

WHY IT IS HARD TO PUBLISH

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A dear friend asked me why the peer review process failed to accept his paper for publication. Here's the reply:

I was going to play "guess the review comments" with you, but in a move of intellectual honesty, I'll just review your paper myself.

Well, OK, in a move of intellectual humility, I'll review only the Abstract, and just comment on the side about the requisite internal content, such as a diagram with containers and links that pays homage to object/process independence; some beautiful gravitation arrows showing me that I am reaching the end of the column; the mandatory dot-dot-dot diagram alluding to an unimaginably complex simplification; of course a Gamma function winning the hearts of all those folks that know that it models anything; some cryptic pseudocode with trendy backward arrows that scoff at conventional assignment notations while providing a brief breeze of logical formalism; another trendy scoff at the establishment by having only one footnote, and that being at best vacuous, and certainly misplaced from the reference list. Talk about a raspberry! And the subtle sexual references to ramming add a touch of decadence. Looks perfect on the inside, but wait, no! on the very last page you have a fatal flaw, an absolute killer. You have not referenced yourself a dozen times.

Well I'd ordinarily throw out any submission that failed to reference its authors. Imagine, these people have not even read their own work! Well, that is unless you assume that none of their work was relevant to the present topic. In that case, they are obviously too inexperienced to contribute to the field.

But since you are a friend, I'll still go ahead and review the Abstract. But you should know that my heart cannot be in it when I know that you are not publishing for self-aggrandizement.

First of all, I am taken by the brave centering of the title "ABSTRACT", standing out there alone, tickling my intellectual curiosity, making me wonder if the title refers to something which is summarizing or concentrating the essentials of a larger thing? Do you make an abstract of some liquid? Will it be in skeletal form?

Or is the content something apart from application to or association with a particular, or simply difficult to understand, or perhaps disassociated from any specific instance, or is it insufficiently formal, or does it draw away attention, or perhaps express a quality apart from an object? Is it theoretical or detached or impersonal? Most importantly, I wonder if it has

only intrinsic form with little or no attempt at pictorial representation or narrative content. Yes, that is it, your title wonderfully describes what has been eliminated from its own contents.

Overall, the Abstract is excellent (but for again one fatal flaw, later). Well, OK, not perfect, since no self-respecting statistics student would publish a paper which uses Markov Chains (they are soooo passe), I must assume that the statistics is for pedantry. Or should I say that it seemed pediculous. (At least you left pedology out of the pedagogy.) The Abstract is nicely indented, giving it a trimmer figure which radiates abstraction. It makes a gallant gesture of self-reference "This paper..", flying in the face of the danger of conceptual reentry, while acknowledging its material basis. The average word length surpasses both the minimal cutoff for intellectual disambiguation and the national average for peer reviewed articles outside of German biochemistry.

The sentence structure is perfect, four. The most powerful at the front, intended to outrage half of your peers, insult the work of twenty percent, and haughtily imply that you are the superior mammal. The second punch is to tell them exactly what they don't know; you even tell them that if they read further they will find out exactly what they don't know, and why they don't know it. Because of course, the second sentence hits them with a barrage of idiosyncratic terms and associations in a language so independent of conventional description that they can learn it only if they are willing to sit at your feet. The gauntlet thus thrown, the third sentence is free to crow, to declare to the oceans and the mountains that, while beating your mighty chest, you can prove that your stuff subsumes their stuff. You know, it would probably been alright had you merely challenged, "My stuff is better than yours". At least then they could have seen you as the Other, and condemned you on grounds of being in a different Universe. That being done, the door would have been open for one reviewer to sneak in: "Well OK, this is certainly crap, but is it internally consistent crap? Is it Pure Crap?" And I think then they may have been more eager to allow you to stand up in public in front of them so that they could humiliate you in front of their entire society, and thus prove to all, in one efficient swoop, that they were both certainly Correct and also Gracious.

So you can easily understand why the four sentence format is so beautiful. You have achieved all of the appropriate objectives in only three sentences. You have designed the master template, a new and improved three sentence Abstract. But you too were both Correct and Gracious. Correct because the fourth sentence conjures up magic of a superior variety, and Gracious because you recognized the importance of protocol to them, and you were willing to add a fourth sentence in the interests of maintaining order.

And what a beautiful fourth sentence! So powerful that I must reserve an entire evening to contemplate it in its full essence, so that I may come to be appreciative of the profoundly deep interconnections which arise when a

blind and meaningless algorithm is given an infinite description of what to do. But perhaps I'm just being too hasty here, it might just be that the algorithm is not given, but already has, an infinite description.

But such art, such beauty, such symmetric balance in your craftsmanship. You homage the quadrivium, properly so being an older graduate student, but the message woven between the sentence structure is that your allegiance is to the trivium, to remaining young.

I always like a totally unintelligible last sentence. It sends the reader eagerly into the body of the paper, dying of curiosity. Some may be deterred by your allusion to infinity, especially if it applies to the rest of the paper. We do know that it is a good brand, so I think you'll be safe on that one.

