

The returns to scientific specialization

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While it is well established that researchers specialize, the extent to which they specialize has gone largely unexamined. We have developed an approach for measuring the extent to which a researcher is specialized, and in turn, use it to quantify the returns to specialization. In this we exploit a longitudinal dataset of 20,000+ biomedical researchers, each starting his or her career 1975 or later. Analyzing this dataset we find there are significant returns to specialization - at mean career age and publishing rate, a one-standard deviation increase in specialization leads to a 25 per cent increase in citations. We further observe that the returns to specialization are greatest early in a researcher's career and decrease as a researcher ages. Similarly, returns are greater when publishing at a lower rate and decrease at higher rates of publishing.

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