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100 research rules of the game

How to make your research world class; how to successfully publish in top international refereed journals

Niamh M. Brennan
Department of Accountancy, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

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Abstract

Purpose – There are several basic, and at times minor, pedantic principles required to successfully publish in good-quality international peer-reviewed journals. These are what the author calls the "rules of the game". Many are so basic, so taken-for-granted, tacit knowledge, that at times supervisors do not tell their students about them. The paper aims to discuss this issue.

Design/methodology/approach – The author has assembled 100 research rules of the game from her work over many years with doctoral students and early career researchers. Each rule is accompanied by short advice. Additional citations are included directing readers to further resources on the 100 research rules of the game.

Findings – The paper documents 100 research rules of the game.

Research limitations/implications – There are many other rules of the game not included in the author's list of 100 research rules of the game.

Originality/value – This paper is a one-stop-shop brief introduction to the author's 100 research rules of the game.

Keywords Research, Rules of the game, Publishing research, Writing research

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction to, and philosophy behind, the 100 research rules of the game

It is important for doctoral students, early career researchers and even more senior colleagues to know the basic, and at times minor, pedantic principles required to successfully publish research – what I call the "rules of the game[1],[2]". These basic principles are ones I have learned and am still learning from colleagues and through trial and (a lot of) error. I share these rules with the intention of helping those at an earlier stage in their career to learn the principles which are often so taken for granted that they remain unspoken, tacit knowledge.

As a supervisor, I make sure all my masters and doctoral students know the rules of the game, but not all supervisors appear to do the same (if they know the rules of the game themselves, which is an assumption not always merited). These 100 research rules of the game complement Brennan's (2019) "100 PhD rules of the game", written for doctoral students.

These notes are a one-stop-shop resource for researchers. They also reflect some of my pet bugbears. Brennan (1998) is a precursor to this short article, written for my Master of Accounting students, providing guidance on how to write a masters dissertation.

Each rule is accompanied by a brief description/some advice and citations to support the rule. Most of the papers cited are short articles on a research rule-of-the-game topic.

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I have organised the 100 rules into six sections. They start with some high-level general advice on conducting research and being a researcher (11 rules). Then I deal with some principles in designing the research (20 rules). It is not enough to conduct excellent research. Authors must sell their work by writing in a convincing and compelling manner. The quality of the writing is more than half the battle in successful publishing. Section 3 therefore has the largest number of rules (39 rules). Section 4 covers conferencing research (six rules), as a precursor to getting research published (Section 5, 17 rules). The challenging issue of co-authoring is covered in Section 6 (six rules). The rules conclude with some repetition, the most important rule of all (one rule) (Table I).

Rule No.	Rule	Description
① *Overall*		
1	Enjoy your research	It is hard to be good at something you don't enjoy. The more you do research, the more you will enjoy it (in a pain-pleasure kind of way!)
2	Play to your strengths	Use your expertise (e.g. proficiency in another language, access to data, methodological expertise, etc.) for research purposes. Be opportunistic. (While also getting out of your comfort zone and developing your expertise)
3	Take ownership/ responsibility for your research	Do not blame your supervisor/your co-authors/reviewers/editors. You are responsible for your research. Reviewers/editors not valuing your research suggest you have not sold them the research (see Bartunek *et al.*, 2006; Faff, 2015)
4	Aim to become known in the literature	Think about your positioning in the literature. Do not spread yourself too thinly or you will not develop a reputation for expertise in an area. Pick two to five areas, at least one of which should be mainstream in your discipline
5	Do not be known for being a one-trick pony	Do not plough too narrow a furrow so that you get known for only one area and you develop a reputation for mining one area excessively
6	Develop a publication strategy/plan	Issues to consider include where you want to position yourself in the literature, what type of research you are interested in and whether your research complements your teaching. Look at other researchers' profiles for ideas of what a good publication strategy/ plan might look like. Their university profile, Google Scholar, or in the absence of a Google Scholar profile, Publish-or-Perish (Harzing, 2018) or Scopus, are good sources
7	Develop publication targets	It can be motivational to have quantified targets, such as the number of refereed journal articles to publish a year in a journal of specified quality
8	Prepare a pipeline	Document your research projects in the form of a pipeline, identifying projects from start to finish, in terms of stages of completion. Having projects at various stages in the pipeline is ideal. (see Lebo, 2016)
9	Learn to juggle research and other demands (e.g. teaching)	Productive researchers train themselves to do their research while having to deal with other aspects of their job. They prioritise. Rule No. 32 "Snack and binge" is also relevant here
10	Find a critical friend	Before submitting your work, have a critical friend give you feedback (and vice versa). If English is not your first language, a native-English speaking critical friend is advantageous. Rule No. 94 "Co-author" is also relevant here
11	Be careful with research funding	"Chalk-and-talk" disciplines (such as my own) do not require much funding (conversely, in STEM (science, technology, engineering

