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Workshop on How to Publish Papers in International Journals

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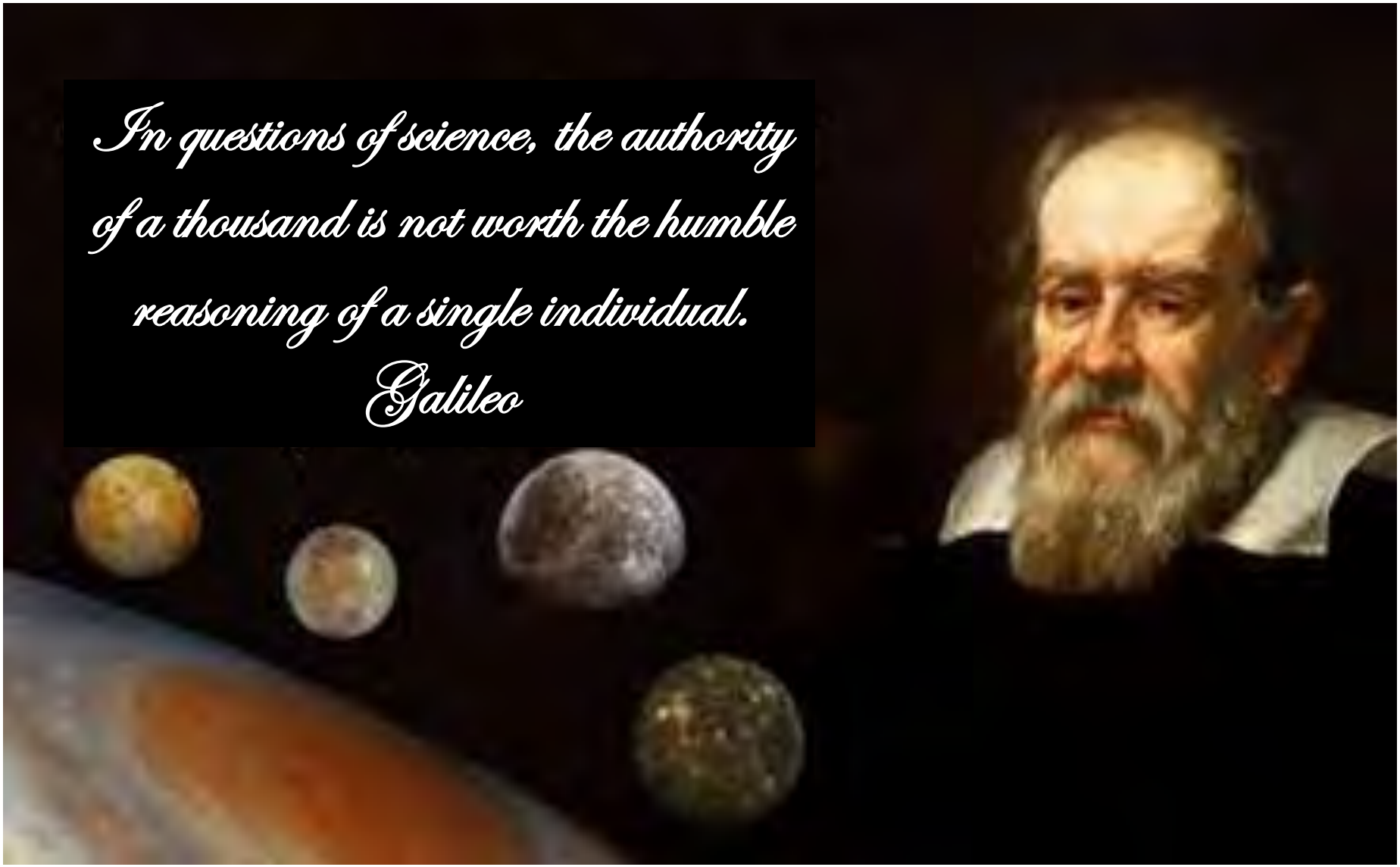
Referee's Reports and Revisions

Just do what they ask and get the thing accepted.

