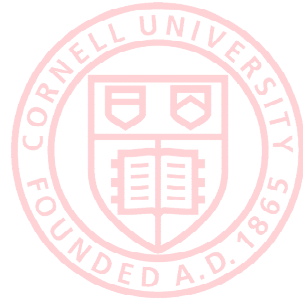


# Publishing Research on African Economics in Academic Journals: Pitfalls and Opportunities

March 23, 2025

John Hoddinott

Chief Editor, Journal of African Economies



# How does the editorial process (generally) work?

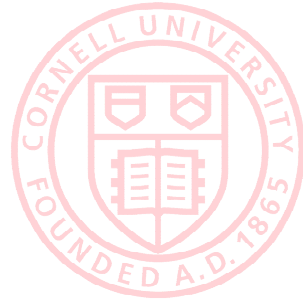
## 1) Author submits paper using online portal

### ALWAYS

- Manuscript
- Abstract and keywords
- Information on authors
- Declarations

### SOMETIMES

- Supplementary material
- Cover letter
- JEL codes
- Figures and tables (sometimes separate, sometimes included in manuscript)

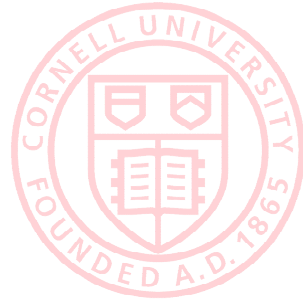


## How does the editorial process (generally) work?

### 2) Initial assessment by Chief (or equivalent) Editor

What do editors look for when they initially assess a paper? For example, at Journal of African Economies?

- i. We receive approximately 400-500 papers per year. I do a quick read on all of them, checking for suitability and fit
- ii. I then send the paper to an appropriate Managing Editor (ME) who undertakes a first review.



## How does the editorial process (generally) work?

### 3) Assessment by Managing (or equivalent) Editor

i. ME's read the paper, focusing on the introduction, methods and core results. They look for the following:

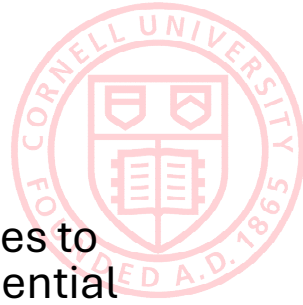
Is this research interesting, novel, and important?

Is this research likely of interest to readers of this journal?

Does the paper appear competently executed (writing, econometrics)?

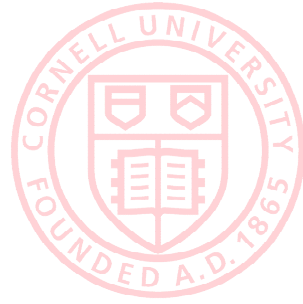
ii. ME decides to desk reject paper (with some brief explanation) or send it to reviewers (usually two, sometimes three, depending on the journal)

Note that the median desk rejection rates for development economics journals is around 75%



## How does the editorial process (generally) work?

- 4) What are reviewers asked to do? This varies by journal. At JAE, we are currently revising our guidelines to referees. I envisage that they will be asked to divide their review into three parts: Contributions; Essential Points; and Suggestions.
- The contributions section is what you see as the main contribution of the paper. How does it advance knowledge? Does it speak to a broad, or narrow, audience?
  - Essential points are issues you see as preventing the paper from now (or potentially ever) from being published. Please enumerate as clearly as possible the changes that you think **must** be made before this paper is published.
  - Suggestions are everything else and most of the report. Suggestions are items that will make this paper the best it can be. While suggestions often take the form of additional work for the author, papers in economics are getting too long ... feel free to suggest content that can be removed from the paper to make the argument more concise.



## How does the editorial process (generally) work?

5) What happens next? This is paper and journal specific.

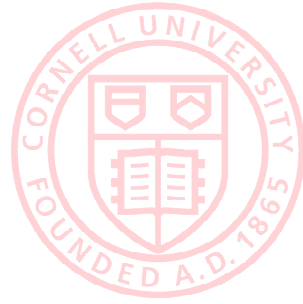
Generally, the ME can decide to:

- Accept the paper (rare)
- Request revisions
- Reject the paper

If revisions are requested, the ME sends the author a letter, enumerating what revisions are needed and attaching the referee reports

Authors then revise the manuscript, re-submit and include a **point-by-point response** to comments made by the referees

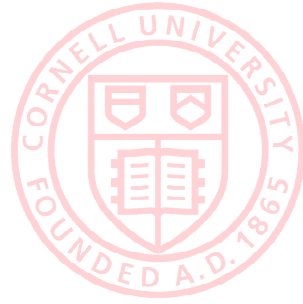
The paper may go back to the reviewers, or the editor may make a decision based on the materials (s)he receives.



# How to write an article about African economic issues

The structure of a good applied paper looks like this:

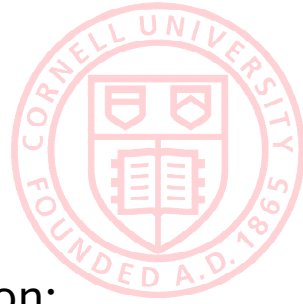
- Introduction
- Model (conceptual framework) – Optional
- Context, data, methods
- Results (1):
  - Descriptive statistics
  - Core results
  - Robustness
- Results (2): Extensions
- Conclusion
- References
- Supplementary Appendix



# How to write an article about African economic issues: Introduction

- Think of the introduction as the story you are going to tell. Some examples:
- There is an important *question* about the world that we can't yet convincingly answer. Answering this question is *important* because ...
- This question has not been addressed, or it has been addressed in a partial or unsatisfactory way.
- I use the following *TOOLS* of economic analysis (models and econometrics) to provide *NEW* evidence on this question.)
- I find an *answer* to the question. This is what we learn that is new.
- This implies the following structure for the introduction.