Table I.
100 research rules of the game

(*continued*)

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Rule No.	Rule	Description
		and maths) disciplines, funding is critical). You have nothing to show for an unsuccessful funding application. The time taken in preparing an unsuccessful funding application could be spent writing a publishable paper. If your funding application is successful, you will be doing the funder's research which may not be publishable in a top journal. A difficulty is the pressure from university managers who require evidence of funding bids for promotion purposes (see Colquitt and George, 2011)
② *Designing research*		
12	Pick interesting topics	If you told guests at a dinner party about your research, would they respond: "that sounds interesting"? Think about formulating an interesting hook in your paper's introduction to capture your audience (i.e. editors, reviewers, readers more generally). Talking about your research may help you to test and sell your ideas (see Bartunek *et al.*, 2006; Davis, 1971; Faff, 2015)
13	Pick narrow, deep topics	Research topics that are narrow and deep are more likely to make a substantive contribution to the literature. This rule is not the same as Rule No. 5 "Don't be known for being a one-trick pony" which relates to an area of research rather than an individual topic for a paper
14	Look at other papers to ensure yours meets the requirements and standards	You are not the first researcher in the world. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Look at other top-class research. Learn what's good from the work of top-class academics (see Bem, 1995, 2003; Echambadi *et al.*, 2006; Evans *et al.*, 2015)
15	Make a substantive contribution to the prior literature	Minor additions (nudges) to the prior literature, for example, in the form of a new variable, or replicating research in another country, are unlikely to be deemed substantive contributions. "It takes just as much time to write an unimportant paper as an important one" (Davis, 2001). Document the number of contributions (see Bergh, 2003; Corley and Gioia, 2011; Ireland, 2009; Rynes, 2002; Whetten, 1989)
16	Find ways of contributing to the prior literature	There are different approaches to finding ways to contribute to the literature, such as gap-spotting and problematising (see Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997; Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011)
17	Do not fill a gap in the literature that is not worth filling	There may be a good reason there is a gap in the literature. For example, replicating research in another unresearched country may not be worth doing
18	Be clear on the precise papers being contributed to/ extended	Identify the exact papers being contributed to, explaining how those papers are extended. Build on top-quality papers in the literature
19	Ensure your theory fits the research	Justify your theoretical choices (see Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007; Feldman, 2004b; Mayer and Sparrowe, 2013; Sutton and Staw, 1995; Weick, 1995)
20	Do not cite too broad a literature	If too many subject areas are reflected in the references, it may suggest the research is so broad that it lacks depth (see Colquitt, 2013)
21	Do not cite too much literature	Too many references at the end of a paper suggest the research may not be focused. Many references may also suggest the paper may come from a doctoral dissertation
22	Synchronise your research design	Research is a complex system of moving parts. The literature review, research questions, research methods, results/findings and contribution must be "all-singing, all-dancing" coherent and internally consistent

(*continued*)

Table I.

