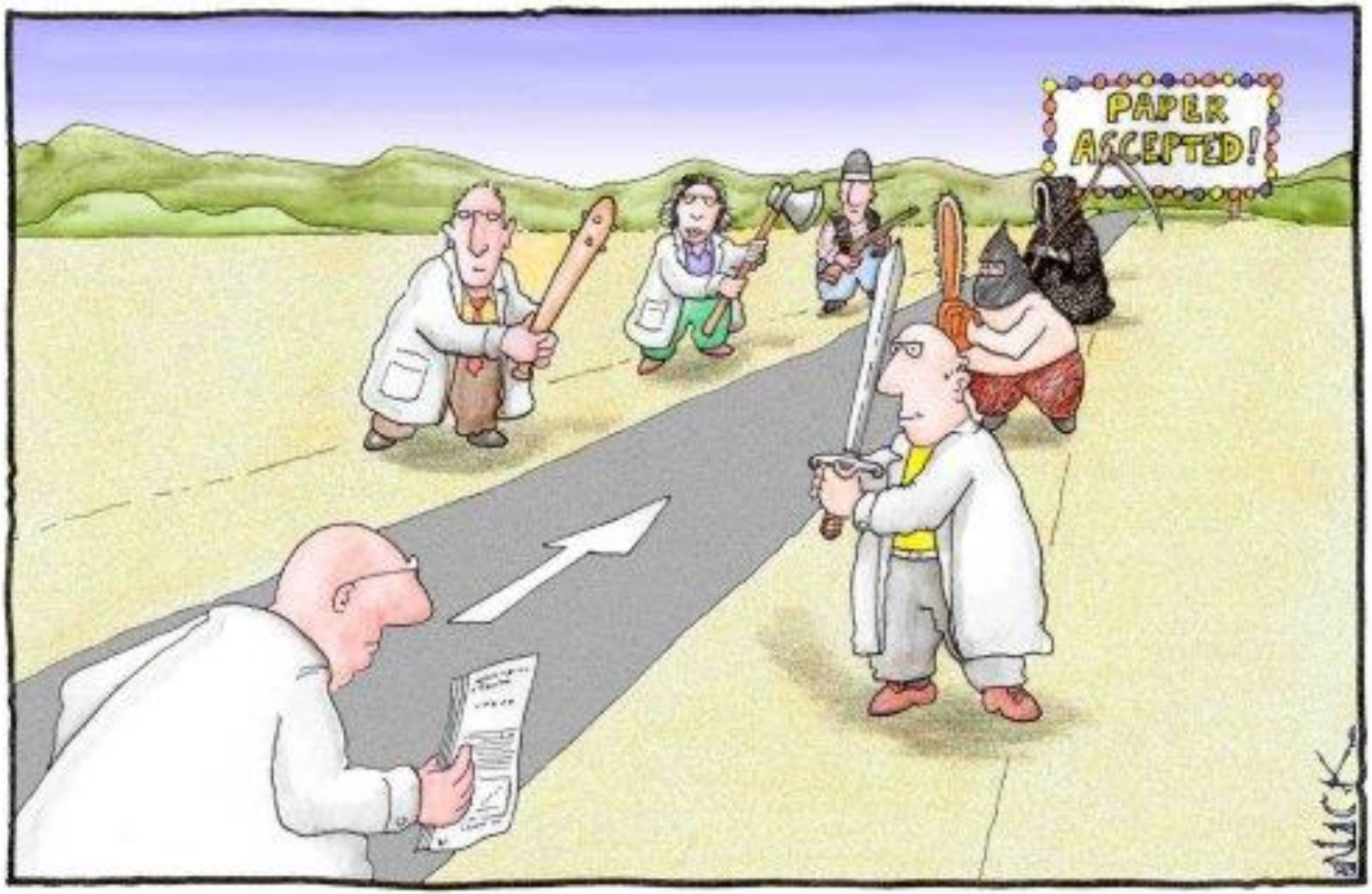
Ordering co-authors

- Different traditions in different sciences
- The first author is always the person with the most important and integrating contribution; the lead author
- In several natural science traditions, the last authors is the group leader (=important)
- In some disciplines the corresponding author has meaning
- In most social science traditions the order is the order of importance of contribution, or alphabetical

