

USEFUL INFORMATION
FOR SCHOLARS NEW TO THE WORLD SCIENCE

新学者融入世界科坛

Yu-Chi Ho, Xiaohong Guan, Xi-Ren Cao, Weibo Gong, Peter B. Luh, Houmin Yan
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Preface

China is being rapidly integrated into the world community with increasing influences and plays a more and more important role in the world arena. Meanwhile, Chinese scholars and students become more and more active in international academia. Publications and professional participations have become a key measure of scholarly accomplishment. With this new trend, it becomes increasingly important that Chinese scholars and students get familiar with, and abide by the international standard when writing papers, submitting them for publication, dealing with editors, and applying for funding.

Co-incidentally, various incidents for which we have personal knowledge or have heard from reliable sources point to some problems that some Chinese scholars have with international professional societies and editorial boards. Such problems arise largely because the cultural difference between East and West but are also fueled by

social incentives in Chinese academia concerning quantitative measure for performance. The old Chinese proverb of “inquiring customs upon entering a new territory” is fully applicable here.

Thus it is perhaps useful to recount the “conventions and protocols” of international academia and the collective experience of more than 100 years in international publications and professional society work of the authors for the benefit of new Chinese scholars and students who are interested in an academic (vs. administrative) career.

We hope the informal notes collected below will be of real use to young Chinese scholars and students.

This booklet is written in both English and Chinese and we would like to publish it in bilingual format. In this way, this booklet itself could serve as an example for readers to compare the different presentation in Chinese and English when preparing a paper to be published in an international journal.

Our last remark is on the order of the authorship of this booklet: the first two authors are listed based on their contributions, and the rest are listed alphabetically.

Acknowledgement

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Publishing Papers and Presenting Speeches

1

1.1 How to share credit and cite references

In scientific and literary writings it is most important “to give credit where credit is due.” After all, this is what an author lives on and the only currency in scholarly endeavor. Violation of this basic dictum can result in severe consequences. The most extreme example is plagiarism where one author steals material from another and claims to be his/her own. When discovered, the punishment is very harsh at least in the West. However, there are lesser forms of “plagiarism” or “not giving credit where it is due” and other authoring transgressions that are due to cultural difference between East and West that can result in misunderstanding and bad feelings. All entering freshman at Harvard University are given a document instructing them on the etiquette of writing a paper,

proper citing of reference, and giving attribution. In order to have free sharing of ideas and at the same time respect for the intellectual property right of scholars, some basic common understanding need to be understood among all persons participating in scholarly discussion and dissemination of ideas.

If one is reporting the results of another or things one learned from another, then it is customary to EXPLICITLY acknowledge the source. It is NOT sufficient to write a couple of paragraphs of text, which are basically rephrasing of other people's words and providing a simple numbered reference, such as [xx]. This creates the impression, intentional or unintentional, that the words and ideas are the author's own creation and the referenced author is only of minor importance. Furthermore, in general one does not report one's own "learning experience" in a paper submitted for publication consideration unless you are providing NEW significant insights. Even then, you should explicitly acknowledge the priority of the ideas of other. Although by giving a numbered reference, you can argue you are not plagiarizing, it will nevertheless reflect badly on you. A knowledgeable reviewer of your paper will not let you get away with it. The offended author, most probably who will also be the reviewer of your paper, will not forgive you. The long-term consequences of such practice are much worse than any temporary benefit one may derive from such an act.

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1. Publishing Papers and Presenting Speeches

If you wish to thank someone who has helped you in the writing or development of your paper, then thank him properly and sincerely. Never thank a person by giving the impression that she/he has personally approved your paper. This may be a sign of respect in the East. But it is bad form. Thus, one often sees at the end of acknowledgement an additional phrase “. . . all remaining errors are solely the responsibility of the author.” One should not be made to take responsibility for a paper unless his/her name appears as one of the authors.