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Rule No.	Rule	Description
23	Express your research questions/hypotheses in a focused clear manner	Reveal your research questions early in the study. Do not keep your readers guessing. The constructs/variables for the research should be clearly reflected in the research questions/hypotheses. The dependent (left hand side) variable comes first, followed by the key variables of interest, followed by the control variables
24	Your research questions/ hypotheses should be operationalisable/ measurable	The research questions/hypotheses should be capable of being operationalised/measured. The constructs/variables need first to be defined and then operationalised/measured. Also consider data availability
25	Ensure your research methods address your research questions/ hypotheses	Your research methods should be capable of operationalising/ measuring the constructs/variables in the research questions/ hypotheses (see Edmondson and McManus, 2007)
26	Pass the replication/ transparency test	Method and methodology need to be described in sufficient detail to allow another researcher to replicate the study or for the research methods to be transparent. Describe your research methods in sufficient detail, but as concisely as possible, so they are replicable/ transparent
27	Do not contaminate the crime scene	Data collection methods should be as neutral and unbiased as possible. You should take steps as much as possible and as appropriate to avoid influencing the findings of the research. For some qualitative research, especially from a critical perspective, this may not be possible. You might offer your research instruments to readers on request
28	Make your analytical framework transparent	How you analyse your data should be clear. Rule No. 26 "Pass the replication/transparency test" is also relevant here
29	Make the conceptual leap	In qualitative research, abstract ideas/concepts from the data to a higher level. For example, move from Level 1 coding to Level 2 coding to higher level more abstract takeaways (see Klag and Langley, 2013)
30	Make the particular the general	Find ways of generalising from the specific context of your research (Parker and Northcott, 2016). This not only is especially relevant to qualitative research, but also has implications for quantitative research. This rule nicely contrasts with (but does not contradict) Rule No. 40 "Move from the general to the particular" (see Bansal and Corley, 2011; Köhler, 2016; Pratt, 2009; Rynes and Gephart, 2004)
31	Identify the surprise from your research	Find the unexpected in your research. If your results are obvious, your readers may feel cheated. Be able to explain your results in a convincing manner
③ *Writing research*		
32	Snack and binge[a]	Snatch bits of time (say between lectures) to write short quick pieces. Find opportunities for intensive writing sessions. People say your need a chunk of time for research. This is true but learn to use shorter periods as well
33	Write it in five minutes, revise it five times over[b]	Write quickly (quick and dirty). Refine and edit multiple times (prink and preen) (see Belcher, 2014)
34	Write for an international audience	Think globally. Journal readers come from many countries. Make sure your research is written in a way that it of interest to, and can be followed by, a wide audience (see Eden and Rynes, 2003; George, 2012)
35	Know your audience	Write persuasively for your target audience to ensure editors/ reviewers/readers buy your ideas. Rule No. 36 "Tell a good story" is also relevant here (see Faff, 2015)

Table I. (*continued*)

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Rule No.	Rule	Description
36	Tell a good story	Write persuasively to tell a compelling story and sell your research. Rule No. 35 "Know your audience" is also relevant here (see Gardiner and Kearns, 2018; Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Pollock and Bono, 2013)
37	Craft a does-what-it-says-on-the-tin title	The title should clearly reflect the research. Smart titles are value adding. Cute titles may detract. The title should be discoverable on the internet. Google does not give weight to sub-titles. Too general and too long titles are not discoverable (see Feldman, 2004a, Oxford Research Encyclopedias, 2013)
38	Write clearly	The writing should be clear and easy to follow so that, say, a final-year undergraduate can understand it. "Our rich data and carefully executed analysis will be as naught if we cannot somehow make it speak" (Klag and Langley, 2013, p. 149). Read your work out loud to hear whether it sounds good. Rule No. 54 "Avoid complex words" is also relevant here (see Gardiner and Kearns, 2010; Morley, 2018; Ragins, 2012; Sword, 2012)
39	Write concisely	Get to your point quickly. Write enough (parsimoniously) but not too much (which only adds noise to your story)
40	Move from the general to the particular	Ease readers into the material by opening your story at a higher level, then developing it into a more detailed exposition. A topical example can sometimes help to start a story. This rule nicely contrasts with (but does not contradict) Rule No. 30 "Make the particular the general"
41	Start your story in the right place	Judge where to start your story. Do not start it too far away or too close such that the opening is too detailed. For example, "the first accounting standard on X was published in 19XX" is too far away for all but history papers; "Paragraph X of IFRS Y requires Z" is far too close and detailed a place to start a story. Rule No. 40 "Move from the general to the particular" is also relevant here
42	Make your work looks like it is written by the best academic in the world	Top academics do not make spelling errors, punctuation errors, are not sloppy with referencing, etc. Make the reviewers think your work is their work, by making your work as perfect as possible. The tiny details/the hygiene issues count. Be obsessive in your attention to detail. Rule No. 55 "Don't make grammatical errors" is also relevant here
43	Structure your work in a logical manner	Ensure your work moves logically from A→B→C, etc. (Not A→W→G, etc.)
44	Choose your paper's structure/headings carefully	The structure/headings are a critical element for a good paper. Examine how other papers are structured, including those in your target journal. Deconstruct papers section-by-section, paragraph-by-paragraph. Use headings and sub-headings to signpost the paper for your readers. Rule No. 14 "Look at other papers to ensure yours meets the requirements and standards" and Rule No. 82 "Examine how other papers in the target journal are structured" are also relevant here (see Mensh and Kording, 2017)
45	If your paper is a manuscript/working paper, format it like other top-class manuscripts/working papers	Your working paper/manuscript should look professional and should adopt the formatting and layout of the top working papers/manuscripts in your field. Rule No. 14 "Look at other papers to ensure yours meets the requirements and standards" is also relevant here
46	Do not let Word take control of your document	Make sure the layout, spacing, etc., of your document is the way you want it, not the way Word wants it. I avoid the automated features of Word, so I (not Word) own and am in control of my document. If you use Word's automated features, make sure to review your document for errors. You need to change Word's automated settings as appropriate. Save and backup your work