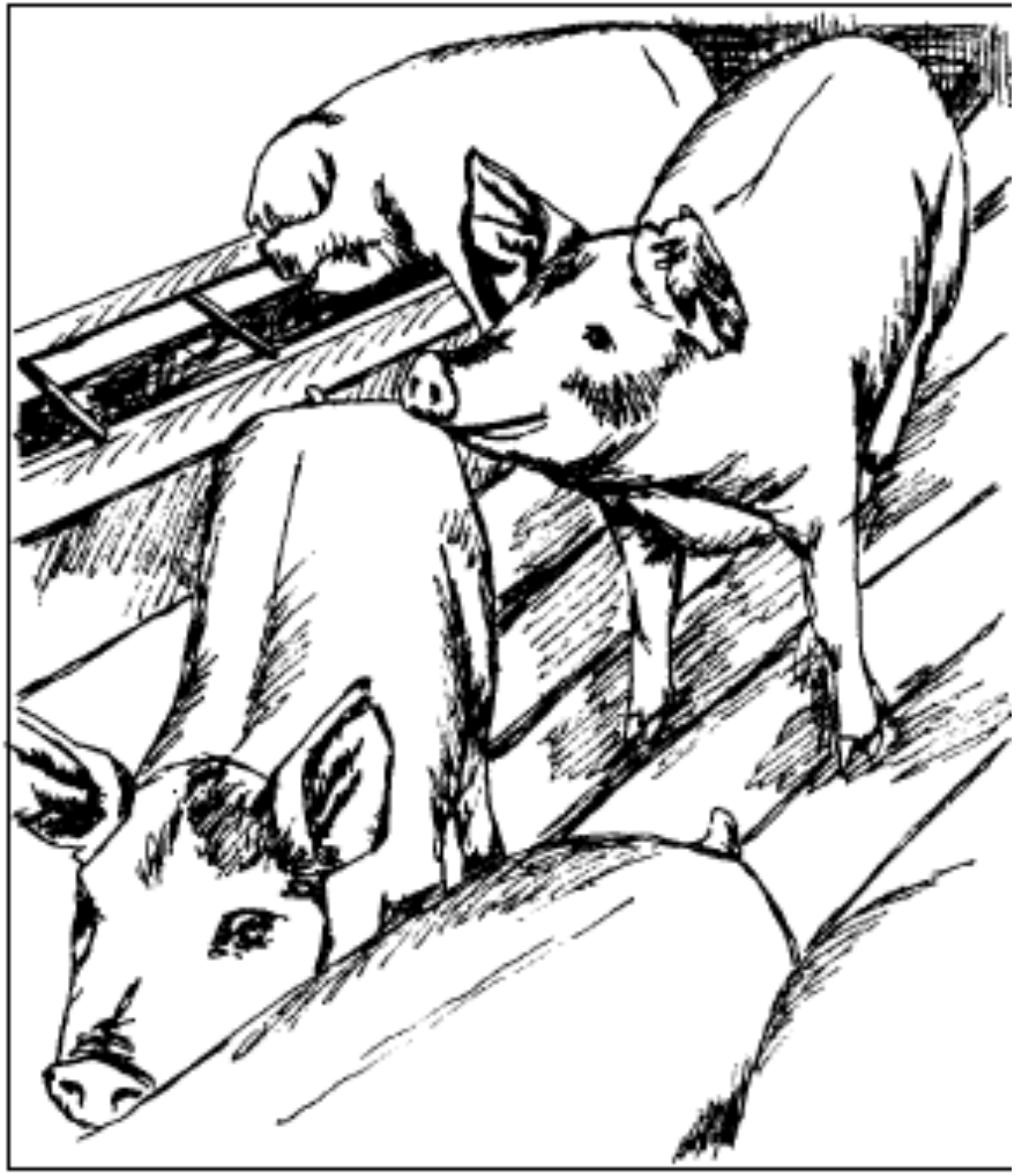
So the Referee's criticised your paper! Best not to fantasize that it is a conspiracy against you. Do not play the martyr and feel sorry for yourself as the self-important victim.

