

Discussion Meetings

Authors are invited to consider submitting papers to be read at a Discussion Meeting of the Royal Statistical Society. These meetings have been held since the Society's beginnings as 'ordinary meetings' and are one of the great traditions of the Society. Colloquially known as 'read papers', many of the major advances in statistics were first presented for discussion in this way.

What is a Discussion Meeting?

At a Discussion Meeting, traditionally held at the offices of the Royal Statistical Society in London, a paper is presented in person by the authors in front of an open audience, who are invited to comment on the paper or topic. The paper and discussion are subsequently published in the Society's journal. Since the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, these meetings have been held as online events enabling people to join live from all over the world.

What type of paper is suitable?

Papers for discussion may contain a significant advance in statistical methodology, focus on a particular statistical debate or have some other wide relevance to the profession. The criteria for acceptance in all cases are the quality of the paper and the potential to attract discussion. Discussion papers should be written to draw in a large and varied audience and to stimulate people to attend the meeting and to contribute to the discussion in person or at least in writing.

In general, papers for discussion might include the following:

- Innovative new methodology
- Studies of applied statistical problems of sufficient general interest to warrant discussion and publication
- Major advances in applied probability
- Interesting and new applications of existing methodology
- Work concerned with the interface between statistics and other fields
- Work concerned with statistical education
- Expository papers, state of the art reviews and critical summaries of statistical material
- Critical studies of areas of economic, scientific or social interest in which statistical methods have an important role
- Issues of general interest to statisticians, especially inviting a wide variety of views

This list is not exhaustive and is not intended to rule out other works.

Discussion papers can be aimed at any of the three series of the journal, A, B or C. Papers describing new methodology are usually published in Series B of the Journal, whereas those with a more applied, policy or societal focus are likely to appear in Series A or C.

Submitting a discussion paper

The submission and review process for papers that are suitable for Series B is different from that for the other series. Papers suitable for Series A or C will be considered individually upon submission. Papers suitable for Series B follow a system of regular submission deadlines:

- 1st January
- 1st April
- 1st July
- 1st October

Manuscripts can be submitted via the ScholarOne Manuscripts on-line submission and peer review system. If you wish your paper to be considered for a Discussion Meeting, you can log into the relevant ScholarOne site for Series A, B or C using one of these links:

- Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A (Statistics in Society)
<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jrssa>
- Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series B (Statistical Methodology)
<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jrssb>
- Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series C (Applied Statistics)
<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jrssc>

When you start to create your submission, you will be able to choose '**Discussion Paper**' from the manuscript types offered.

It would be helpful to indicate in a covering letter the reasons for submitting your paper to this journal series. It would also be helpful to indicate whether, in the event it is not accepted for reading and discussion, you would like it to be considered for publication as a regular paper in the series you have selected.

Peer review process

The review process is overseen by the Discussion Papers Editor. Papers submitted through the Discussion Meeting route will be quickly screened by the Discussion Meetings Committee (DMC) to assess whether the content is appropriate for discussion.

There are no submission deadlines for papers that are aimed at Series A or C. These papers will be reviewed individually upon passing the initial screen.

The intention is that the screening process is completed quickly, normally within 3 weeks.

Papers written for narrow specialist groups will not be accepted for reading, although they may be perfectly acceptable for publication as a regular article and might, at the editor's discretion, be suggested for transfer to be reviewed as a regular paper.

The review process for papers that pass the initial screen then depends upon the content of the paper and the series of the journal that is most appropriate. Papers which present significant new methodology and are aimed at or seem suitable for Series B, are passed to

Research Section Committee for full review. Other discussable papers are passed to the most appropriate of the other sections of the Society or can be handled by the DMC itself if it does not fall unambiguously within the remit of any one section.

In all cases the appropriate section will consider the paper, arrange referees for papers of interest, and recommend acceptance, revision or rejection.

The intention is to provide a first answer to authors within four months.

The Discussion Meeting

The programme for Discussion Meetings normally allows for one a month between September and June. Most meetings are held in the early evening at the Society's premises. Occasionally, they are organised elsewhere, for example at a session of a major statistical conference in or outside the UK or to coincide with a particular statistical occasion. Since March 2020 they have been held as interactive online events due to the pandemic.

Preprints of the discussion paper are available in advance to download from the Society's website and some printed copies can be picked up at the meeting.

The usual format of the meetings is that the authors summarise informally the main features of their paper in about 40 minutes. This allows people attending the meeting who have not studied the paper in advance to follow its substance. After the authors have presented their paper, the discussion is opened by two invited speakers who each have up to 10 minutes (or about 800 words in writing) to comment on the paper. This is called proposing and seconding the vote of thanks. Their role is not only to praise the authors for good work but also to ask them some searching questions about it.

Further shorter comments (up to five minutes or 400 words in writing) are then invited from the audience. If there is enough time at the end of the two-hour meeting and before the authors are given the opportunity to respond very briefly verbally (and at greater length in writing in the journal), the secretary for the meeting will read out any contributions that have been sent in from people who cannot be present. Contributions in writing (again, 400 words maximum) are welcome up to two weeks after the meeting.

Occasionally the format of meetings may be rather different. They may be longer and include several papers, or they may not include substantial papers at all but be focused on discussion of specific themes, introduced by two or three main speakers presenting differing points of view. Such discussion meetings will often be concerned with matters of public interest. The process for these types of meeting is similar to that for the single-paper meetings but the conduct of the meeting and subsequent publication may depend on the individual circumstances. For example, an article in Significance magazine might be an appropriate record rather than a report in the journal.

Discussion Meetings are filmed and made available through YouTube after the meeting. A link to YouTube is provided on the RSS website.