

Publishing in Peer-Reviewed Journals

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Publication in peer-reviewed journals is a critical component of job-market vitae and tenure applications. Similar to presentations at regional, national, and international conferences, journal articles demonstrate ongoing research and aid scholars in honing their arguments for later publication in monographs. Despite the ubiquity of journal publication, many young scholars find the process complex and difficult to negotiate. They are unsure of their obligations as authors and have little information about the steps from submission to publication. While individual journals may impose variations in style and format, the following outline is designed to make the process more comprehensible for graduate students and new Ph.D.s.

Young scholars often submit articles derived from their work in graduate school: seminar papers, theses, or dissertations. Praise from their professors and peers provides encouragement to submit the material for publication. However, before submitting the manuscript, authors should evaluate and rework the material to meet the publication demands of the specific journal; the requirements for publication are usually different from the expectations of the classroom or the graduate committee.

Author evaluation of the manuscript.

- **Determine the right journal for your manuscript.** Evaluate your own work critically. Peruse the publications and their Web sites to determine the best fit for your manuscript. Topical emphasis, rejection rate, and average length of time from submission to publication are areas you should consider in determining where to send your manuscript.
- **One journal at a time.** It is imperative that you submit your manuscript to only one journal. If it is rejected, you may submit to a second journal. Submitting a manuscript to more than one journal simultaneously can cause you embarrassment and lead to copyright problems for you and the journals.
- **Clear, concise thesis placed early in the manuscript.** The most common criticism from referees is the lack of a thesis. Manuscripts are often narrative, with little analysis, and therefore lack a thesis. Ask yourself, what am I providing besides a good story? With no thesis, young scholars often resort to a statement suggesting that the person or event “has never been studied.” Such statements are no substitute for a thesis.
- **Thesis grounded in the current historiography.** Readers must be made aware of the historical debates that inform the thesis. The historiographical material provides the reader with an insight into the origins of the thesis and the ways in which the current article advances interpretation of the subject.

- **Well-documented primary materials from a variety of sources.** Manuscripts with thin documentation raise questions in the minds of reviewers. Referees are particularly skeptical of manuscripts that rely solely on newspaper sources. Review your documentation critically and engage in additional research if necessary.
- **Looks matter.** Manuscripts that are poorly prepared suggest sloppy scholarship. Check spelling, syntax, word use, passive voice, and repetition. Read and re-read the manuscript, and ask a colleague (or several colleagues) to read it as well.
- **Format and style.** Check the format and style page in the journal or on the journal's Web site. If the journal uses footnotes rather than endnotes, your manuscript should conform to that style from the beginning. The same can be said for font, type size, and page organization. Does the journal permit headings and subheadings, images, maps, charts, and graphs? When you submit material in a style incompatible with the journal's style sheet, the editor may assume that you did not do your homework.
- **Send what the journal requires.** Check the number of paper copies required by the journal. Is a disk copy required? Can you send the manuscript electronically? Be sure to provide complete contact information, including a postal address, e-mail address, and telephone number. If you move during the process, update your contact information.

Steps in the publication process.

Confusion about the steps in the process toward publication can lead to misunderstanding between authors and editors. In many cases, publication is a hurry-up-and-wait system that can be stressful. Knowing what to expect can relieve some of the anxiety.

- **Submission and acknowledgement.** Once the manuscript has been submitted, the editor or editorial staff will acknowledge receipt with a card, letter, or e-mail. Allowing for holidays, academic breaks, and summer slow downs, call or e-mail if the journal has not acknowledged receipt within 10 days.
- **First read.** Some journals send everything out for review, others do an in-house read to determine if the manuscript fits the journal demands. If the journal does an in-house reading, you may receive a second notice that the manuscript has been sent out for review. If the journal rejects your manuscript on an in-house reading, the editor will inform you of the decision and may offer an explanation for the rejection. If the rejection letter offers suggestions for improving the manuscript, consider the advice carefully. Your feelings may be hurt, but incorporating the counsel may enable you to place your manuscript elsewhere.
- **Referees.** The editor will send your manuscript to several referees. Editors select referees on the basis of the manuscript's subject matter and the needs of the journal. Especially during the summer, it is often difficult to locate suitable scholars, who are away from their offices and engaged in their own research. Otherwise, the referee process usually takes 6 weeks to two months. Review of

manuscripts is a double-blind process. The author does not know who reviewed the manuscript, and the referees do not know who wrote the article.

- **Evaluating the referee comments.** Referees advise the editor that the manuscript is suitable for publication, suitable for publication with major or minor revisions, or unsuitable for publication. No matter the determination, referees are expected to provide commentary on the manuscript. **Read the commentary carefully and critically.** Referees are chosen because they are familiar with the literature and anxious to see good scholarship published. Their comments can provide helpful guidelines to improving your work. As an author, it may be difficult to accept the criticisms offered on a manuscript you viewed as exceptional. Put the manuscript and the comments aside and then revisit them with fresh eyes.
- **Revisions.** Most manuscripts that are accepted for publication require some revision. If you think a particular revision is not needed, you should explain your decision to the editor when you submit the revised article. Adhere to the **deadline** the editor provides for returning the revised manuscript. If you cannot meet the deadline, inform the editor immediately. Also, some journals send revised articles out to a new referee, who will recommend additional revisions, so be sure to find out about this up front so you are not surprised about the extra time and work this may entail.
- **Images, maps, and tables.** If you are submitting images, maps, or tables for publication with your article, check for permissions to publish (in the case of images and historical maps) and provide captions and attributions. Images are usually submitted as black and white original photographs or as scanned images at resolutions that range from 300 dpi to 900 dpi. Presses do not accept images xeroxed or images scanned from books. Check the journal Web site for specific requirements.
- **Copyediting.** Your revised manuscript will be copyedited by the editor (in the case of small journals) or by a separate copyeditor (in the case of larger national journals). Copyediting is intended to remove spelling, syntax, or grammatical errors and make the manuscript conform to the print requirements of the journal. The copyedited version will be returned to you with a quick return to the editor required. Read the copyedited version carefully to be sure that editing and formatting changes did not alter the meaning or misplace the footnotes (or endnotes). Return the copy according to instructions and within the deadline. At this point the process is moving quickly toward the publication deadline.
- **Page proof or blue lines.** Some presses may send page proofs and/or blue lines for final approval. Changes to the article at this point in the process are costly. If you receive page proofs or blue lines, make only those changes that are essential. Return the copy by the deadline; failure to do so causes delays in publication.
- **Enjoy the accolades that your hard work and careful scholarship have produced.**

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