Hierarchy and iterative are good qualities, but it is ambitious to join them. The mention of representation is weak, calling up past images of self-reference and memories of actions which must have been taken to meet a -- well how can I be sufficiently discrete here? -- to meet a situation. I'll make a technical comment now that the map is already a representation: a representation of a representation has no semantic value. I won't complain too much, but a representation also never interleaves or decides, that is the job of an algorithm. Data Structures and Algorithms would be called by one name if we had active data. While on the topic, another slight slip in the beginning puts the words "learning" and "plans" in the same sentence. All professionals know that these things are in different chapters of the text, and should never show up together. You must think of the chaos you might create before you hastily assemble any collection of words into a sentence! For instance, just what do you think it does to young minds when they encounter an predatory algorithm which converges on poor defenseless plans? Yes, I know that the plans will react, your contribution is that they can also get their hierarchies up.

I don't think you need to point out that the Sharsha algorithm is on-line, most everything is now-a-days. I'm still debating how warm I fell about your notion of an acronym that has a stray letter in it. Or the idea of an acronomic name that isn't all caps. You do know that caps shout out that you have a computer, an advantage in getting a good job. Perhaps I should be kinder by calling the name a curiosity enticer. You are good at those. Perrhaps I even harve somerthing to learn herre.

Showing your algorithm's name as taking an initialization argument is a brilliant stroke, even though the wandering R detracts from its full impact. Actually this sentence, though unintelligible, is the most beautiful one in the entire piece. You stoutly claim the absence of pictorial information in your elegant one word title, yet you manage to slide in subtle technical wisdom, such that the first "h i e r a r c h y" is always aroused relative to the second "hierarchy". I like your choice of mysterious letters; Q has a

good reputation there. Reminiscent of the pirate Q-ships which were once known as Q-boats. I also really like the strobing visual illusion of switching between italicized and normal font for the same word in the same sentence. That kind of stuff is real art. But nothing compared to the genius of repeating not only the same word over and over, but the same pair of words! Oh both poetry and music, that you mysteriously parenthesized and introduced analogically to give the slightest hint of mystery as if calling from the depths of creation.

This sentence alone is worth an article, so the reviewers may have depreciated you for having too broad an aim, putting forth two entirely different research plans into the same Abstract. And then so crafting their balance that first and less significant idea covered the first three sentences. Then, wham-o, the brilliant head-fake, and the upper-cut, a fourth sentence of pure poetry.

You brilliantly managed to encapsulate in one quadrupartite, not only the meaning of the master algorithm, but also the lightness and poetry that surrounds us in a haze of sentimental nostalgia for times gone by and opportunities missed and then regained. The solidity of the iambic line, collapsed into the innovative iambic word, with the contrapuntuality of syllables creating a pentametric harmonic though the magnificent excursion into hyphenation. And such irony! For such subtle and proper hyphenation to occur after your fatal blunder.

Yes, the last sentence is very very pretty, and in an excellent position to end the Abstract, another skillful twist. In fact, the only flaw I can find in this lovely sentence is its dark illusion on the last line. It just turns my stomach to think that you use an algorithm that must execute both policies and values in order to succeed. Too much destruction. And those poor little plans and values not only have to give their very existence to the Demon Sharsha, they must endure the humiliation of a potentially infinite execution. Well, I know that the progress of Science takes a heavy toll, and I can understand your callous disregard in using brute force algorithms. But you did cross my line of tolerance with an infinite execution. Again, I'll give slack here, those damn algorithms are a mean bunch by their very nature, perhaps you just ended up with some particularly nasty and recalcitrant ones. Maybe your algorithm simply offended the sensibilities of the more delicate reviewers.

But all of that is just background, nothing fatal. We all have to deal with algorithms and we all try to represent representations. But the fatal flaw was indeed heart-breaking: never, never, never, do I have to say it again, never hyphenate the prefix "sub". You won't learn this until you are out of school and dealing with the real world on a daily basis. Some observations just need the expertise of an older researcher, and you have been wise to seek counsel. Although they cannot expect you to have such knowledge at such a young age, the reviewers were most probably harshest about this. The only

subwords that hyphenate are foreign words, words like sub-rosa and sub-Saharan. Nationalism, you know, is sacred. Hyphenated subwords are strictly reserved for foreign diplomatic correspondence, and for effete intellectual pseudo-conceptualization coming from the humanities. In one swoop, you not only offended every foreign national, many of whom are on technical review boards, but also everyone in any technical field, suggesting that their topics could be reduced to the hyphenated degradation of post-rational subcriticism.

So, my friend, yes, the reviewers were harsh, expecting you to have wisdom beyond your years and between your ears. But believe me, you will thank them later, thank them for the firmness of their training and for their graciousness of not embarrassing you in public with a hyphenated subword. You now have the opportunity to climb up against adversity, to reach to bigger stars by showing them that you have learned to dehyphenate.

Overall, 2 out of 10.