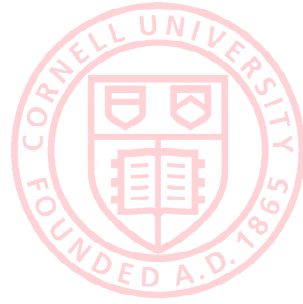


# How to write an article about African economic issues: Introduction

1. Motivate with a description of the “big issue” that your paper addresses (what is the important question; what is known, what it not known) (1–2 paragraphs)
2. Clearly state your research question (1 paragraph)
3. Empirical approach (1 paragraph)
4. Key results (1–2 paragraph)
5. Value-added relative to related literature (1–2 paragraphs)
6. Optional paragraphs:
  - Robustness checks, policy relevance, limitations
  - Roadmap

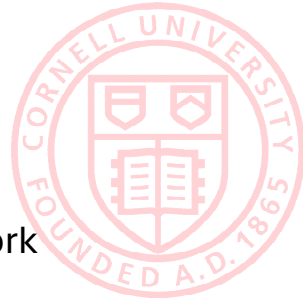
Do you need a literature review section?

No. You need to know the literature, but you don’t need a separate literature review section.



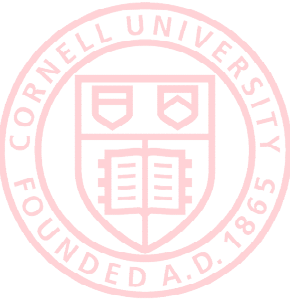
# How to write an article about African economic issues: Methods

- Context
- Data (sources, how obtained)
- Outcome variables (how defined, how constructed)
- Key covariates (how defined, how constructed)
- Model to be estimated (if using standard econometric practices, references are appropriate)
- Construction of standard errors
- Specification tests as appropriate



## A note on Tables

- Poorly laid out tables can significantly detract from your paper, making reviewers (and editors) less receptive to your work
- So what makes for a good table?
- **MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE:** A good table is self-explanatory. In other words, without reading your text, I should be able to understand everything you report in your table.
- Table essentials:
  - (1) Report sample size,  $R^2$  and other key regression diagnostics (eg RMSE) as appropriate
  - (2) Table heading (and notes) should make clear what the outcome variable is and how it has been estimated
  - (3) Use self-explanatory labels for your explanatory variables. Cryptic abbreviations or symbols force the reader to page back and forth between the text and tables to understand your results
  - (4) Choose sensible units for variables so that you avoid reporting coefficients like 13576.2 or 0.004553 and especially 0.000!!
  - (5) Report standard errors
  - (6) Include mean of dependent variable

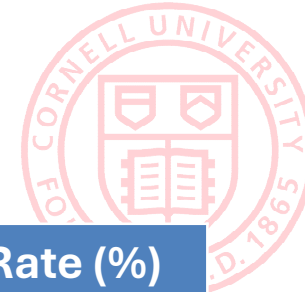


# DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS JOURNALS

**DIVISION OF NUTRITIONAL SCIENCES**

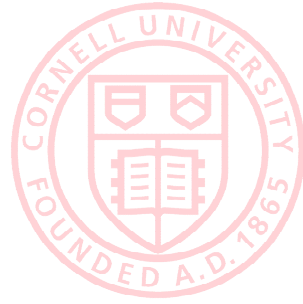
College of Human Ecology | College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

# Development Economics Journals: Background information



	Number of submissions (2023)	Acceptance Rate (%) (2023)
Development Policy Review	369	19.0
Economic Development and Cultural Change	302	6.3
Journal of African Economies	419	5.9
Journal of Development Economics	1840	7.4
Journal of Development Effectiveness	179	13.0
Journal of Development Studies	1578	7.0
Review of Development Economics	~1500	-
World Bank Economic Review	457	10.1
World Bank Research Observer	74	9.4
World Development/ World Development Perspectives	4464	~8.0

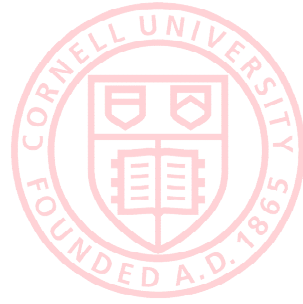
Source: McKenzie, D. 2024. State of Development Journals 2024



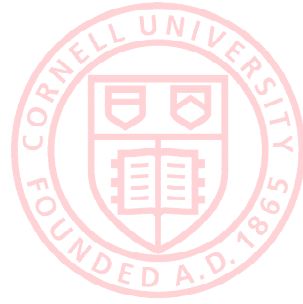
## Development Economics Journals: Where should you consider submitting?

- 1) Is your paper relevant to the aims of the journal
  - Papers on economic issues in China are not appropriate for JAE
  - Papers that do not have an explicit policy focus are a poor fit for Development Policy Review
  - \*\*\* READ THE “JOURNAL AIMS” BEFORE SUBMITTING \*\*\*
  
- 2) Does the journal have a record of publishing papers in your area of interest (speaks to audience). Are you citing papers from this journal?
  
- 3) Any of the 10 main development economics journals are good journals to publish in. Worry less about “prestige” and more about “fit”

## And lastly, what keeps (some) journal editors up at night



- Plagiarism
- Replication
- Generative AI



## Useful references

- Marc Bellemare
  - `chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://marcfbellemare.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/BellemareHowToPaperSeptember2020.pdf`
- Jesse Shapiro
  - `chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/shapiro/files/foursteps.pdf`
- David Evans
  - <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/how-write-introduction-your-development-economics-paper>