(*continued*)

Table I.

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Rule No.	Rule	Description
47	Use tables and diagrams	Papers with variety – text, tables and diagrams – are more interesting to read. Tables and diagrams are concise means of presenting complex ideas. Every table and diagram should be numbered and labelled. Data within tables/diagrams should also be labelled (e.g. units of measurement should be clear). Every table and diagram should be mentioned by number in the text. Check your target journal for layout of tables/diagrams (see Rougier *et al.*, 2014)
48	Look at how other authors design their tables and diagrams	You do not have to reinvent the wheel. Closely examine other people's diagrams to learn about design
49	Tables and diagrams should pass the at-a-glance-clear test	Tables and diagrams should be easy to understand. They should be accompanied by a detailed key. Tables and diagrams should be capable of being understood independently of the text
50	Write to pass the armchair test	Your readers should not have to get out of their armchairs to pick up the phone to ask you what you meant by a sentence in your paper. Your paper must be capable of being read on a stand-alone basis
51	Make one long sentence into two short sentences	Shorter sentences are generally more readable and easy to follow. Rule No. 38 "Write clearly" is relevant here (see Healy, 2018; Strunk and White, 2000)
52	Remove redundant words	Redundant words are those that, when removed, do not change the meaning of the sentence. Edit out superfluous words. Rule No. 39 "Write concisely" is also relevant here (see Strunk and White, 2000)
53	Write as you would speak (professionally)	Avoid language you would not use in everyday life. Language and tone should be professional/academic (see Morley, 2018). Overly personal remarks and jokes may grate on readers
54	Avoid complex words	Write so that your work is capable of being understood by a final-year undergraduate student. Rule No. 38 "Write clearly" is also relevant here
55	Do not make grammatical errors	Top authors do not make basic mistakes. Try to write like a top author. Rule No. 42 "Make your work look like it is written by the best academic in the world" and No. 56 "Use the grammar as well as the spell check in Word" are also relevant here (see Wiens, 2012)
56	Use the grammar as well as the spell check in Word	The grammar check in Word will help you to improve your writing. Rule No. 55 "Don't make grammatical errors" is also relevant here (see Wiens, 2012)
57	Write in the present tense, until the conclusions section; then write in the past tense about what you did	When reviewing prior research, the publications exist today even if they have been published in the past. Research methods and methodology tend to be described in the present tense
58	Unless the journal style guidelines specify otherwise, write in the active not passive voice	The active voice is a more compelling form of writing. At the same time, there shouldn't be too many "I"s and "we"s
59	Do not overly direct-quote other people's work; paraphrase instead	The research is yours and should look like yours. Too many quotes might create the impression your research is too reliant on the work of others. Writing style is individual and direct quotes bring too many different writing styles (voices) into the paper (see Graff *et al.*, 2006)
60	If quoting other authors, make sure the quote is accurate	It is amazing how many times authors are quoted inaccurately. Check, and double check, the accuracy of your quotes, making sure to consult the original source, not secondary sources
61	Choose the right word	Writing is almost mathematical in the need for precision and accuracy ($2+2=4/2+2\neq5$; vinaigrette≠vignette/antidote≠anecdote).

