

Statistical  
Excellence Award  
for Early-Career  
Writing

The why, the what  
and the how



April 2021 volume 18 issue 2

# The data economy

Past, present and future – a new series begins

ROYAL  
STATISTICAL  
SOCIETY  
DATA | EVIDENCE | DECISIONS

ASA  
AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION  
Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics

***p*-values**  
Are we any closer to  
a “post  $p < 0.05$  era”?

**Sound human**  
Statistics, statisticians  
and the news media

# The why

- *Significance* is a showcase for statistics and data science
  - Challenge myths
  - Answer questions
  - Support decisions
- Written by experts for anyone interested in the analysis and interpretation of data

# The why

- To reach a broad audience, we need:
  - Enthusiastic statisticians and data scientists
  - Strong writers
  - Compelling storytellers
- To find these people, we launched the Young Statisticians Writing Competition

# The what

- The competition was launched in 2011, with the first winner announced in 2012
- In 2017, it became part of the RSS Statistical Excellence Awards and was renamed the Statistical Excellence Award for Early-Career Writing
- The winning article is published in *Significance*
- Runners-up may also be featured in *Significance*

# The what

- What's in it for us?
  - A great piece of content from a talented young writer
- What's in it for you?
  - Exposure to our international readership
  - Coverage in mainstream/science media
  - The chance to present at the RSS 2021 Conference in Manchester, England

# The what

- What we're looking for
  - 1,500 to 2,500 words on any subject... as long as it involves data, statistics and statistical analysis
  - An easy-to-read, magazine-style feature
  - An original article that isn't under consideration for publication elsewhere
- See [significancemagazine.com/writingcomp](http://significancemagazine.com/writingcomp) for the full set of competition rules

# The how

- How do you decide on a topic?
- **Remember: you can write about *anything***
  - The population of rats in New York City
  - Using probability distributions to plan a wedding
  - Analysing Google search data to see whether Christmas really does come earlier each year
- See more examples at [significancemagazine.com/613](http://significancemagazine.com/613)

# The how

- Ask yourself: “What’s the best way to showcase the power of statistics and data science?”
- You might want to:
  - Bust apart a popular myth  
*“Are millennials really less politically engaged?”* (Kevin Lin, 2017)
  - Answer a burning question  
*“How many cancers can we hope to prevent?”*  
(Stensrud and Valberg, 2018)
  - Provide evidence to support decision-making  
*“How many guests should I invite to my wedding to ensure a full house?”*  
(Damjan Vukcevic, 2013)



# The how

Make sure it's a topic you're interested in,  
personally and professionally

If you're not interested in  
what you're writing about,  
your audience will know

# The how

- Tips for writing an engaging article:
  - Strong introduction, grab the reader's attention straight away
  - Make it clear why they *have* to read your article
  - Give them just a hint of what they are going to learn, or find out, if they carry on reading
  - But don't give the entire game away upfront

# The how

- Think about story structure:
  - Once you've grabbed their attention with a strong introduction, draw them further into the subject
  - Start fleshing out the background and context
  - Introduce them to new ideas and concepts in a natural way – don't front-load the detail and explanation, let the story develop
  - Most important: tell the reader only what they need to know to understand your story

# The how

- Accessibility is key
  - Don't get bogged down in detail
  - Don't use jargon to explain other jargon
  - Make things relevant and relatable – always use real-life examples and analogies where possible
  - Always ask yourself, “Can I make this more readable?”

**Write:** “Parts of the data set were pretty noisy”

**Don't write:** “There was evidence of considerable heteroscedasticity”

(with thanks to Robert Matthews for the example)

# The how

- End your article by circling back to where you started
  - Return to the example or question or promise that was made in the introduction
  - What do we know now that we didn't know before?
  - Coming full circle helps the reader to appreciate what they have learned and how far they have come in their understanding
  - But don't just restate what the article has said, e.g.: “In this article, we have shown that...”
  - Keep the reader engaged – tell your story – right until the very end
- See [bit.ly/notes4authors](https://bit.ly/notes4authors) for more tips and advice

# The how

- How do we pick a winner?
  - Our judging panel, including *Significance* editors and YSS committee members, read and debate the entries
- Judges are looking for:
  - Interesting, engaging and easy to read articles
  - A strong story, married to sound statistics and fault-free analysis

# The how?

Three finalists will be selected in June,  
and the winner will be announced at the  
RSS Statistical Excellence Awards ceremony  
in July

**Best of luck in the competition**