

How to Get a Paper Published in the Journal of African Economies Transcript



Interview with Francis Teal, Managing Director of the Journal of African Economies (JAE).

Francis Teal

Hello my name is Francis Teal, I'm the Managing Director of the Journal of African Economies.

Question

How many papers are submitted to the Journal and how many are published?

Francis Teal

Okay. Well, at the moment we're receiving about 400 submissions and we're publishing between 20 and 30 a year over five issues in the journal.

Question

How many of the papers submitted in 2022 were rejected without being sent to referees?

Francis Teal

Last year we had 426, of which 268, that's about 60% plus, were desk rejected. That is they were thought of not sufficient quality to go to referees.

Question

Why are so many papers not judged of sufficient quality to be sent to referees (desk rejected)?

Francis Teal

Well, clearly that's a very important question. And there are various reasons. One is that they are simply not on a topic that is appropriate for the JAE. We get papers on stock markets in Africa, which is clearly an important question for financial markets and those interested in finance, but it's not really a question for those interested in development. So that's one reason, but that's not the main reason. The main reason is that they simply do not present an interesting and compelling account of why the journal should be interested in the paper.

Question

How can authors get their papers sent to referees?

Francis Teal

The key there is the abstract. Now, very often the authors of papers do not spend much time on the abstract. It's an afterthought. And that's quite wrong, it needs to be the forethought. And what the abstract needs to do is to show that you have an interesting question, to show that you're going to answer it in a way that is rigorous. And most of all, the abstract needs to make clear what is new about the paper that you're writing. What is new about the conclusions that you are going to draw from the paper?

Question

What do authors do that does not meet those criteria?

Francis Teal

You might think it is rather obvious that an abstract begins with the question of interest. But it's true, in the majority of cases of papers that we desk reject, authors do not begin with the question. They often begin with the methods that they're going to use to answer the question, or they tell you about the methods, whether it be a survey or some other feature of the paper. The key thing is that those are instruments to addressing the question. So you must begin with the question and as well as the question, you must tell the editor what's new about what it is you're going to say about that question. So they want a coherent question, they want it to be interesting, and they want to know what's new about the question that you are posing. And I want to stress that because without a clear question and without a clear statement of what's new about your answer to that question, you won't get your paper refereed.

We publish very few papers using time series econometrics, and those are typically papers that focus on method. And many authors think that because they're using very sophisticated time series econometrics, that is a selling point for the paper. It isn't. The sophistication of the methods is not the central question in the mind of the editor. The central question is how well and how relevant the methods you are using are for addressing the question that you pose.

Question

Can you give an example of the author doing everything right?

Francis Teal

Well, obviously, there's a lot of ways of doing things right. But let me just give you a very specific example. Take the issue of violence in sub-Saharan Africa, it's causes and consequences. Now, that's clearly an interesting question. It's not a new question. So as well as the question you need to focus on, what is your contribution to the issue of the causes and consequences of violence in Africa? What's novel? It may be a novel dataset. It may be a way of using somebody else's data to address an aspect of the question that they haven't addressed in their paper. So what's new about what it is you're going to be doing, both in terms of the method and in terms of the results of your analysis.

Now, at this point, methods kick in because you've got an interesting question. You've acknowledged it's not new. You've explained how your tackling of this question fits into the literature. So that's covered. Now, at this point, you explain the methods that you want to use. Is it an RCT? Is it an econometric method? Whatever. It's got to be relevant and it's got to be geared to the question that you began with. And at this stage, if it's an empirical paper, you present the descriptive statistics.

Okay, So you've got the methods, you've got the data, you've got the question. Then finally, you've got your results. And your results need to be very clearly set out and related to the results of other people who have tackled this question. And then the conclusions are basically a summary of what you've done, how you've done it, and what your results are. And I come back to the basic point that those are then ingredients to the abstract. The abstract is not an afterthought. The abstract is central for interesting the editor in the question you want to pose.