Editorial

How can we promote the *Model Assisted Statistics and Application* journal?

Dear authors, editors, editorial board members, reviewers, readers, friends, and would-be friends of the journal of *Model Assisted Statistics and Applications*.

Congratulations on this Three-Volume anniversary! And thanks to all of you for your great support and efforts on behalf of MASA!

As the Guest-Editor for 2009, I would like to share with you some thoughts on reaching for further MASA progress and seeing it flourish. MASA is already an interesting and useful journal, but certainly it can achieve even greater success.

Some interesting statistics: Examining the semiannual distribution of MASA papers by authors/continents, we observe that Asian countries contribute the greatest proportion – see Table 1.

Table 1
Distribution of the papers by authors/continents (100% for each row)

Semi-annual	Africa	America	Asia	Australia	Europe
v.1, #1–2	6	11	50	11	22
v.1, #3–4	5	19	50	13	13
v.2, #1–2	–	45	55	–	–
v.2, #3–4	–	29	43	7	21
v.3, #1–2	7	43	43	–	7
v.3, #3–4	–	12	88	–	–
Total %	3	24	56	6	11

Another interesting distribution is obtained (based on keywords) for the main subjects of MASA papers – see Table 2. It shows a clear concentration of works in survey sampling techniques, and also testing, estimation, and computation problems. Most of these works consist of pure derivation without much attention to applications. Regression modeling and other multivariate methods are definitely underrepresented. Contributions of works on applications and general methodology are rather modest too.

Table 2
Distribution of the papers by the subject (100% for each row)

Semi-annual	Survey sampling techniques	Tests, estimation, computation	Regressions, multivariate techniques	Applications, general methodology
v.1, #1–2	50	39	–	11
v.1, #3–4	42	16	21	21
v.2, #1–2	23	31	15	31
v.2, #3–4	23	41	18	18
v.3, #1–2	40	33	7	20
v.3, #3–4	33	44	17	6
Total, %	36	34	13	17

So the question is, how can we make the journal a really enjoyable and useful read for a wider set of statisticians, researchers, and students who wish to use modern statistical techniques to solve theoretical and practical problems in any field of human interest and activity? We must endeavor to make MASA more attractive to this wider audience.

To this aim, I would like to direct the authors' and referees' attention to the following issues.

1. Purely technically oriented papers cannot constitute the main body of an application-oriented journal, and MASA is in part such a journal. Instead of derivation for the sake of derivation, a reader should see a real sense and meaning in each work. Of course, it does not mean we will discount theoretical papers; rather they should present a plainly formulated aim and useful results. Theory is beautiful because it gives life to statistics. But theory itself does not constitute the whole game of applied statistical research: Two players are needed – theory and its use.

2. As an author, give a clear introduction including background and purpose of the work. Tell the readers what has and what has not been done in the area. Give the rationale for the study – the readers do deserve to know from the beginning why you have put all that effort to conduct the research. Clearly state the objectives so that the readers don't have to deduce them from your results, discussion and even worse, conclusions. It always makes sense to describe the background for the problem; never assume that the readers of your paper are specialists in any particular subject you study.

3. Pay much attention to providing an explanation for which *model* is suggested and used in the paper, especially because MASA is a journal on "model assisted statistics". In the absence of stated laws, researchers need models as a simplification of real life phenomena and processes. These models are utilized in applied statistics, so the results of their applications should be demonstrated in addition to the distributions, objectives and criteria. A model does not live if it is not applied; its essence appears only when it is embodied in a real estimation, analysis, classification, or prediction process. All roads lead to Rome, and all models should lead to applications – otherwise, they are poor models.

4. Models should be supplemented with verification and validation of their performance, either as a numerical simulation or with examples of practical applications of the considered techniques using real life data – because MASA is also a journal for 'applications'. This is not to say that every single MASA paper has to present real life applications. If a paper is not accompanied by a real example, we may publish it provided that it presents theoretically or methodologically interesting results. In selected situations we may publish strictly theoretical papers, but those should indicate some potential for solving practical problems. Simulations offer wide possibilities to present a models' performance as well.

