How to Improve Your Chances of Getting a Paper Accepted

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Context: It’s Getting Harder

◆ Conference submission rates are rising
◆ Some effects
  – more work for PCs, lower acceptance rates, lower author satisfaction, …
◆ Some community responses
  – increasing PC size, culling early, adjusting publication styles (e.g., first-class posters), coordinating events, adding new events, …
Why are Submissions Increasing?

- We only have conjectures
  - increasing numbers of faculty
  - increasing numbers of grad students
  - increasing pressure to publish
  - increasing numbers of rejections
  - increasing numbers of double submissions
  - lowering of Iron Curtain
  - opening of China
  - industrialization of Asia and Middle East
Why are Submissions Increasing?

Number of new US PhDs is growing…

Number of new US academics is growing…

Source: Computing Research Association
Observations/Perceptions: Quality

◆ Growth mainly at or below traditional acceptance cutoff

◆ Placement of acceptance bar somewhat arbitrary
  – hard to find natural “knees”
  – example: SODA
    » linear increase in scores in top 90%
Observations/Perceptions: Innovation

◆ Conferences adopting risk reduction strategy
  – maintaining or even lowering acceptance rates
  – papers in established areas/themes have better chance of being accepted
    » but maybe that is okay?

◆ Conferences with lowering acceptance rates receiving more polished papers on narrower topics
Observations/Perceptions: Stature

◆ Pressure to publish in top venues
  – CS argued that conferences more important than journals; now we are suffering for it
  – grad students expected to publish in top places

◆ Premier events being diluted by growth in number of events (ACM: 145 events)
  – how does one tell them apart? is acceptance rate a reasonable criterion?
  – people leaving ACM to start events, but eventually returning for coop or sponsorship
A Radical Idea

- Rethink the role of conferences
  - reduce importance w.r.t. journals
  - reduce number and increase acceptance rates
  - conference presentations derived from “best” journal submissions (rather than vice versa)
  - tenure evaluation based on quality of top $N$ papers, not number of papers

- Journals have better scale properties
  - larger reviewer pool
  - less time pressure on authors and reviewers
Improving Your Chances

- Do good work
- Chose your problems carefully
- Avoid “idea” papers
- Work vertically, not horizontally
- Write defensively
- Polish, polish, polish
- Find a role model
- Know the literature
- Know your audience
- Develop your community
- Avoid the LPU temptation
- Don’t submit just for the feedback (the “throwaway” is your credibility)
What to do Before Submission

◆ Maturity is measured by evaluation, not effort
  – A prototype is *not* an evaluation
  – An example is *not* an evaluation
  – A case study is *not* an experiment

◆ Writing is part of the research

◆ Don’t trust your students to do the writing

◆ Get early feedback
What to do After Submission

- Assume rejection
- Improve the work
- Improve the paper
What to do with a Rejection

◆ Stay calm
◆ Ignore the tone
◆ Concentrate on substance
◆ If reviewer did not get it, it is your fault
◆ Resist temptation to play roulette with PCs
◆ Don’t give up