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Some thoughts on publishing in AOS

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Caveat: I was editor-in-chief, I am an editor, but I make these comments based on personal experience not as a statement of journal policy

- Some pieces I have written around these topics
 - Chapman, C. S. 2012. Framing the Issue of Research Quality in a Context of Research Diversity. *Accounting Horizons* 26 (4):821-831.
 - Understanding there are different choices in understanding quality not a uni-dimensional hierarchy of goodness
 - Ahrens, T., and C. S. Chapman. 2014. In defence of the double blind review process. *EAA Newsletter* 46 (2):13-14.
 - The worst possible process, apart from all the alternatives
 - Chapman, C.S. (2015) Researching Accounting in Healthcare: Considering the Nature of Academic Contribution, *Accounting and Finance* 55(2), 397-413
 - The field can only hope to address big empirical questions through the careful integration of diverse forms of theoretical ones
- Key message: Papers sit in a stream of work with a past, and you hope a future
 - Who will do what differently after reading my paper?

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Problematization and research questions

- All research makes simplifying assumptions around a chosen theoretical framing which can be more or less explicit
- Alvesson, M., and J. Sandberg. 2011. Generating Research Questions Through Problematization. *Academy of Management Review* 36(2) 247-271.
 - “Gap spotting” – under problematizes → “That’s boring”
 - “Critical” – Over problematizes? → “That’s absurd”
 - Problematizing is a question of making explicit what assumptions might “fruitfully be challenged” → “That’s interesting”
- Fruitful is an audience choice matter however, nothing is in practice universally “interesting” despite the rhetoric of “general interest” versus “field” journals
- Alvesson offers some useful strategies for seriously engaging in the exercise of making theoretical assumptions explicit

Questions sit in complex webs of significance

- Tsang, E. & Ellaeser, F. (2011) How Contrastive Explanation Facilitates Theory Building *Academy of Management Review* 36(2) 404-419
 - Q: “Why do you rob banks?”
 - A: “Because that is where the money is.”
 - What is the allomorph? What is the fact and foil?
- Does The Willy Sutton Rule “work”?
 - Balakrishnan, R., S. Hansen, and E. Labro. 2011. Evaluating Heuristics Used When Designing Product Costing Systems. *Management Science* 57 (3):520-541.
 - Armstrong, P. 2002. The costs of activity-based management. *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 27 (1/2):99-120.
- “work” is a complex bundling of theory, studies, people, trajectories of development in questions, problems (solved and unresolved)
- Back to Alvesson then, know your audience



Willie Sutton FBI File Photo

On Successful research

- Ohlson, J. A. 2011. On Successful Research. *European Accounting Review* 20 (1):7-26.
 - Theory as a tool for structuring and communicating our ideas
 - But not necessarily defining an empirical puzzle to address
 - It's core idea must be simple enough to absorb and pass on
- Simple is easy. Useful simplicity is dramatically hard
- If pressed to offer just one way in which you might best improve your research I would choose
 - “Read more” – Understanding of the different world views on issues in the literature, their assumptions and methodological preferences
- Followed closely by
 - “Write more” – Positivists should not underestimate this challenge for their work also
- Academic writing is a significantly iterative process of crafting text, seeking feedback, crafting text ... hopefully leading to publication

Keep control of the readers' attention

- It the author's job to precisely and clearly make a point (if the reader doesn't understand this is YOUR problem)
 - Try to make a positive argument for what you will do rather than explaining what you will not
 - Being “the first” is a weak point of interest since it says no one else has cared before
 - Unique data is boring, data that provides unique opportunities to address existing problems is interesting!
 - Keep your vocabulary as tightly controlled as possible, use new words with caution
 - Always use the spell and grammar checker!
- The process of writing your first draft will reveal to you quite how far you are from this kind of clarity of purpose, so rewrite...

Iteratively developing written argument

- Use titles as well as introductory and concluding paragraphs for sections and chapters to prepare and remind the reader about the nature and structure of the argument
 - Beware relying solely on outline numbering (e.g. 1.1, 1.1.1., 1.1.2, etc.)
 - Beware paragraphs that begin “Another interesting thing...” or “It is important to understand...”
- Keep paragraphs focused on making a specific point (>6 sentences are you sure these are all the same point?)
- Keep sentences shorter (>2 lines are you sure this cannot usefully be broken into two sentences?)
- By the time you reach the conclusion, you will understand your point better than when you wrote the introduction... so go back and rewrite the introduction, and, line up the parts in the middle
- In terms of planning your writing don't always start a writing session at the beginning of the document

