How to write an academic paper

JORGE NIOSI
GLOBELICS ACADEMY 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Define the subject and why it is important and for whom

- Avoid writing summaries of theories with an illustration about why this is important for your country or region
- Try to find out issues that are generally important for at least several countries
- Write from the start the audiences for which this is important and why
- If possible avoid case studies
- Think on a list of journals that can publish this paper

Read the relevant literature in peered review journals only

- Avoid reading working papers, unpublished presentations in conferences and other material that has not gone through peer review
- Read particularly the journals where you may publish and find the topics that are unattended or missing in the area
- Find the literature that fits with your methodology and theoretical background and read it (i.e. avoid neoclassical economics if you are in evolutionary or institutional economics)
- English has become the lingua franca of science: read mostly English language papers

Avoid writing working papers and too many presentations in conferences

- Today anything you write or present has strong chances of being in the web: you risk being copied
- One presentation in a good conference should be enough before you prepare the final version for a journal
- In good peered reviewed conferences you may have important feedbacks
- Too many versions, followed by reformatting are a waste of time

Define your theoretical value added

- A good article must have a theoretical value added at least as much as an empirical one
- The theoretical value added may consist in a new hypothesis, a new definition, a new link between theories, an addition to an existing theory
- From the start you must find out what your novelty is and how it fits with existing theory (Ex. Benchmarking as a policy method)
- Find the journal to which this novelty belongs and read the debate within that journal

Present your hypotheses

- One does not test a theory; only a part of a theory
- Your hypotheses are those section of a theory or theories, or those dedications from these theories that you will test
- From now on, your data collection must fit with your hypotheses
- Avoid having too many hypotheses; a single article may contain between one and ten of them

Present your data

- Use solid data, either from government sources (R&D data, Innovation surveys, industrial surveys) or prepare your own ones
- In all cases test as much as possible the quality of the data, even from public sources (i.e. LA data on R&D, or LA innovation sources)
- If your do your own surveys, be sure you know your population of firms, you have a good sample, and if you use several databases, that you have compared their definitions and samples

Draw your conclusions and make clear your theoretical contribution

- Your theoretical conclusions should be your major contribution
- Empirical conclusions (this theory also applies to my country or my region) have very little sex appeal
- Summarize your theoretical contribution in the abstract, in the introduction and explain in the conclusion
- Show how future work can extend your contribution to other fields (ex. Thesis at IFSC on SIS and system dynamics)

Choose a journal for which this issue is important

- You already know the journal where these issues are debated
- Reread you draft paper and be sure that you send ot to the right one
- Cite the authors that write in this journal and the article of this journal: these publications are competing for impact factors
- Among the journals where you could send a paper, choose the one with the highest impact factor.
- Again, avoid writing in any language but English
- Avoid chapters in books

Be patient

- Send the paper and be prepared for your paper to appear one or two years after it was sent
- Very good journals always respond and most often send the papers to assessment
- Usually the assessments allow you to improve the paper
- You can even – if the paper does not receive the recommendation “retouch and resubmit” - send it to a better journal
- Never send the same paper to several journals at the same time