Table I. (*continued*)

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Rule No.	Rule	Description
		The spell check in Word will not pick up these errors (see The British Council, 2010)
62	Avoid acronyms	Acronyms, other than the obvious (the USA, the UK, etc.), are a barrier to readability
63	Summarise your research in a 3 min (450 words) elevator speech	Summarising your research concisely can help in more clearly writing a longer paper. Kinney (1986, p. 349) gives the following advice: Summarise your paper in three sentences: what is the research problem? (What are you doing?); why is the problem important? (Who cares?); and what will you do to address the problem? (How are you going to do it?) He advises that this should form the basis of your abstract/introduction (see Faff, 2015). An alternative exercise is to summarise your work in 1/3/5 min versions
64	Learn the craft of writing abstracts	Some journals provide guidance on how to write an abstract (see Koopman, 1997)
65	Avoid citing other papers and using unfamiliar acronyms in your abstract	An abstract is often presented separately from the article, so it must be able to stand alone. For this reason, references should be avoided, but if essential, then cite the author(s) and year(s). Also, non-standard or uncommon abbreviations should be avoided, but if essential they must be defined at their first mention in the abstract. This advice is taken from the style guidelines of the journal, *Accounting Organizations and Society*
66	Label variables/constructs consistently	Changing labels confuses readers, e.g. "board size"/"size"; "board experience"/"experience". When "size"/"experience" is used does it refer to "board size"/"board experience" or something else (e.g. "firm size"/"director experience")?
67	Sequence variables/ constructs consistently	It also confuses readers to switch the sequencing of lists within the research, including within tables. Be pedantic in being consistent
④ *Conferencing research*		
68	Apply citation and referencing style guidelines perfectly	Apply the style guidelines of the journal, in terms of citations and references, to the last full stop, comma and brackets. Check when to use "and" vs "&". Some journal reviewers start by looking at the references, checking if they are in good shape. Poor referencing may create the impression that it is a "Reject" paper
69	Include issue number, as well as volume number, in your references	When the issue number is missing, it can take frustratingly longer for readers to find the paper in the electronic systems of their university
70	Conference your research	Conferencing your work is a precursor to publication. It is a means of obtaining feedback and improving your work before sending it out for review. If you are presenting in a conference session, you should stay for the whole session. Show interest in the other papers in the session. Engage with your fellow presenters. When attending other sessions, discretely move between sessions, between papers. Don't move in the middle of the presentation of a paper
71	If you are presenting, do a practice run (or two) in advance[c]	Rehearsing your presentation in advance (rather than winging it) and speaking it aloud may highlight problems/opportunities that might not otherwise be evident. Rehearsing also facilitates an advance check on both timing and time
72	Choose to attend conference sessions based on quality of presenter, not just topic	The quality of the research can be more important than the topic. Conferences are opportunities to learn from the best researchers
73	Look for and give feedback	Find opportunities for obtaining feedback on your research at conferences, at seminars, from visiting scholars to your university. Find opportunities for providing feedback at conferences and at seminars