Understand standard format as a resource not a constraint

- Formats and styles vary, but within a research community they make it easier for the reader to engage with your writing
- The Title, Abstract and Introduction fundamentally condition the way in which the reader will approach everything that follows
 - What they will expect to see and how they will think about it?
 - Work on them from **the very beginning** (a rough idea of direction can save you drowning in reading and writing) but go back and edit as detailed work clarifies what is really important/interesting/well founded
- The abstract offers a condensed version of the whole paper
 - If the journal asks for one paragraph then provide that, if they ask for a structured abstract then provide that
 - What is the question? Why is it interesting? How did you answer it? What is the key finding/contribution?
- The introduction covers this ground in more detail and roadmaps the structure of the paper to follow

Common questions: Cluster 1

- Questions
 - Does AOS accept review articles?
 - Does AOS publish case studies?
- Don't even think about submitting to any journal if you do not know the answer to this kind of question
 - You can not effectively **problematise** something for an audience if you have read so little of the journal as to not know such things
 - Publishing is a process of communication so if you have not read anything in the space of the journal previously it is highly unlikely you can write something that will connect to it effectively
 - This is not about scattering some cosmetic citations, it is about understanding how and why an audience finds something interesting

Common questions: Cluster 2

- Questions
 - What is the acceptance rates of papers by AOS?
 - Are there differences in the likelihood of a paper being accepted by AOS based on the topic of the paper?
 - Are there differences in acceptance rates due to the methodology used (quantitative vs qualitative)?
- AOS has not published such information because it encourages the wrong kind of thinking about what makes for quality in research
 - In recent years the journal receives over 400 submissions per year and publishes in the mid 30's articles
 - This is not a matter of policy however it is the outcome of the review process
 - Choose a journal because that is where the debate you are addressing is taking place, not because it has a high/low rejection rate

Common questions: Cluster 3

- Questions
 - How do editors assign papers to referees?
 - How do referees of AOS evaluate articles?
 - How does the editor make a decision especially when reviewers are not in agreement?
- The editor-in-chief makes an initial assessment as to whether or not to send the paper out for review or desk reject
- If to go out for review must choose the editor they feel is most relevant to the topic/method/theory of the paper (could be themselves)
- Editors then determine which reviewers are most suitable to engage with the paper from the perspective of how the journal thinks about work in the area
 - Editorial board speaks for this, I am fine if they have reviewed this before
 - Significant number of ad hoc reviewers
- Reviewer choice complex mix of method/theory/topic/experience
- Reviewers advise, editors decide

Common questions: Cluster 4

- Questions:
 - How authors should interpret the feedback of the referees and editorial decisions
 - How authors should prepare the resubmission cover letter and response
- Offer a courteous response that shows you took the comments seriously, but I find reviewers tire of memos as long as the paper
- If the argument is important make sure it is in the paper
 - Detailed repetition and excerpting is often done in the name of saving the reviewer work looking for changes, but speaking as an editor I expect the reviewer to read the paper, speaking as a reviewer I read the paper first
- Avoid defensive rewriting at all costs
 - Figure out why they asked the question and why this is the right question or you risk to answer it in the wrong way
 - Often because you didn't explain well what you are doing
- Tastes vary, but I find lengthy cover letters largely pointless
 - The paper is what the readers will get

Decoding review comments (ask an experienced colleague)

- It will be tempting to imagine the reviewer is dismissive, careless in reading, contemptuous of your work
 - Try to imagine a vocalisation of written comments that rather conveys frustrated efforts to understand
- It will be tempting to imagine that the reviewer is giving orders about what you should and should not do
 - In positivistic work the nature and dimensions of your question and data are defined to a degree that authoritative statements as to what are and are not valid causal claims are feasible
 - In interpretive work neither the reviewer nor the editor know the extent of your field material and engagements and so such strongly directive comments are often not sensible (journals do vary on this)
 - Given this, be careful to consider whether comments are trying to offer helpful suggestions in the face of a failing current storyline rather than being a comprehensive set of expected changes

Final cluster: the bad and the good

- What are the most common reasons for the rejection of papers submitted to AOS?
 - Most often the concern of reviewers and editors point is that what you are trying does not “work” as explained/evidenced
 - Nothing is perfect, and most things can be improved, but the less you appear to know the audience the less likely you are to be offered a chance to remedy this
- On average how long does it take from acceptance to publication of an article?
 - If the paper is not in a special issue it will likely be in a volume within a month from the editor sending the acceptance notification
 - If it is a special issue it will be visible in the in press section in the same time frame with a doi but not a volume or page numbers