

 **THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

*How to Publish in Leading Journals:
Some Strategies and Tactics*

George Z. X. Chen
School of Management, Marketing &
International Business

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Introduction

"Our goal as Academics is to do high quality research and publish it in the best possible place." – Tom Smith

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Overview

- Why Publish in Leading Journals?
- Challenges and Constraints
- Some General Strategies
- Some Specific Tactics

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Why Publish in Leading Journals?

Possible Answers (Tsui, 2008)

- Contribute new knowledge
- Generate impact
- Get famous
- Get promotion

One More Answer:

- Get job satisfaction (sense of achievement, recognition, self-actualization)

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Challenges and Constraints

- Limited chances to publish in leading journals
 - Very limited spaces
 - Very high rejection rate
 - Many excellent researchers are competing
- Long process (2.5-5.5 years to get an article accepted)
 - Stage 1: Complete a research project (1-3 years)
 - Stage 2: Go through the whole R&R process (1.5-2.5 years)
 - Stage 3: Formal publication (about 1 year)
- Very picky and demanding reviewers
- Researchers' constraints: limited time, resources, knowledge & skills
- We need some strategies and tactics for publishing, which are also helpful for conducting high quality research.

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Strategies for Publishing in Leading Journals

- Satisfy the "needs" of the gatekeepers ("publication orientation")
 - Understand the "needs" of the leading journals
 - What reviewers like?
 - Solid research design/methods
 - High quality data/strong result
 - Strong theoretical contribution
 - Strong practical contribution
 - Creative/interesting research idea
 - Advanced data analysis approach
 - Good presentation skill (logical, clear and concise)

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Strategies (Cont'd)

- The Major Reasons that Papers Got Rejected in Leading Journals
 - The research questions asked were neither interesting nor important.
 - Hypothesis without **theory** or insufficient theoretical justification for hypothesis.
 - Design flaw (Methods can not answer your research questions).
 - Weak empirical contribution (e.g., data with poor quality).
- Know the specific requirements of your target journal

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Strategies (Cont'd)

- **Make full use of your strengths and offset your weaknesses**
- **Select the "best fit" research topic**
 - Choosing a right research topic will contribute more than 50% to the success of your publication.
 - The "best fit" research topic is not necessarily the most interesting one => balance between contribution and feasibility.
 - Try your best to maximize your alternative list of research topics.
 - Calculate the benefit and cost for each alternative research topic.
 - **Be patient:** Spending more time in the stages of research idea generation and research design will save you a lot of time in the later stages of your research and publication!

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Criterion for decision making

- Which stage in the **Research Idea Life Cycle** (Atuahene-Gima, 2003)? - Focus on "Birth" and "Growth" stages
- Is the research idea **interesting**?
- Will it be able to make significant theoretical contributions?
 - **Theory, Theory and Theory!!!**
- Will it be able to make significant **practical contributions**?
- Can you collect **high quality data** for this study?
- Do you and your team members know the **data analysis approach** for this particular study?
- How much **time** will you need to complete this study?

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Is the research idea interesting?

- Will your findings counter intuition (challenge common sense)? (e.g., Zhou (2002), JAP paper)
- Will your study help to open a “black box” of the phenomenon or relationship that have been known? (e.g., AMJ paper, 2007, with Aryee)
- Will you be able to tell an “attractive story” based on the potential findings of your study to a group of researchers and managers?
- No one has done this? => It may not be interesting, new or significant!

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Strategies (Cont'd)

- **Maximize your contributions within one paper**
 - Several contributions in one study: mediating and moderating, and context (cultural value)
 - Two studies in one
 - However, “simple is elegant”!

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Strategies (Cont'd)

- **Get credit by using special research design and applied advanced methods**
 - Combine different research methods (mixed approach; lab and field; qualitative and quantitative)
 - Multi-level design
 - Longitudinal study
 - Try to use some advanced data analysis methods (e.g., HLM and SEM to test a mediating and moderating model)
 - Collect data from different sources (Avoid common method variance problem)

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Strategies (Cont'd)

- Borrow ideas from one research domain and try it out in another domain

- Try a top journal first

- Grab "special Issue" opportunities

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Tactics for Publishing in Leading Journals

- Read previous five years' top tier journal articles
 - Never read poor quality journals (avoiding "garbage in and garbage out")
 - Build your study on top of "the great men's shoulders".
 - Note: Don't follow blindly what has been published in the top journals – they may contain serious flaws or limitations

- Talk to different people
 - A dynamic process in research idea generating stage: Reading-discussing-reading-discussing-reading

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Tactics (Cont'd)

- Form an effective research team
 - Synergy ($1+1 > 2$)
 - diversity and mutual complement
 - Know the right people
 - Try to build your "competing competency"
 - Get a collaborator with "Type A behaviour" (related to workaholic)

- Write the first draft of the Letter to the Editor before conducting your study

- Packaging your "product" (good presentation skill)

- Ask feedback from colleagues before submission

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Other Specific Suggestions

- Don't make too many unpublished references
- Cite all new publications on that area
- Cite the papers published in the journal you targeted
- Don't be overly critical of past research
- Presentation:
 - Title of paper must be provocative (if you can)
 - Abstract must contain theoretical and practical contributions
 - Introduction – strong positioning of contribution (but don't overstate your contribution)
- Now that I have written it ...
 - Edit, edit and edit! Sloppy writing signals sloppy research to reviewers.
 - "The best writers labour over each sentence"

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What Irritates Reviewers

(Brass, 2008)

- Straw-man arguments
- Overstating "contributions" ("first" or "only study")
- Opinion words ("very interesting")
- Claiming a lack of research in an area
- Promising too much in the introduction (note: high expectation leads to high disappointment)
- Acronyms or abbreviation for variables in text or tables
- Tables and text don't match
- Not including "limitation"
- Missing references
- Poor writing (repeating things)
- Not including measurement

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Persevere, Persevere & Persevere!!!

- If one journal rejects your paper, revise and submit it to another.
- Remember to revise it before submitting to another journal!
- If the reviewers don't like it, there is a problem with your paper, not the reviewers.
- Don't take criticism personally.
- Ask revision ideas from colleagues.
- Revise, revise and revise => Your paper will have a good chance to be accepted!

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Concluding Remark

- The precondition for publishing in a leading journal is to conduct a high quality research.
- We need some strategies and tactics, in order to efficiently conduct high quality research and publish our papers in leading journals.

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Key strategies highlighted:

- Satisfy the "needs" of the gatekeepers
- Make full use of your strengths and offset your weaknesses
- Select a "best fit" research topic
- Maximize your contributions within one paper
- Get credit by using special research design and applied advanced methods
- Borrow ideas from one research domain and try it out in another domain
- Try a top journal first
- Grab "special Issue" opportunities

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Key tactics highlighted

- Read previous five years' top tier journal articles (including forthcoming papers)
- Talk to different people
- Form an effective research team
- Write first draft of the Letter to the Editor before starting your study
- Packaging your "product" (good presentation skill)
- Ask feedback from colleagues before submission

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Concluding Remark (cont'd)

- To publish in a leading journal requires knowledge of your area, creative idea, patience, and dedication – They always pay off!

□ **Good luck!**

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Q & A

Thank You!

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Some Useful References

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