Submitting a paper

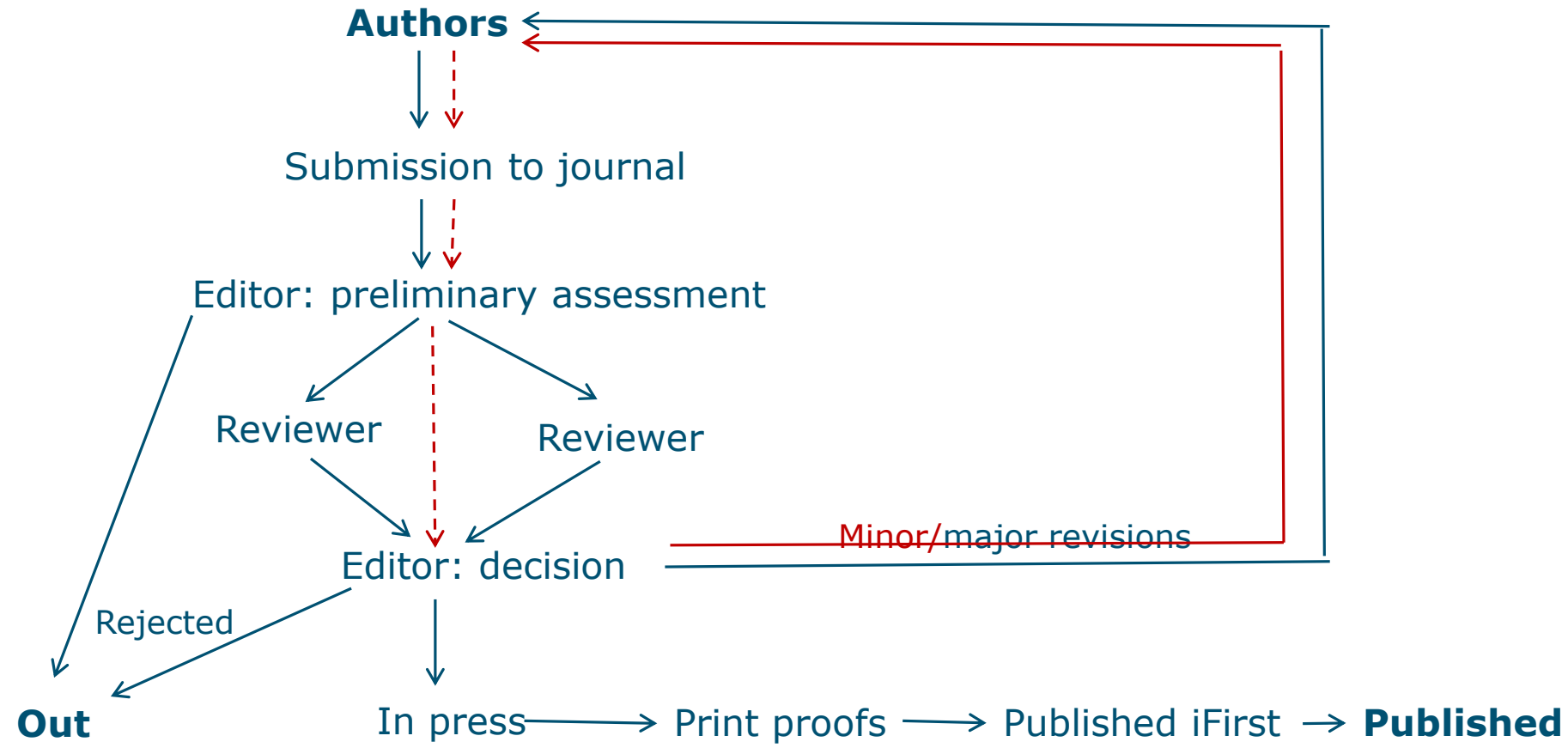
- Paper prepared and formatted according to the journal guidelines
  - Section names and numbers
  - Format reference list, make it coherent
  - Line numbering, page numbering
  - How to place tables and figures
  - Maximum length
- Is the paper ready and complete? (anonymous, abstract, ref.)
- Cover letter to the editor
  - You want to submit the paper
  - Why does it fit the journal
  - Contains original work not submitted elsewhere

Peer review



Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as 'quite an improvement.'