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Rule No.	Rule	Description
74	Keep a note of feedback	Ask a friend to keep a record of the questions and discussion at your session. Open your mind to accepting and responding to the feedback. Do not be defensive. In revising your paper, address issues raised. Reviewers for your paper may be in the audience. Rule No. 87 "Embrace the reviewers' comments with a positive mindset" is also relevant here
75	Network	Use conferences to expand your network of contacts. It can be useful to be known in your academic community. If you are lucky, you might find a co-author at a conference. Your reviewers might be at the conference. You might keep a record of your network
⑤ *Publishing research*		
76	Do not jump the gun[d]	Papers should be polished and ready for submission before being submitted. Submitting too early will waste everyone's time and end up as a reject
77	Take care in choosing your name for publication	Choose as distinctive a name as possible. Use middle initials (e.g. Niamh M. Brennan). If you have a double-barrel surname, insert a hyphen between the two, so they stay together as your surname (e.g. Encarna Guillamon-Saorin). Some people's names are common (e.g. John Smith). Here is a distinctive name: Alice-Liang Xu
78	Make sure your paper is a good fit for your target journal	Fit is more important than ranking of the journal. Target the top journal with which your paper has a fit. In the absence of fit, your paper risks being desk rejected. You need to be familiar with the ethos of your target journal. Read the aims and objectives of the journal carefully (see Reuber and Sharma, 2013)
79	Do not publish in or cite pay-to-publish journals	Pay-to-publish journals can damage your reputation (see Bealls, 2018)
80	Hook into the journal's "back yard[e]"	If your paper is a good fit, it should be possible to connect your paper with prior research published in the target journal (see Grant and Pollock, 2011)
81	Cite papers from the target journal	If your paper is a good fit, it should be possible to find relevant papers in the target journal to cite. If you cannot find relevant papers, it suggests it is the wrong target journal
82	Examine how other papers in the target journal are structured	Deconstruct other papers in the target journal section-by-section, paragraph-by-paragraph, sentence-by-sentence. Be forensic in your analysis. Rule No. 14 "Look at other papers to ensure yours meets the requirements and standards" is also relevant here (see Anglim, 2013; Reuber and Sharma, 2013)
83	If the journal requires a cover letter, make sure to write a compelling letter	Some journals require a cover letter to the editor. A few publishers provide guidance on how to write cover letters (see Mudrack, 2015; Stolowy, 2018)
84	Overcome your fear of rejection	All top authors have experienced rejection. Ball and Brown (1968), the most highly cited and influential paper in my discipline, was rejected by *The Accounting Review* (Ball and Brown, 2014, p. 17). There is no shame in rejection. Some academics have even published their "CVs of failure"
85	Have Plan B in case your paper is rejected	Have an alternative target journal in mind in the event your paper is rejected
86	Understand why you got a desk rejection and learn from it	A desk rejection occurs where the editor does not consider your paper suitable to send out to review. Fit with the objectives of the journal and poor writing are two common causes of a desk reject (see Craig, 2010; Stolowy, 2017)
87	Embrace the reviewers' comments with a positive mindset	Reviewers give you their expertise free. They are trying to help you, though this may not always be apparent, especially if comments are

Table I. (*continued*)

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Rule No.	Rule	Description
		expressed overly harshly (see Bergh, 2002; Carpenter, 2009; Harrison, 2002; Rynes, 2006a, b; Seibert, 2006)
88	Address (almost) every reviewer comment in a revise-and-resubmit	Respond to reviewers' comments, point-by-point, sentence-by-sentence and phrase-by-phrase. Make it easy for reviewers to follow how you have addressed their comments. I find a two-column reviewer comment-author response table format useful (see Agarwal *et al.*, 2006; Bergh, 2002; Michelon, 2018; Rynes, 2006a, b; Seibert, 2006; Shaw, 2012)
89	Put revise-and-resubmits to the top of your to-do list	Getting published takes a long time, often many years. Do not add to the time by sitting on revise-and-resubmits. Rule No. 8 "Prepare a pipeline" is also relevant here
90	If your paper is rejected, make sure you fully understand why your paper was rejected	Deconstruct the editors' and reviewers' comments point-by-point to ensure you learn from the rejection (see Craig, 2010; Daft, 1985)
91	If your paper is rejected, address all the reviewers' comments before targeting another journal	If you submit your paper to another journal, there is a chance it will be sent to the same reviewers. If you do not fix the problems in the paper, it is probable new reviewers will find the same problems
92	Customise your rejected paper for the new target journal	Find a hook, cite papers from, comply with the style guidelines, of the new targeted journal. Rule No. 78 "Make sure your paper is a good fit for your target journal" and Rule No. 80 "Hook into the journal's 'back yard'" are also relevant here
93	Say "yes" to reviewing	Reviewing is a wonderful self-development tool. You can learn from other people's mistakes. Reviewing can also build your reputation with key influencers such as journal editors and associate editors. Do not review for pay-to-publish journals. Rule No. 79 "Do not publish in or cite pay-to-publish journals" is also relevant here (see Colquitt and Ireland, 2009; Hempel, 2014)
⑥ *Authorship*		
94	Co-author	Co-authors can help productivity. Two heads are better than one. Co-authors can share the pain of rejection. If English is not your first language, a native-English speaking co-author is advantageous. Rule No. 8 "Prepare a pipeline" and Rule No. 10 "Find a critical friend" are also relevant here (see Tucker *et al.*, 2016)
95	Only co-author when there is a meeting of minds between you and your co-authors	Co-authors can hinder productivity. This can happen if there isn't a meeting of minds and if the work practices of co-authors do not gel
96	Do not take on a free rider	"[1]These authors contributed equally to this project". There were three authors of this paper. Footnote 1 only appeared beside two authors' names. The two authors "outed" the free rider
97	Do not be a free rider	The reputational consequences of Rule 96 for the third co-author were damaging
98	Avoid predatory co-authors	Predatory co-authors are likely to also be free riders. Not all free riders are predatory. (see @retractionwatch for examples of unethical behaviour in publishing)
99	Build trust with co-authors	If your co-authors have the original idea for the research or have done more of the work, put their names first even if not in alphabetical order. Make sure your co-authors know if you are presenting the paper at a conference or seminar