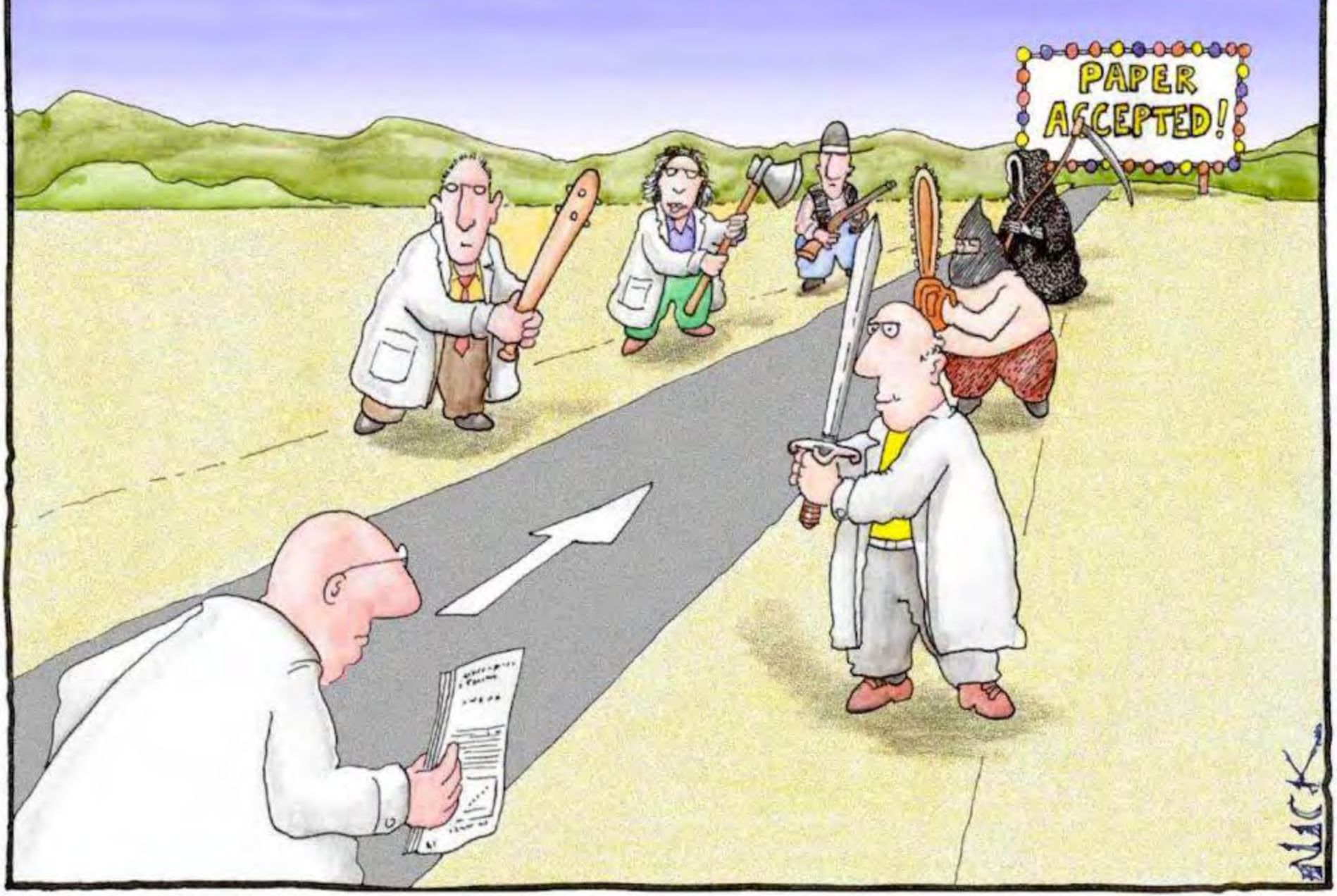
Go Lions! Another inappropriate response is to simply give up and resign yourself to your fate. There are not many lions and tigers in the arena.


In questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual.
Galileo

What you think of the peer referee's of your paper on a bad day.

Why could they not understand my brilliant paper?





Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as "quite an improvement."