The process

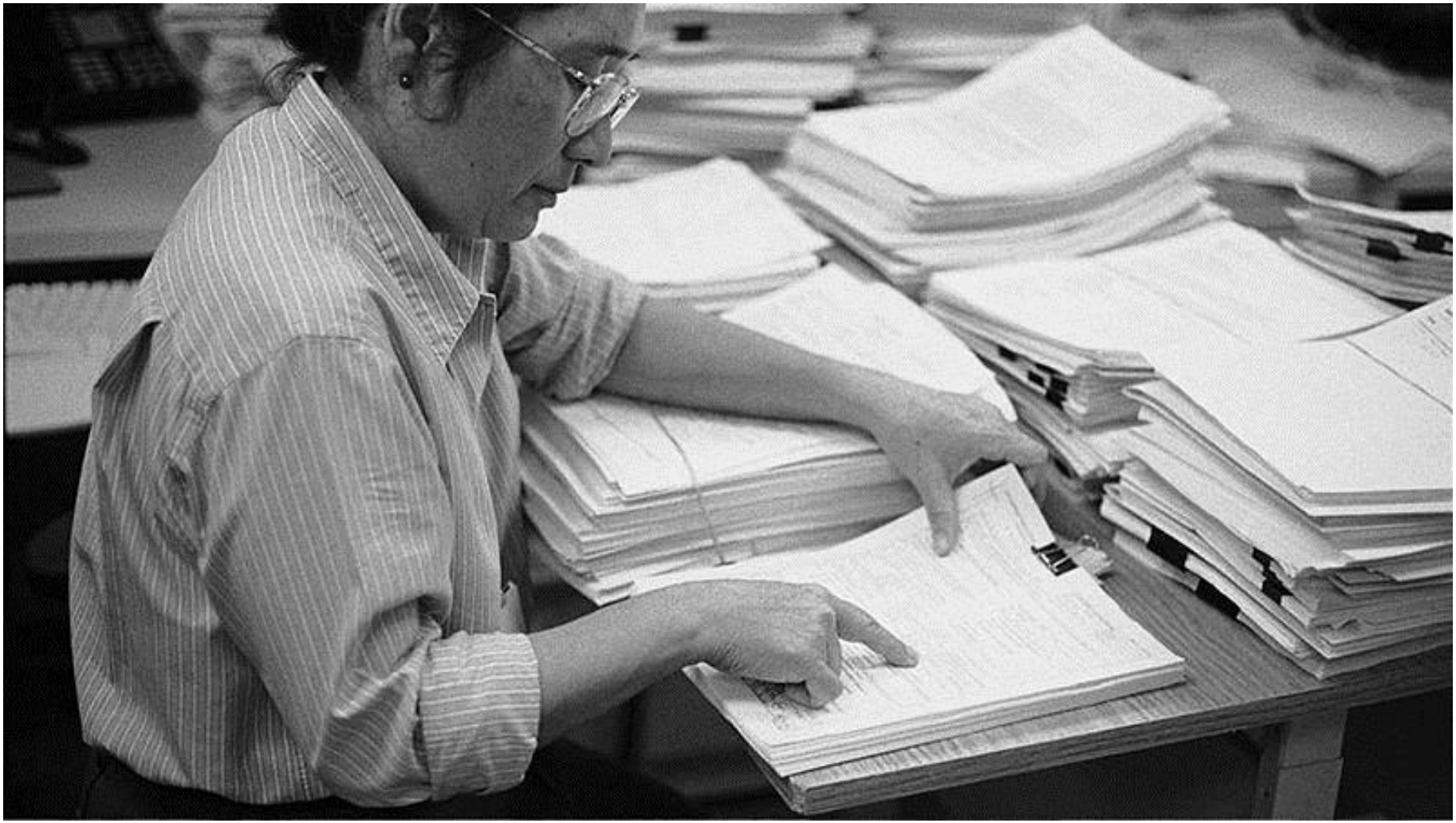

Authors
Submission to journal
Editor: preliminary assessment
Reviewer
Reviewer
Minor/major revisions
Editor: decision
Rejected
Out
In press
Print proofs
Published iFirst
Published

Elements in preliminary assessment

- Fitting in aim and scope of journal
- Clear, short and unambiguous title
- Clear and well structured abstract
- Clear and well written introduction, helping the reader and getting him/her excited
- Length of the paper
- References to other papers in journal
- Good language, easy lay-out

A transparent, well written, not too long and clearly structured paper brings the reader in a good mood!

The editor



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Examples of outright rejections

- Government Response to Enviro Conflicts; Not very systematic and wide-ranging PhD student's literature review. Reject 6.2.13
- Conservation in Amazon; not fitting the journal. Reject 17.2.13
- Modelling the effects of pro bicycle infrastructure & policies in … Too specialised, modelling, no politics. Reject 5.3.13
- Recalibrating on Collaborative Governance Taiwan. Simple case study Reject 27.3.13
- Knowledge production and polluted soil. Essentially 3 Finnish case studies, too specialised for EP Reject 30.3.13
- De-Stigmatization of polluted areas near 1 factory in Taiwan. no general knowledge, too specialised for EP Reject 31.3.13

Status of submitted paper

- Most journals use an electronic submission system where you can track and trace your article
- Status: 'with the editor', 'under review', 'under revision'
- Time length can vary greatly:
  - The workload of the editor
  - The time required to find reviewers
  - The workload of the reviewers
- A good journal will take 3-4 months for first decision
  - Preliminary assessment 3 weeks
  - Review process 8-10 weeks
  - Decision editor 2-3 weeks

Reasons for paper rejection

- Failure to conform to journal scope: bad fit
- Poor grammar, style, syntax, structure
- Not (clear what is) new, innovative

Preliminary assessment

- Inadequate research; can be a matter of research traditions