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Rule No.	Rule	Description
⑦ *Concluding rule*		
100	Enjoy your research	These research rules of the game begin and end with the same rule. Rule No. 1 is the most important rule, first and last, which I reinforce by means of repetition. Rule No. 1 "Enjoy your research" is also relevant here!

Notes: [a]I have adapted this phrase, thanks to Gardiner and Kearns (2011); [b]I thank Yiannis Gabriel for this rule; [c]I thank Steve Evans for this rule; [d]I thank Elizabeth Morton for this rule; [e]I thank Gus de Franco for this phrase

Table I.

It is not enough to read and know these rules. They must be applied in practice, which is a lifelong learning process. As Kavanagh and Scally (2018, pp. 8-9) observe, "games are epistemologically beyond the compass of lists and definitions and can only be properly known through playing. Games are phenomenological practices as they emotionally engage players, giving them a meaningful experience and opportunity to express themselves". A checklist (Appendix) helps the authors self-assess their own work for application of the rules. Make sure you can answer "yes" to (almost) all the rules (as appropriate) before you submit your manuscript for review.

This is a high-level introduction/summary. For each rule, there are swathes of additional resources available to obtain greater depth of understanding of each rule.

My list of 100 rules is not exhaustive. For example, research integrity is critical, but is only touched on in these rules. These rules do not guarantee success in the world of academic international peer-review publishing. If properly used, they should ensure the research meets some basic requirements for top-quality publishing.

Bamber (2016), ter Bogt (2014), Buckby (2013), Cortese (2009), L'Huillier (2012, 2014) and Parker (2012, 2015) are amusing takes on the rules of the game in academic life.

I have written this paper in the hope that some or all of it may prove to be a game changer for readers.

Notes

1. I use the phrase "rules of the game" tongue-in-cheek, capturing theoretical physicist Edward Teller's sentiment that (pure) research "is a game, is play, led by curiosity, by taste, style, judgment, intangibles" (cited in Reagan, 1967, p. 1383). Kalfa *et al.* (2018) have a darker take on playing the game in academia.

2. Further resources complementing this paper are available at: www.niamhbrennan.ie and @100RulesoftheGame

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Appendix. Self-assessment checklist

