

How to write a terrible article?

Publish *and* perish

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Compliments
of the authors



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Two-, Three-, and Four-Atom Exchange Effects in bcc ^3He

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We have made mean-field calculations with a Hamiltonian obtained from two-, three-, and four-atom exchange in bcc solid ^3He . We are able to fit the high-temperature experiments as well as the phase diagram of Kummer *et al.* at low temperatures. We find two kinds of antiferromagnetic phases as suggested by Kummer's experiments.

Don't think if you're ready, jump at it!

- Ask yourself whether you really want to publish the paper. Reflect on your motivation – you will need *a lot* of motivation while writing!
- Use a board to note down your motivation, goals and purpose of the paper. Revise, revise, revise!
- Make a reality check whether you really have a story to tell and who you would tell it to.
- Reflect on your data and research: do you trust it? Is it reliable? Did you check it more than twice?
- Ensure that you can carefully frame your work in context and that it fits the big picture and contribute to science as a whole.

Do not be bothered with planning

- Careful planning is key: initially time consuming, eventually saves a lot of time which then you can dedicate to more worthwhile activities.
- Before writing your plan, think about the potential readership – consider their interests, how to address these with your paper, what is the potential impact of your paper?
- Consider potential deadlines, make a reality check whether you can meet these without a negative impact on the quality and your other work.
- Consider and reflect upon the structure of your paper: what is typically expected, what you would like to include and where. Revise, revise, revise!
- Ask your colleagues or friends for input! Don't be afraid to brainstorm.

Do not search, do not read

- Literature study is the essential starting point of any worthy research activity, and should form the solid basis of every publication.
- Before considering their own research project, authors should first collect sources, read, study and reflect on them.
- Literature study allow you to carefully frame your research and locate it on the „map” of current knowledge. Only such a study can allow you to evaluate the scope and impact of your research.
- Reading allows you to improve your own writing skills: make yourself familiar with certain language phrases, commonly used in scientific writing.

„*Let me just pretend this paper didn't exist...*”

- Being selective in referencing previously published research is acceptable only if you are selecting relevant papers, painting the background for your research.
- Rejecting and avoiding citing previous studies with findings contradictory to yours is unethical and hampers scientific progress and may lead to financial losses.
- *A lie has no legs* – all knowledgeable reviewers know the field and do regularly literature studies and will quickly realize the literature study is incomplete and may reject a manuscript.

„Let me just copy that...”

- **Plagiarism is a serious breach of publishing ethics and copyright infringement. It is also a very effective route to academic self-destruction.**
- **If you need to refer to someone else’s work, always acknowledge their authorship - cite it.**
- **Most academic publishers have systems for detection of plagiarism and repercussions may be severe – including retraction of the paper and legal consequences.**
- **If you find that someone has stolen your work, notify the editors. You may also consult your legal advisor at your institution on what to do next.**

Excel in ambiguity and inconsistency

- A scientific article is not a novel: repetitions of terms are not unwelcomed. Do not seek synonyms and paraphrases.
- There should be no room for interpretation. The reader cannot read your mind, just the article.
- When using abbreviations or uncommon terms, ensure these are clearly explained in the beginning of the article.
- Ask a colleague or a friend from a related field to read through your paper and mark confusing terms and sentences.
- Average length of a sentence in a good article is 12-15 words.
- Avoid using complex sentences and make proper use of punctuation.
- Pay special attention to the title, abstract and keywords

Be subjective, boast your great achievement

- Good PR is necessary but not in scientific papers: the true value of these lies in their content and it should speak for itself without any embellishments.
- Avoid using definite words like *never, all, everyone, always* etc.
- Statements in a scientific article are intended to communicate knowledge and information, which are best conveyed with unambiguity, consistency and objectivity.
- Subjective statements are not only imprecise and inappropriate but also lead to disagreements with reviewers and readers.

„Grammar and spelling are for grammar geeks!”

- Grammar and spelling are the backbone of each coherent statement; ignorance will lead to misunderstandings and inappropriate reception of your manuscript.
- In the day of electronic tools and with multiple spelling checking tools, not paying attention to grammar and spelling is disrespectful towards your readers.
- Read passages of your paper aloud and notice where punctuation marks should be.
- Ask your friend to proof-read your paper or make use of professional services. It is a worthy investment even if you're writing in your mother tongue.
- Pay special attention to the title, abstract and keywords

Write all alone and don't ask for feedback

- No man is an island and we all need input from colleagues and fellow researchers to gain a wider perspective and reflect upon our work.
- Senior colleagues may support you in interpreting your results and in writing conclusions (key element of every paper!) – use their wisdom.
- Junior colleagues may help you in making the paper coherent and logical, especially if they are not very familiar with the research. They can identify incomplete stories.
- Welcome feedback and criticism as long as they are constructive: choose your advisors and co-authors wisely.
- Co-authors should be only the people who provided significant input in the paper – this is reserved for those who worked on the manuscript. Others can be thanked in Acknowledgements.

Pick any journal, as long as it's with high parameters

- Check the list of journals you read most often – these will share the readership of your manuscript and thus may be suitable.
- Treat writing a manuscript as a long-term investment which you want to showcase and store in the best possible „bank”.
- Once you select potential journal(s) compare them. Always check who are the editorial board members.
- Always consult a basket of metrics and not a single parameter: Scopus offers a variety of indicators and features a special comparison tool.
- If you are still in doubt where to publish, consult senior colleagues and ask for their advise. Visit your library and consult with the librarian specilising in bibliometrics.

„Guidelines for authors? Boring!”