- No contribution to (new) scientific knowledge
- Author is unwilling/unable to revise according to reviewer's and editor's suggestions
- Much overlap with other papers by the author

Assessment after review

Reasons for requiring revision

- Insufficient/unclear problem statement/ research goal
- Missing relevant literature/too old literature
- Unclear conceptual model, framework
- Methods unclear, not well described
- Methods and results not clearly separated
- Unclear or confusing presentation of results in text, tables, figures
- Conclusions not supported by research
- Missing or inadequate references
- Substandard English

How to revise a paper

- Revision does not mean that paper will be accepted in the end
- Carefully read all comments of editor and reviewers
- Determine which points have to be solved and which are optional
- Determine points you principally do not agree with
- Discuss the comments and solutions with all authors
- Ask for more revision time if needed.
- Make changes in the paper
- Make extensive revision notes in which you explain how you dealt with the comments

Revision notes

- Make a separate document revision notes
- Write an answer to all comments, using different fonts for comments and your answers
- Be polite. Thank the reviewer, show gratitude for the suggestions, indicate that it has improved the paper a lot
- Keep in mind that the paper is the central issue. If something has raised concern by reviewers, the concerns have to be taken away
- Discussions with editors and reviewers usually do not help
- Use line numbering or sections to help the editor and reviewer to see changes made
- Do not hide comments

Final comments

- The editor takes the decision: there is no higher authority
- Do not bother editors; they are busy and don’t like to be disturbed with minor details
- Use the comments of rejected papers to improve before submitting to another journal
- If you are invited to review a paper, do it! You learn a lot
- If you have no time to review a paper, react directly

Thank you!

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