Rule No.	Rule	Yes	Maybe	No	Comment
	① Overall				
No.1	Enjoy your research				
No.2	Play to your strengths				
No.3	Take ownership/responsibility for your research				
No.4	Aim to become known in the literature				
No.5	Do not be known for being a one-trick pony				
No.6	Develop a publication strategy/plan				
No.7	Develop publication targets				
No.8	Prepare a pipeline				
No.9	Learn to juggle research and other demands (e.g. teaching)				
No.10	Find a critical friend				
No.11	Be careful with research funding				
	② Designing research				
No.12	Pick interesting topics				
No.13	Pick narrow, deep topics				
No.14	Look at other papers to ensure yours meets the requirements and standards				
No.15	Make a substantive contribution to the prior literature				
No.16	Find ways of contributing to the prior literature				
No.17	Do not fill a gap in the literature that is not worth filling				
No.18	Be clear on the precise papers being contributed to/extended				
No.19	Ensure your theory fits the research				
No.20	Do not cite too broad a literature				
No.21	Do not cite too much literature				
No.22	Synchronise your research design				
No.23	Express your research questions/hypotheses in a focussed clear manner				
No.24	Your research questions/hypotheses should be operationalisable/measurable				
No.25	Ensure your research methods address your research questions/hypotheses				
No.26	Pass the replication/transparency test				
No.27	Do not contaminate the crime scene				
No.28	Make your analytical framework transparent				
No.29	Make the conceptual leap				
No.30	Make the particular the general				
No.31	Identify the surprise from your research				
	③ Writing research				
No.32	Snack and binge				
No.33	Write it in five minutes, revise it five times over				
No.34	Write for an international audience				
No.35	Know your audience				
No.36	Tell a good story				
No.37	Craft a does-what-it-says-on-the-tin title				
No.38	Write clearly				
No.39	Write concisely				
No.40	Move from the general to the particular				
No.41	Start your story in the right place				
No.42	Make your work looks like it is written by the best academic in the world				
No.43	Structure your work in a logical manner				
No.44	Choose your paper's structure/headings carefully				
No.45	If your paper is a manuscript/working paper, format it like other top-class manuscripts/working papers				
No.46	Do not let Word take control of your document				
No.47	Use tables and diagrams				
No.48	Look at how other authors design their tables and diagrams				
No.49	Tables and diagrams should pass the at-a-glance-clear test				
No.50	Write to pass the armchair test				
No.51	Make one long sentence into two short sentences				
No.52	Remove redundant words				
No.53	Write as you would speak (professionally)				
No.54	Avoid complex words				
No.55	Do not make grammatical errors				
No.56	Switch on the grammar as well as the spell check in Word				
No.57	Write in the present tense, until the conclusions section; then write in the past tense about what you did				
No.58	Unless the journal style guidelines specify otherwise, write in the active not passive voice				
No.59	Do not overly quote other people's work; paraphrase instead				
No.60	If quoting other authors, make sure the quote is accurate				
No.61	Choose the right word				
No.62	Avoid acronyms				
No.63	Summarise you research in a 3 min (450 words) elevator speech				
No.64	Learn the craft of writing abstracts				
No.65	Avoid citing other papers and using unfamiliar acronyms in your abstract				
No.66	Label variables/constructs consistently				
No.67	Sequence variables/constructs consistently				
No.68	Apply citation and referencing style guidelines				
No.69	Include issue number as well as volume number in your references				
	④ Conferencing research				
No.70	Conference your research				
No.71	If you are presenting, do a practice run (or two) in advance				
No.72	Choose to attend conference sessions based on quality of presenter, not just the topic				
No.73	Look for and give feedback				
No.74	Keep a note of feedback				
No.75	Network				

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⑤ Publishing research					
No.76	Don't jump the gun				
No.77	Take care in choosing your name for publication				
No.78	Make sure your paper is a good fit for your target journal				
No.79	Do not publish in or cite pay-to-publish journals				
No.80	Hook into the journal's "back yard"				
No.81	Cite papers from the target journal				
No.82	Examine how other papers in the target journal are structured				
No.83	If the journal requires a cover letter, make sure to write a compelling letter				
No.84	Overcome your fear of rejection				
No.85	Have Plan B in case your paper is rejected				
No.86	Understand why you got a desk rejection and learn from it				
No.87	Embrace the reviewers' comments with a positive mindset				
No.88	Address (almost) every reviewer comment in a revise-and-resubmit				
No.89	Put revise-and-resubmits to the top of your to-do list				
No.90	If your paper is rejected, make sure you fully understand why your paper was rejected				
No.91	If your paper is rejected, address all the reviewers' comments before targeting another journal				
No.92	Customise your rejected paper for the new target journal				
No.93	Say "yes" to reviewing				
⑥ Authorship					
No.94	Co-author				
No.95	Only co-author when there is a meeting of minds between you and your co-authors				
No.96	Do not take on a free rider				
No.97	Do not be a free rider				
No.98	Avoid predatory co-authors				
No.99	Build trust with co-authors				
⑦ Concluding rule					
No.100	Enjoy your research				

Corresponding author
Niamh M. Brennan can be contacted at: niamh.brennan@ucd.ie

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