Notes for AAEA Symposium on Publishing (Portland 2007)
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Wizard of Oz analogy: is it appropriate?
 Publishing is like a trip along the Yellow Brick Road
 Emerald City = acceptance
 Editor as "wizard"
  Something mysterious
  Is the wizard all powerful, or something less?

Reality
 Journals are "owned" by the profession (literally or figuratively)
 Editors serve the community for a period of time
 Editors rarely have an agenda other than to serve the community as
  well as possible and publish the best possible papers, subject
  to a time constraint

 Editors are busy people
 Usually have all the regular things to do (teach, conduct research,
  supervise students, administrate, write grant proposals,
  and publish) this is an add-on responsibility

Editor's responsibility
 Gate-keeper or perhaps something like an air-traffic controller
 25-30% acceptance rate
 50-75% of papers are probably "publishable"
 How to choose which to publish?
  Rely on
   (1) opinion of editors
   (2) goodness of fit with journal aims and scope
   (3) bias for papers that "read well"

Structure of journal operations
 Editors
 Associate Editors (also busy)
 Reviewers (also busy)
  Few incentives for reviewers or associate editors
  Few options to "enforce" the reviewing contract

Editor's strategy
 Editor's goal (sadly): reject a paper
 10% desk rejects
  Which get desk rejects?
   Those in obvious need of much work
    Weak analysis
    Weak writing
    Overly narrow subject without no generalizable
     methods/approach
 Remainder?
  Assign best possible associate editors and reviewers
  Match subject matter and methods
  Pick reviewers who know the subject and will deliver good
   reviews on time
  Typically 2 reviewers
  Editors "tend" not to override reviewers
  Split decisions – how to resolve?
   Most editors would rather reject a good paper than
    accept a bad paper
  Associate Editor is often the tie-breaker (expert on topic)

Author strategy to Editor (Goal - get past the desk reject)
  Avoid small mistakes
  Get help with written English
  Make sure subject matter is aligned with core of journal
  Show that paper connects to a stream of research that has
   previously appeared in the journal
  Short and informative cover letter

Author strategy to Reviewers
- Win over the reviewers (Goal – get to a R&R decision)
  - Be provocative without provoking
  - Be clear about the hypothesis/research question
    - (half of negative reviews focus on this)
  - Be clear about your methods
    - (the other half of negative reviews focus on this)
  - Negative reviews RARELY focus on the conclusions
  - Shorter papers are more likely to succeed. Why?
    - Easier to read
    - Easier to hold the reader's attention
    - Easier to maintain continuity
    - Provides a clear succinct storyline
    - "smallest publishable unit"
  - Avoid small mistakes
  - Get help with written English
  - Make sure your lit review is complete since the reviewer or Assoc Editor is likely to be someone familiar with the subject matter

Revise and Resubmit
- This does not guarantee certainty of outcome
- 1/3 – ½ of R&R decisions are eventually rejected
- Why? Failure to satisfy reviewers
- 5-10% reviewers recommend to accept and editor will reject.
  - Why?
    - perception of weak/incomplete reviews
    - similar (better) papers in the pipeline
    - lack of sufficiently broad appeal

Rejection
- It happens to us all
- If you are rejected, move on and don't take it personally
- Challenging a decision rarely works