5. Papers need to be more informative and user-friendly, so that a professional reader can reproduce their techniques and results. The conclusions should explicitly indicate the achievements of the paper and the difficulties remaining to be considered. Perspectives for further research are highly welcome, but these need to be real perspectives, not mere statements that "this topic needs to be studied further" – practically any topic needs to be studied further.

6. Present the results in concise and informative tables and/or graphs. Choose the presentation based on common statistical knowledge and rules. Do not overload the work with numerous lengthy tables or lengthy computer code; instead, you can suggest in the paper to provide them upon request, or make them available in a website.

7. If not essential, move long derivations to an appendix or several appendices.

8. Keep your references up-to-date. This is not to say that you must avoid "old" references; they can be essential and important, but it is crucial to include all relevant recent sources.

9. Good language and writing style are very important, and the journal should not accept poorly written papers. Refer to classical sources on writing and academic writing. For instance, a perfect starting point is the classic [1]. If needed, ask for help from your English-speaking colleague familiar with your research field, or use online English language editors.

10. Last but not least, avoid any kind of plagiarism. It is a serious problem – see, for instance [2]: "Plagiarism is the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work. . . Within academia, plagiarism by students, professors, or researchers is considered academic dishonesty or academic fraud and offenders are subject to academic censure. . . In many universities, academic degrees or awards may be revoked as a penalty for plagiarism". Of course, nobody is assuming that there could be a conscious intent to plagiarize in a paper for a scientific journal. However, no journal can use without reference or permission any portion of material published earlier by another source which has the copyright for that work and can sue this journal for illegal use of its property. Thus, any attempts to "smuggle" other people's work as yours could be severely treated [3]. Please always provide a reference for the origin of the material obtained from the earlier source.

Concerning some possible changes within the journal, I would suggest the following.

1. More advertising is needed to make MASA a truly international journal, so that authors from different continents, countries, scientific schools, industry branches, science disciplines, and campuses can mutually enrich their statistical knowledge.

2. The accepted works should be more evenly distributed throughout various topics, covering a wider range of contents and analyses.

3. It makes sense for the journal to arrange more special topic contributed issues. As a good example, articles on *teaching statistics* could be incorporated in the last issue of each volume. Such material will be helpful to students and instructors, facilitating the processes of teaching and learning.

4. Letters to the editor, which are widely used in professional journals to provide feedback from the readers, could be published regularly.

5. In two previous editorial articles [4,5], Dr. Marcin Kozak initiated a good idea of giving fascinating quotations on mathematical and statistical issues. Actually, many journals publish various citations sent by readers. For instance, the journals of the Mathematical Association of America (The College Mathematics Journal, Mathematics Magazine, The American Mathematical Monthly) have regularly published such quotations for dozens of years. Most of them are funny and humorous, and there are also poems and images. I would like to invite all readers to send their findings for such a "Collection of Statistical Wisdom" for MASA. To continue this tradition, I contribute the following gems:

   – *The Way of the enlightened is not beyond finding the mean. Exceeding the mean is bias and error* [6];
   – *Beware of mathematicians, and all those who make empty prophecies* [7];
   – *All models are wrong, but some are useful* [8].

In conclusion, MASA should present a wide range of statistical innovations, tools, techniques, problems, examples, applications, and interpretation of results. Of course, a professional journal cannot be an "easy-read", but it has to support practical hands-on usage of modern statistical techniques. By implementing the suggestions outlined above, I believe we can grow MASA into a truly outstanding international journal. I look forward to working with all of you towards achieving this goal.

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[1]   William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, (4th ed.), Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1979.
[2]   Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plagiarism.
[3]   Indian Academy of Sciences, http://www.ias.ac.in/mathsci/index.html.
[4]   M. Kozak, Editorial: Let's sing a song about statistical models, *Model Assisted Statistics and Applications* **3**(1) (2008), 1.
[5]   M. Kozak, Editorial, *Model Assisted Statistics and Applications* **2**(1) (2007), 1.
[6]   Zen Lessons, translated by T. Cleary from "Precious Lessons from the Chan Schools", Chinese Buddhism of the Song dynasty 10–13th centuries, lesson 141, Barnes & Noble, New York, 1998.
[7]   St. Augustine, De Genesi ad Litteram, Book II, xviii, 37.
[8]   Attributed to George E.P. Box.