- Guidelines are not the most riveting lecture but they contain critical information allowing you to publish your manuscript smoothly, minimizing the risk of having a manuscript rejected due to non-fulfillment of technical requirements.
- Appropriate formatting of the manuscript speeds up the editorial process and will facilitate your submission.
- Guidelines will contain information about the structure of the articles: some sections are mandatory.
- Some journals will provide an article template, some have a more relaxed policy - „Your paper your way” (Elsevier).
- Make use of available tools to format citations and save your precious time (and nerves!) – Mendeley has several thousand citation styles that will match the journal of your dreams.

Don't be bothered with the cover letter

- **Cover letter typically accompanies a manuscript submitted to the journal. Editor reads it to understand what is the paper about and to assess its potential value and your motivation behind journal choice.**
- **Mandatory statements:**
 - Manuscript not under review elsewhere
 - All authors approve submission and you're submitting the final draft
 - No conflict of interest to report OR clearly report the conflict of interest
- **It is best to avoid templates: editors know them by heart and will not be impressed.**
- **Be clear and explain why you think that your paper is ideal for this journal (not because of its bibliometrics parameters). Be modest and be honest.**
- **Pay careful attention to grammar and spelling! Messy cover letter may lead to rejection without even getting to the review stage.**

Ignore editor and reviewer comments

- The purpose of the peer-review is to enrich your manuscript, so it does not contain errors, ambiguities and makes a better impact.
- The editor and reviewers represent your future readers.
- Ignoring recommendations of the reviewers may lead to rejection of the manuscript.
- While you may argue with the comments, it is necessary to make a clear and logic arguments, while remaining polite.
- Editors ensure the reviews are objective: if you feel they are not, you may dispute it and bring it to the editor's attention.

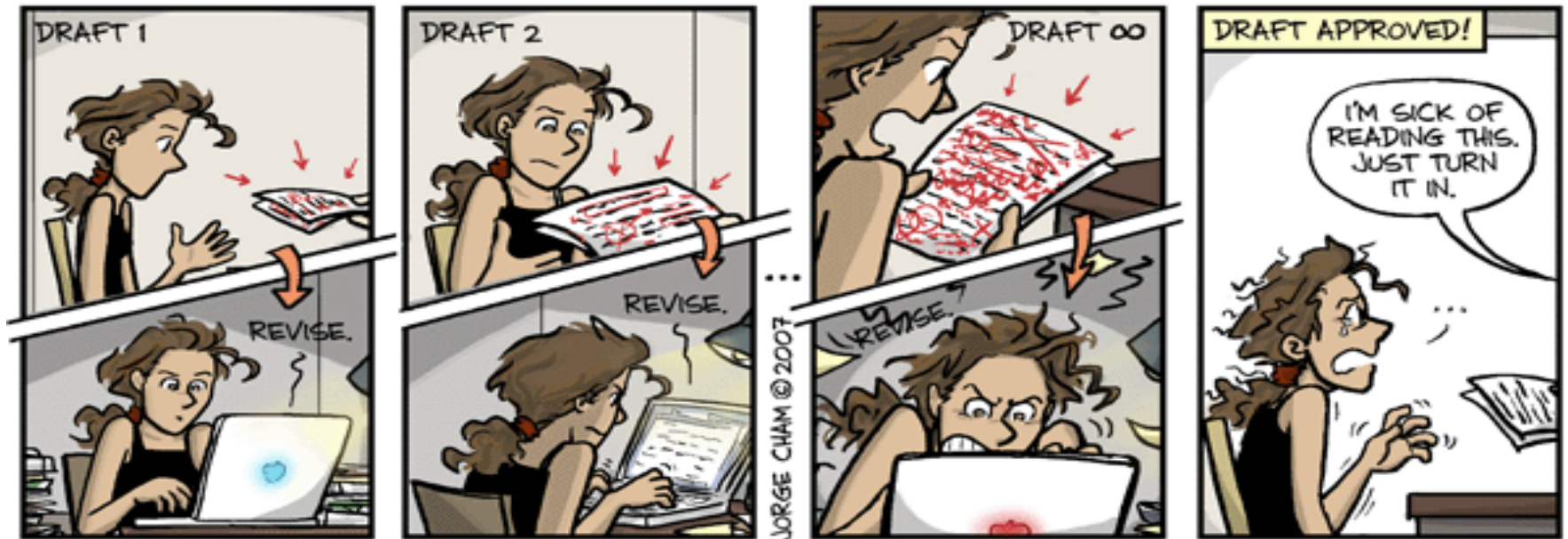
Once published, put it in a drawer and forget

- **First of all: celebrate it!**
- **Publishing a paper – especially the first one – is an achievement which you should cherish and share with your colleagues.**
- **Ensure your paper is visible: post links to its official source (i.e. publisher's or journal's platform), share copies with your colleagues etc.**
- **Set up and ORCID ID and link it to Scopus and Mendeley: ensure the paper is visible there.**
- **Always check your copyright agreement and do not breach it when sharing your paper!**

Final remarks

- Read, read and read – within and outside your field of expertise
- Scholarly publishing is highly competitive and can be stressful
- Nobody can write a perfect paper – all have flaws
- Grow thick skin: science is the business of being wrong and being able to admit it
- Better to work long and hard on a paper you're proud of than publish quickly and...be embarrassed
- Always put quality above quantity
- Use proper tools – Mendeley, Scopus, ScienceDirect, ORCID
- „Revise and resubmit” is every researcher's motto...

Revise, (re)submit!





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Thank you very much!

Any questions?

Further reading and resources

- Elsevier's Publishing Campus - www.publishingcampus.com
- Elsevier's Journal Finder - journalfinder.elsevier.com
- Information about publishing in journals - www.elsevier.com/authors
- Contact me: k.gaca@elsevier.com