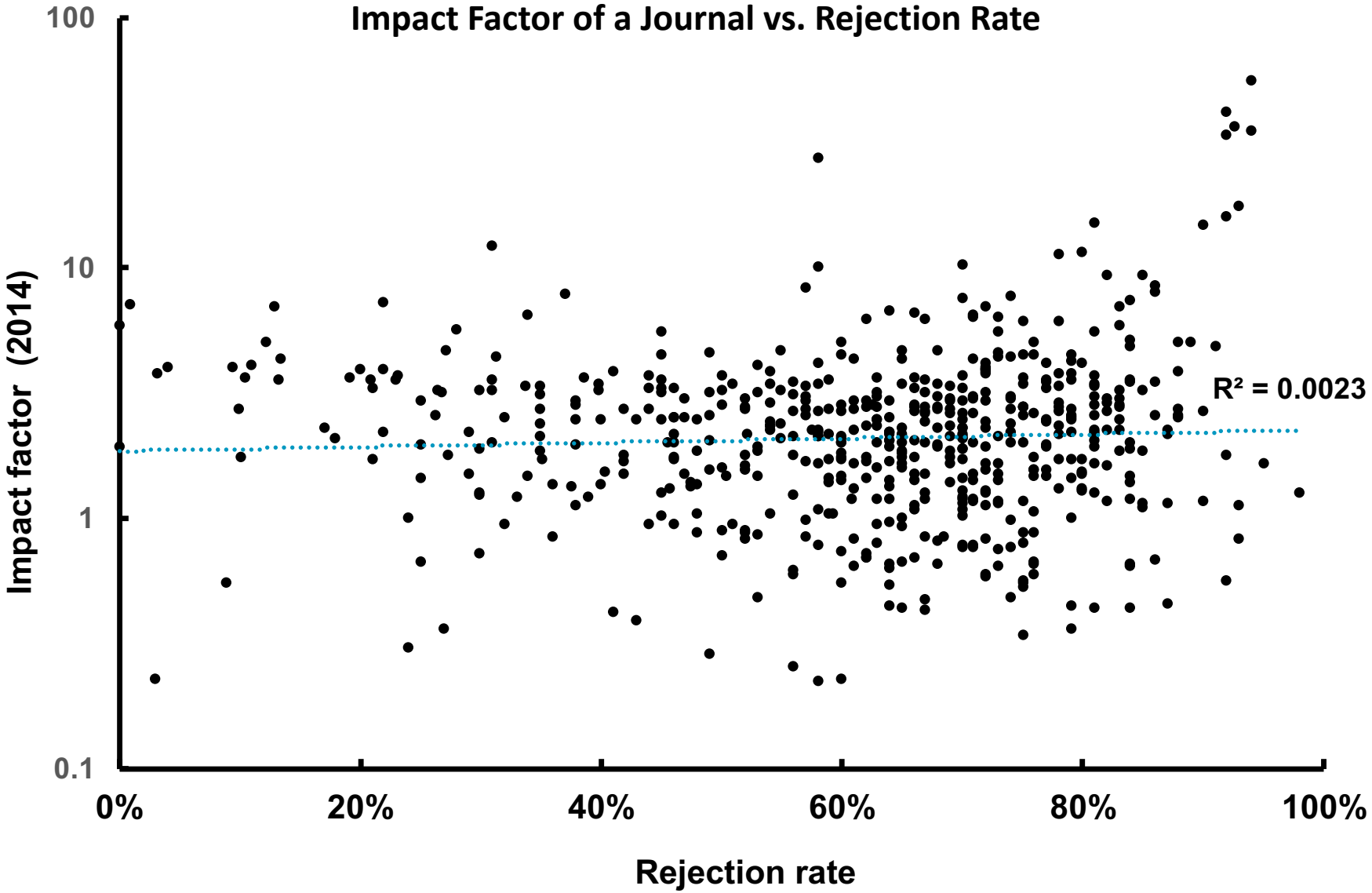
I am the editor and I have rejected your paper. Don’t even think you can win an argument with me.

Just because you are having trouble getting work published does not mean you are wrong. The world is real and it will not go away.

Galileo was no idiot. Only an idiot could believe that science requires martyrdom - that may be necessary in religion, but in time a scientific result will establish itself.

(David Hilbert)

izquotes.com



Is rejection more likely if you send your paper to a prestigious journal or a lesser journal? **Apparently not.** This not as silly as it seems because after all the papers get sent to be refereed by basically the same people.

The Abstract

- Remember what I said about the abstract. It is the first thing people read so if your abstract is bad generally they do not read any more of the paper.
- The Abstract was the first thing a referee reads and if they did not like it things go down hill from there.
- Always go over your Abstract because it is likely that it was the start of your problems with the referee.
- When you revise a paper give the Abstract some serious attention even if the referees did not comment on it. It may of put the referee's off right from the start.
- If you find things that annoy the referees in the rest of the paper and you revise the body of the paper and not the abstract you are asking for trouble.
- When you have revised your paper make sure the Abstract tallies with the new version of the paper. This is easy to overlook.

The Introduction

• You must have a clear statement of what is the problem your paper is addressing and why it is important. Referees do not like Introductions that do not clearly state what the paper is about.

