How to Write a Paper?

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Typical Structure of a Paper

1. Abstract
2. Introduction
3. Literature Review and/or Theoretical Framework
4. Econometric/Empirical Framework
5. Data and Descriptive Statistics
6. Empirical Results
7. Summary and Conclusions
8. References
9. Appendix

Abstract

- Communicate the one major and novel contribution.
- Not more than 150 words.
- Write very concrete. Don't waste space with meaningless and vague statements.
- State the major research question, model (if not standard), data (if innovative) and major results.
- Give at least three representative keywords (possibly not contained in the title) after the abstract.

Getting the Introduction Started

- Before you start writing: Identify and distill *the* central contribution of your paper.
- First paragraph: Introduce to the overall topic. What are we talking about?
- Second paragraph: State in compact form what your paper is about (without going into more details). State *the* central and novel contribution. Put the punchline right up front!

The next introductory paragraphs...

- Give more background information on your specific contribution. If necessary, give the most important underlying references.
- Motivate your research objective and state your research questions.
- Explain how your paper contributes to the existing literature.
- Explain (in compact form!) your approach and state the used data (if interesting).
- State the major findings (not all specific details).
- Give the structure of the remainder of the paper.

Literature Review

- Only needed as an extra section if you provide it in more detailed way. Otherwise imbedded in introduction or next section.
- Don't overload the reader and don't write a survey!
- Carefully select the relevant(!) literature and not just all what you could find.
- Categorize and systematize the literature in a meaningful and transparent way.
- Quote properly in the form, e.g., "Engle and Granger (1987)"

Notation

- Use a proper, transparent and consistent (!) notation. Make it simple but still unequivocal.
- Try to use common notation (e.g., r_t for log returns and not, e.g., h_t.)
- Introduce your notation carefully. If it is complicate, remind the reader to some definitions from time to time (... risk aversion θ is ...)
- Check your formulas carefully. Avoid obvious errors.
- Show main derivations and relationships. Lengthy derivations should go into the appendix.

Tables and Figures

- Don't overload the reader with empirical results.
- Most important tables/figures should be put directly in the text. Less important ones might be put in the appendix. Irrelevant ones should be skipped.
- Tables and figures must be readable (font size, colors!)
- Tables and figures should be designed in a way such that they are maximally informative.
- Tables and figures should be self-explaining (proper legends, explanations)!

Empirical Results

- Don't just replicate what the reader anyway sees from the tables and figures (e.g., ... the t-statistic is 2.35 ...)
- Directly interpret results and draw conclusions.
- The result sections are often boring and written in a mechanical way. Avoid that and make it interesting!
- Work out and systematize the major findings. You might even number them in the text.
- Start with the *main* result!
- Don't waste space with preliminary results.

Conclusions

- Short and sweet!
- Very briefly and compactly explain again what you have done in the paper.
- Do not repeat all of your results. Give *the* main message!
- Give some general conclusions but don't start speculating.
- Do not put all your plans for future research at the end!

References

- Quote papers properly and completely (!)
- All papers quoted in the text must appear in the references and vice versa.
- Quote in the “Econometrica style“.
- If you quote working papers, check for updated versions or forthcomings.

Appendix

- Mathematical appendix for lengthy derivations and proofs.
- Extra category for tables and figures.
- Use also a consistent and transparent structure.
- Note: The appendix should provide useful extra information!
- The appendix is not a “waste dump“ for everything you have produced.
- Assess whether you (as a reader!) would find your appendix useful.

General Remarks on Organization

- Readers are impatient and don't have much time. Readers skim!
- Most readers just want to know the main story and your basic result!
- Organize your paper such the readers can easily skim and can get to the point.
- Don't organize your paper in a "novel style". Get to the central result as fast as possible - not at the very end!

General Remarks

- Keep it short! Every word counts!
- Every sentence should say something.
- Don't replicate phrases. Saying it once (but understandable) is enough!
- Discipline yourself. "Do I really have to say this? Can I formulate more compactly (but still understandable)?"
- Be precise regarding your wording. Avoid meaningless sentences.
- Avoid obvious sloppiness! Use spell-checkers.

Specific Remarks on Writing

- Normal sentence structure: subject, verb object.
- Use active tense. Not: "... it is assumed that ..."or "... it should be noted that ..."
- Use present tense.
- Write concrete and not abstract. Don't use fancy words.
- Don't use double adjectives (... very important results ...)
- Avoid technical jargon

- It is usually the case that most good writers find that everything before the “that“ should be deleted. Right?
- Don’t use to much “this“. E.g., “this shows ...“, “this means ...“
- Don’t abbreviate authors’ names.
- *Don’t* overuse italics.
- Use footnotes only for things a typical reader genuinely can skip. If it is important put it in the text, otherwise skip it.
- Don’t use bullet point lists.

Conclusions

- Good scientific writing is very difficult!
- Put the punchline right up front.
- Be as clear as possible.
- Get rid of any nebula and noise.
- Don't try to impress people with (typically dispensable) technicalities or details.
- Make it maximally easy (and not complicate!) for your readers to read your paper and to understand the main contribution.
- Assess your paper from the viewpoint of a referee. Referees don't have much time and want to quickly understand what your main contribution is.