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In an earlier article in this journal Shalvi, Baas, Handgraaf and De Dreu¹ presented data to support their hypothesis that one should write when hot, submit when not. Their data suggested that over a four-year period more authors submitted papers for publication in the summer months (when it was hot) but that, as acceptance rates did not vary across the months, it would be better to submit papers in the winter (when it was not) when there would be less competition.

I have the following difficulties with this conclusion:

1. This pattern of data was reported for one journal only (*Psychological Science*): it was *not* found in a similar second journal (*Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*). Shalvi *et al.* thus over-generalize from their results.

2. The data were obtained from journals that publish 12 issues per year and have relatively large submission rates (approximately 1,500 per year for *Psychological Science* at the time of the study²). It is not clear whether or not there would be similar results for journals that publish bimonthly or quarterly, and/or for journals with low submission rates. Table 1 shows the results that I obtained when I compared the submission rates per month in three journals with different publication schedules. In all three cases case there were no significant differences between the numbers of articles submitted in the winter and the summer months.

3. Next, the notion of summer being hot (and winter not) is surely a hemispheric one? Should one therefore adjust the calculations for authors living below the equator?

POINT OF VIEW

Write when you can and submit when you are ready!

James HARTLEY

James Hartley rejects the notion that we should write when it is hot and submit when it is not.

How might Shalvi *et al.* deal with a paper like that by Kuppens, Allen and Sheeber,³ where one author

works in Belgium, one in Australia, and one in America?

Furthermore, just what defines

Table 1. Submission rates per month for three journals that differ in the number of issues per year. Journal A has 6 issues, and Journals B and C have four issues each per year.

	Journal A 2008–2009		Journal B 2008–2009		Journal C 2008–2009	
Jan	22	36	23	5	19	18
Feb	25	25	16	15	21	16
Mar	22	32	11	15	15	14
Total	89	93	50	35	55	48
April	22	33	16	12	17	18
May	28	21	15	21	10	15
June	22	36	14	12	23	10
Total	77	90	45	45	50	43
July	27	39	18	16	11	16
Aug	34	32	12	13	17	16
Sept	35	40	10	13	25	15
Total	96	111	40	42	53	47
Oct	41	21	18	14	20	35
Nov	37	26	13	21	13	27
Dec	27	29	9	8	4	21
Total	105	76	40	43	37	83

Table 2. Seasonal submission rates differ according to how one defines the start of 'winter', 'spring', etc.

Starting month	Journal A 2008–2009		Journal B 2008–2009		Journal C 2008–2009	
	Dec/	74	90	48	28	44
Jan	69	93	50	35	55	48
Mar/	72	86	42	48	42	47
Apr	72	90	45	45	50	43
Jun/	83	107	44	41	51	42
Jul	96	111	40	42	53	47
Sep/	113	87	41	48	58	77
Oct	105	76	40	43	37	83

'summer' and 'winter'? Normally, in terms of journal publications, we think of the year starting in January (cold in Europe and hot in Australasia). However, in a straw poll conducted in my department, I asked colleagues indicate when they thought winter and summer began.

Eighteen of 23 respondents (78%) voted for winter being from December to February, spring from March to May, summer from June to August, and autumn from September to November. Three more opted for this decision after quibbling about it first (making it 91%). One

Table 3. The number of articles accepted per month according to the dates of the initial submissions and the dates of the revised submission for Journals B and C (with revised definitions of the seasonal boundaries)

	Journal B		Journal C	
	Initial	Revised	Initial	Revised
Dec	3	2	3	1
Jan	4	0	5	5
Feb	3	1	4	4
Total	10	2	12	10
Mar	5	0	2	1
April	0	4	5	7
May	2	4	3	1
Total	7	8	10	9
June	1	2	2	2
July	3	3	3	3
Aug	2	7	4	5
Total	6	12	9	10
Sept	4	2	5	4
Oct	0	3	1	4
Nov	5	4	3	3
Total	9	9	9	11

more – also a farmer – opted for winter starting in November and one – a Canadian – abstained from making a decision. . . .

Shalvi *et al.* do not give much information about how they defined their seasons: but at two points (on p. 120) they define winter as November–February (a four-month period) and their calculations (on p. 120) also suggest that they measured their 'seasons' in *three* four-monthly groups. Fortunately Shalvi *et al.* present their data graphically month by month so one can see what actually happens for each of the 12 months, but they appear to use the terms winter and summer somewhat loosely.

Table 2 shows how the data shown in Table 1 can vary according to the method used for classifying the seasons. Different results are obtained when one classifies winter as December, January, and February, etc., compared with January, February, March, etc. The differences shown in Table 2 are small but they might accumulate (or disappear) in a larger study.

4. Finally, it is questionable whether or not every journal maintains a steady acceptance rate over the months. To check this I was able to examine the acceptance rates in 2009 for articles submitted (mainly) in 2008 for the Journals B and C shown in Table 1. Here another difficulty arose that Shalvi *et al.* did not consider. This was that journals often report two dates with their articles – the date of the *original submission*, and the date of acceptance of the *final revised version* – which might be several months (or even on occasion years) later. The question is, therefore, should one analyse the dates of the original submissions (assuming that this was when the main writing was completed) or should one analyse the dates of revised submissions (when the rewriting was completed)?

In this case I examined both, and Table 3 shows the results. It can be seen that the acceptance dates for Journal B (and especially those of the revised submissions) are somewhat differently spread than are those for Journal C. However, in all cases, the acceptance dates do not vary significantly according to the season – thus confirming the findings of Shalvi *et al.* in this respect.

Concluding remarks

The results reported by Shalvi *et al.*, are interesting, but they need more supporting data to sustain the notion that it is better for authors to write when hot and submit when not. I suspect that different results will be found with different journals. And to my mind a more likely explanation for any differences will depend upon the journals concerned and, as Shalvi *et al.* also discuss, their editorial policies. Some editors (perhaps depending on the number of submissions) have more strict criteria for dealing with acceptances

and rejections than others. Schultz,⁴ for example, appears to have rejected any paper if one, two, or all three of his referees suggested it. Other editors (such as Rushby⁵) may make their own judgements more individually by, for example, re-reading the submission and/or seeking out additional referees when they disagree. Further, some papers might be accepted but saved for a subsequent special issue and some might be delayed in publication because the available space is taken up by such events. Policies such as these are more likely to affect acceptance dates than are the seasons of the year. Accordingly, in my view, rather than restrict oneself in the ways implied by Shalvi *et al.*, it is better to write when you can and submit straight away!

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