• Did you make the aims of the paper clear in the last paragraph? You can even put in a single sentence about what your paper has shown. **This statement must be obvious, not implied.**

• If the Referee starts pointing out "missing" papers, books etc. **You can usually work out who the Referee is.** Make sure you cite their profoundly important papers.

• **Do not** bring up points in the **Introduction** that are not dealt with in the paper. Make sure you **leave them out.**

What not to say in the Introduction:

- You do not bring up issues in the **Introduction** that you do not deal with in the paper. **This critical error makes your paper look incomplete.**
- **Do not make the Introduction too heavy. Go easy on theory and equations (Make use of Appendices & Supplementary Material sections).**
- When you have finished the **Discussion** you need to re-evaluate the **Introduction**. Topics brought up in the **Introduction** but not dealt with in the paper can be either removed or added to the **Discussion** as future avenues of research. Talking about new avenues of work in your **Discussion** improves the look of your paper.
- **You may need to say <u>what your paper is not about</u> in the light of seemingly inane comments by referees.**

The Introduction should demonstrate clear evidence that you critically read the literature and identified the problem. If there is a lot of criticism of your Introduction you need to give it close attention as you have not set up your problem.

Remember some amusing quotes from Willingham (2007)

• "Critical thinking is not a set of skills that can be deployed at any time, in any context. It is a type of thought that even 3-year-olds can engage in—and even trained scientists can fail in."

– Some brilliant scientists can be very credulous and remarkably easy to fool, especially if they are told what they want to hear. They will also completely fail to see what is obvious to you.

• "Knowing that one should think critically is not the same as being able to do so. That requires domain knowledge and practice."

– You do need practice to understand science and you do need to learn to be sceptical without it stopping you from attempting to do any work at all. The perfect experiment does not exist.

Materials and methods:

- **Modern papers often have extremely poor descriptions of materials and methods.** This is a very negative development. Try to resist your detailed descriptions of the M & M being dismissed or give in to a request to cut them down.
- Pay close attention to specifying essential things for your work to be repeatable. Accurately describe the machines you used, where you got your material and how it was looked after. If you used field material specify where from. Generally you will need evidence that nothing was collected illegally. Culture media need to be described accurately. If you use a reference make sure the reference actually does provides the information (Many references to culture media are actually inadequate).
- Getting manuscript checked for English can be expensive but do not skimp on it. A poorly written M & M will result in a paper being rejected.

Phuong Nguyen
March 5 2017 at 10:23pm ·

"Non-English speakers often work very hard on improving the English of the Abstract, Introduction and Discussion and neglect the English in the Materials and Methods and the Results. If people cannot understand what you did and how you did it your paper is unlikely to be accepted" (Dr. Raymond, 2017)

I now truly understand and feel my teacher's lectures.

Results:

- Modern papers often have not only extremely poor descriptions of Materials and Methods but the Results can be very poorly expressed. This is a very negative development. Try to resist recommendations that your detailed descriptions of the results be cut down.
- Take very careful notice of any negative comments about Tables and Figures and make sure you fix them.

Responses:

Here is a fairly typical referee's response to a paper (from Taylor, 2016) and examples of appropriate responses. Make sure you respond to every comment. Even comments you think are not important or seem silly have to be answered

Table 1. Typical sequential response format for responding to referees' comments.

Referee 1, Comment 1: The figures have a lot of distracting elements that are not related to the data or its interpretation. Edward Tufte, a statistician and graphical expert, refers to this as "Chart Junk", which is distracting from the message the graph is meant to convey. The ratio of ink devoted to data versus ink devoted to other stuff on the graph should be much higher. For example, please remove the distracting horizontal lines that were thoughtlessly included by MS Excel, as they are not necessary for viewing the trend or the absolute value of a datum.
Response to Rev 1, Comment 1: On Figures 1, 2, and 4, we have removed the horizontal lines and gray areas on the figures. We have increased the ink devoted to data and agree that these changes have made the figures more visually appealing.
Referee 2, Comment 1: On line 78 there is a reference to many studies but only one citation is provided to support the statement and this paper is not a review article. Please provide three exemplar citations to better support the claim that there are many studies. Similarly, on line 154 there is a statement about "recent studies . . ." but the citation at the end of the sentence is from 1975, which is not recent. Please reword the sentence or provide a more recent citation.
Response to Rev 2, Comment 2: One line 76, we include three citations to more accurately support the statement about many studies. We also include a reference from 2014 to support the statement about recent studies.

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