One more thing. It is important to treat other people's idea and intellectual property with respect and care. A published paper can be freely passed around and shared without authorization from the original author. After all, a published paper is in the public domain. But a draft or rough ideas a colleague shared with you for comment and discussion within a limited circle should be treated with care. In particular, a PowerPoint document or transparency slides should not be distributed or used without checking with the original author. This is important because a transparency or a PowerPoint slide does not have the accompanying voice that goes with the slide to provide the detail explanation. No self-respecting author would like these used or quoted out of context. Also the creation of a good PowerPoint slide is a very time consuming task. To appropriate such a slide for personal use without attribution is a

violation of intellectual property right of others. Here is an example. One of us, Ho, had a carefully prepared slide from a plenary address that many people liked including a government contract monitor who holds the power of money (literally the power of life-or-death) over the project. Yet he wrote Ho asking for specific permission to use the slide for his purpose and promised to give full attribution to Ho when using it. This is like a parent in the Eastern cultures* asking permission from his/her child to borrow something the child has created. More importantly, if scientific workers cannot be assured of this implicit understanding among colleagues, free discussion will be stifled and progress will be significantly slowed.

We advise that authors be generous to collaborators who indeed make contributions. It is our opinion that it is always a good practice to share credits even though you may honestly think that the other person does not deserve it when the contributions among collaborators are not clear-cut and it is hard to judge the fairness accurately. Look at it this way, in the short run you may think you have giving away something. But in the long run, if you have staying power you will write far more on the subject than your

* It is unthinkable in the East that a parent needs to ask permission from a child to use something a child has created. But this is standard practice in the West.

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1. Publishing Papers and Presenting Speeches

co-author or person whom you have acknowledged. If you share a Nobel Prize with someone, you are still a Nobel Laureate and not a half Nobel Laureate. Besides, sharing credit generously will result in far less arguments and bad feelings with your colleagues. Your generosity may even be repaid someday surprisingly when you least expect it.

People with integrity and principle will always tell you if they feel they don't deserve sharing credit with you on something. It is our own principle that we have to materially contribute to a paper in ideas or in writing before our names should go on as the co-author of a paper. Many well known scholars have lived to regret that their names appeared on a paper which later on turned out to be falsified by their co-author.

Finally, note in co-authored papers, the order of the name of authors is dependent on the custom of the profession. For example, in medical papers, the name order is often determined by seniority with the name of the head of the laboratory or project appearing first while the last named author is the most junior but who may have done most of the detailed work. In other cases, the first named author is the one who had the original idea or contributed most to the paper. In still other cases, alphabetical orders are used. Our practice has been sequencing the authors based on contributions. This is fair, and has been the practice for IEEE in

general. In most cases, the authors should be able to come to a mutually satisfactory answer. In case of dispute, our own recommendation is it never hurts to be generous in sharing credit this way. Life is too short for one to worry much about this order nor is it important in the long run.

■ 1.2 How to get a paper published in an international journal

Everyone realizes that there are huge variances in the quality of international journals listed in the Science Citation Index (SCI). For a journal to be listed in the SCI is no guarantee of quality. The same goes for publishing a paper in one of the SCI journals. Thus, if a scholar or a university administration is interested in quality rather than quantity, then a count of papers published in SCI journals is no guarantee.

On the other hand, at any one time, each science and technology discipline has a small list of commonly agreed upon international journals of top quality and reputation that are known to recognized experts in the field. Advisory committees and outside referees can easily provide such a list when asked by a university administration for evaluation purposes.

The number of times a given paper is cited by OTHER

authors in SCI is indeed a quality measure of the paper. This is the MAIN purpose of SCI. It is not the purpose of SCI to guarantee the quality of journals covered by its publications. It also should be noted that the numbers of citations vary a lot in different areas and disciplines.

You need to address three types of readers in a well written paper:

- The reader just wants to know the result of the paper to determine if she/he wants to read on. A good ABSTRACT serves this purpose.
- The reader wants to know intuitively what is the key ideas behind this paper, how is it derived, what are the significance and implications. You can do this in one place in the introduction or an earlier section. In fact answering this will also serve to prime reader type 3.
- The reader wants to know all the gory details.

There are many common rules for writing a paper and making a presentation even though the kind of effort required is different. You should also consult the companion paper in this booklet on “how to give a talk”.

Because the peer review system is anonymous, criticisms often times can be frank, brutal, sarcastic, or even occasionally wrong. Asian scholars often interpret such critiques as a personal