

# Publishing Experimental Economics Papers

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# Experimental Economics at the AER

- 1 AER friendly to EE, whether lab or field. **Huge** number of such submissions
- 2 Most such papers are handled by:
  - ▶ Stefano DellaVigna (all types), Roland Bénabou (esp. behavioral, applied theory), Esther Duflo (field, development), Jeff Ely (closely theory-based)
- 3 **Preregistration** is not a requirement, but highly recommended, especially for experiments, which cannot be easily be replicated
  - ▶ Referees will often ask to look at preregistration plan, or not be so happy if there isn't one. But, it is not grounds for rejection per se
- 4 If paper combines theory and experiments (occasionally, even if not), referees typically include experts on **both** aspects, within and/or across reviewers
- 5 After coeditor “conditionally accepts” a paper, it goes to the AEA’s **data editor**, who will want all the data, documentation, codes, and may ask for some more information, clarifications

# The Road to Publication: Submission

- ① **Submitting:** may request one (or more) specific coeditor. Decision belongs to the chief editor, as a function of workloads, possible conflicts of interest, etc., but usually the request is followed
  - ① Do not bother suggesting referees. Will be ignored, and may even look strange
  - ② On very rare occasions, may want to take advantage of the “opposed referees” option. Should then briefly explain why, have a very good reason
- ② **Screening:** coeditor assigned looks at paper to decide whether has reasonable chances, or not  $\Rightarrow$  send to referees, or desk reject
  - ① May or may not solicit advice from an associate editor or other expert
  - ② Desk rejection is not an “insult”. It saves you and everyone else time  
DR usually within a month, generally much faster, possibly a couple of days
  - ③ No statistic on DR rate, but would say about 35-40% at AER, varies a lot a lot across journals. DR papers get 50% refund

# The Road to Publication: Evaluation

- 1 **Refereeing:** coeditor chooses referees, usually 2-3, but can be more, or less
  - 1 Requests letter and report within about 5 weeks, \$100 incentive.  
Alas, some referees can be terribly slow
  - 2 Ideally, aim to make decisions within 4 months, but not always possible.  
If not heard back after 6 months, perfectly fine to inquire with journal, or even before if time is critical (up soon for review or tenure, etc.; can mention it)
- 2 **Second coeditor opinion:** before issuing any first-round R&R, plus whenever feel need to, coeditor will solicit the opinion of another coeditor,
  - 1 Reads paper, letters and reports, then sends feedback and an assessment ("I completely agree with you," or "if it were me...", "I think they should also do X"). Can be very brief or very detailed
  - 2 It is taken very seriously by the other coeditor (decisions do get switched), but is nonbinding

# The Road to Publication: Feedback and Decision

- 1 **Decision letter:** Reject, or R&R of variable strength or tentativeness
- 2 Reject is final. Exception is if letter says would allow submission of drastically different version or extension of the paper, “to be treated as a new submission”. Such (unofficial) “reject and resubmit” fairly rare. Examples:
  - 1 New paper would require important new experiment(s) or data-gathering, the feasibility or/and outcome of which is a priori very uncertain
  - 2 Take paper in very different direction, jettison large part(s), add new one(s)
- 3 **Feedback:** R&R usually comes with relatively precise list of requests and challenges, “reject and resubmit” much more open ended
  - 1 Referees don't always agree, that is life; but often they do
  - 2 Editor's should tell you which requests he/she considers most important

# The Road to Publication: Revision

- ① **“Authors’ Replies”**: include memos explaining how you addressed each request or question, or explaining why you could not address this or that one
  - ① One general (or part of cover letter), giving an overview of the changes
  - ② Specific ones for each referee, thanking them for their extremely valuable input, etc., restating at least some of what is in the general memo, and then explaining in detail how you address their concerns
- ② **Iterations**:  $n = 1, 2, \dots$

# Dealing with Rejection I

- ① **Nothing personal...** It happens all the time, including to editors, famous people, Nobel prizes. Just an integral part of a researcher's life  
And yet, it will often feel unjust
  - ① Rejection letters are almost always quite short, but sometimes (especially for young authors) the editor may write a long one, with detailed comments and advice. Pure public goods provision, take advantage of it...
  - ② Some referee reports may be too short / not deep enough, or feel that way. But, typically, at a good journal, will get some very good/useful ones as well
- ② **Appeals and complaints:** always possible, but (essentially) never succeed.
  - ① By the time paper gets rejected at a top journal, several very good people have evaluated it, often with different but complementary perspectives  
Some may have felt that paper was worth spending a lot of their time on the report, others not (e.g., top experts)

## Dealing with Rejection II

- ② Mistakes, sloppiness, and even strategizing by referees certainly do happen: editors are alert to this, and for example often look to see whether the different referees point to similar reasons for rejection, or revision
- ③ **How to respond –or not (usually better)**
  - ① Get advice from advisors, senior colleagues or coauthors, etc. Sleep on it. Sometimes heard: write a strong refutation letter, then throw it away
  - ② Arguing on subjective aspects, e.g., paper's innovativeness, question's importance, etc. = waste of time. On the other hand, if there is a major and clearly demonstrable (good or bad faith) mistake in a report, and this looks like it really affected the decision, then it is OK to write (nicely) to the editor
  - ③ Given (b)-(c), however, chances reversal are close to zero; can't think of one. Keep in mind that the "negative signals" the editor has about a rejected paper are almost surely stronger (letters) than the ones you will see (reports)



## Dealing with Rejection III

- ④ What authors will more often do is to write: “I am *not* asking for a reconsideration of the decision, but would like to point out that what referee *n* says is incorrect or seems unfair, because of XYZ.” May do so to:
  - ① Set the record straight, if it really matters (e.g. my proof was not wrong), or
  - ② In some cases, implicitly alert editor that in the future they might want to take that referee's reports with a grain of salt
- ⑤ But again, this is exceptional
  - ▶ Do not want to acquire a reputation for being a “difficult” author.

# Types of Experimental Papers

- 1 Striking proof of concept, cleanly refuting standard explanations, while strongly pointing at other one
  - ▶ Typically comes with a clever new design
  - ▶ May or may not contain a simple alternative model
- 2 Solidly demonstrating key prediction from specific theory or (class of) model(s)
  - ▶ Such line of work starts in lab, then later on field, or combining both
  - ▶ Not just finding effects but going deep into competing mechanisms
- 3 Closely mapping very specific model(s) to an experiment
  - ▶ Testing among models, structural estimation
- 4 New experimental methodology
- 5 Bigger and better data