

Branislav L. Slantchev

# On Publishing

# Caveat Emptor

- Only advice about venues I know:
  - Refereed journals
  - Chapters in edited volumes
  - Refereed books
- No clue about:
  - In-house journals
  - Editorials
  - Vanity presses
  - Trade books
  - Textbooks

# Generic (useless) advice

- Do competent research on an exciting topic!
- Be clear and concise
- Avoid jargon
- Spell-check & proof-read
- Write focused lit reviews
- Take care with introduction
- Think about title & abstract
- Be generous with acknowledgments

# The Process

- Articles:
  - Submit -> wait  $N$  months -> get rejected
  - Editors & referees are very busy
  - Top journals 5-7% acceptance
  - “Easy” journals 10-12% acceptance
  - Rejection is modal category:
    - Most papers not ready for prime time
    - Many are badly targeted
  - On average,
    - Better work ends up in better journals
    - I have no evidence for that

# The Process

- Books (university press)
  - Editor = feudal baron
  - Modal category: desk rejection
  - Contact editor early (perhaps get introduced)
  - 95% guarantee to kill book: admit it's your dissertation
  - Know your audience / estimate interest
  - Proposal vs. completed manuscript
  - Multiple submissions OK (usually)
  - Takes much longer to write
  - "You don't finish a book, the book finishes you" – K. Schultz

# Strategies

## Pancakes:

- Publish a lot
- Regardless of quality of outlets
- Pros:
  - Low risk
  - Long CV
  - Experience
- Cons:
  - Work often subpar
  - Reputation?

## Home-runs:

- Publish less
- Mostly in top outlets
- Pros:
  - High impact
  - High visibility
  - Reputation!
- Cons:
  - High risk
  - Short CV

# Strategies

- Both strategies work
- Mostly personal style / preference
- Few can pull off long CVs + excellent work
  - Some methods make it easier to publish more...
  - ... but that does not mean *you* can do it!
- FACT: not all of our papers deserve to be in a top-3 journal
- Learn to
  - Recognize scope/importance of your idea
  - Gauge quality of your own work (might be impossible)

# Selecting a Journal

- Do not auto-pilot down a list according to rankings
- Be mindful of career implications:
  - People care where you publish
  - *YOU* care where you publish
  - If you can turn an idea into APSR-material with more work...
  - ... do the work!
  - Don't be lazy & dump half-assed papers into 3<sup>rd</sup>-tier journals
- Consider carefully the audience
- Don't worry about turn-around, at least initially:
  - For me: between 2 to 18 months (average 8 months) at places published
  - With rejections, average well over a year (still time on tenure clock)



# Selecting a Journal

- In my case:
  - Modal category: published in journal of first submission
  - Second most common: published in journal of second submission
- Target properly = minimize frustration!
- Still, I've had:
  - 2 papers rejected by 3 journals each
  - 1 paper rejected by 5 journals
- Don't get discouraged!

# Responding to R&R

- You will get upset
- You will be grateful
- Cool off before tackling revisions
- Do not turn down R&Rs
- Treat Editor's suggestions as instructions
- Respond to *all* comments by referees:
  - Make a list, identify points of convergence
  - Keep track of changes, with page numbers
  - Organize response letter

# Responding to R&R

- The response letter
  - Is absolutely crucial!
  - Nobody will remember what they wanted 6 months ago
  - Don't call referees idiots
  - Likely everyone will see it
- In the letter:
  - Put most important revisions first (with page numbers)
  - Resolve all criticisms you agree with
  - Do not attempt to hide or pretend to have done work you haven't
  - If you disagree, explain (politely) why
    - Referee is demonstrably (mathematically, factually) wrong
    - Referee's request is inconsistent with other parts of paper
    - Referee's request is too difficult / would require separate paper (new contribution)
    - Referee's approach will take paper in a different direction (tricky!)

# Dealing with Rejection

- Happens to all of us
- Some rejections b/c Editor didn't like idea, topic, etc.
- Even without "objective" reasons, rejections 100% final
- OK, 99% final provided:
  - Procedural problems (e.g., sent to wrong referee)
  - Mathematical/factual error is main reason for rejection
  - Referee intervenes on your behalf (exceedingly rare)
- You will never know why it was rejected:
  - Possible with positive reports if Editor does not like it
  - Possible with lukewarm reports if referees sent separate private comments
- Don't simply go to next journal:
  - Address legitimate concerns
  - Decent chance you will draw at least one previous referee

# What to Publish

- Refereed articles: YES! YES! YES!
- University press books: if relevant, YES!
- Replications: maybe, if you have a better method
- Special issues: maybe (rough ride)
- Edited volumes: avoid (probably not an issue)
- Book reviews: not before tenure (service to discipline)
- Textbooks / trade books: not before tenure (service to your pocket)
- Editorials: not before tenure (service to your ego)
- Vanity presses: no

# Aside on Co-authoring

- Absolutely, yes
- Careful who with:
  - Famous advisor
  - Other faculty
  - Fellow grad students
- Establish name order early
  - Alphabetical (not so good if your name starts with 'S')
  - By contribution?
    - Ask everyone to estimate own share of work
    - Sum estimates
    - Result is at least  $0.75 \times (\# \text{ of co-authors}) \times 100$
  - By footnote?
  - Rotating (on large projects)?