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Publishing Articles in Academic Journals

Having covered the basics, we turn our attention in this chapter to some of the complexities and details of how to write journal articles and get them published in refereed academic journals.

What do we mean, 'academic journals'?

We find that undergraduate students often get confused about the difference between academic literature and other sorts of publication when doing literature reviews. This is often because we haven't been specific enough about what we mean by 'academic journals'. What we do mean are publications, on paper or electronic, which contain scholarly articles that present some or all of the following: research findings, new knowledge, new theorisations or interesting syntheses or re-presentations of existing knowledge. The authors and the readers are usually academics, but not necessarily so.

Academic journals are, therefore, the 'chat rooms' for the exchange of knowledge and ideas and for debate. In fact, this is exactly the reason why the scientific community invented academic journals in the eighteenth century. They were, and remain, an important mechanism by which geographically disparate scholars can communicate and share their thinking.

Journals have a particular structure. They are always edited by one or more academics, who take overall responsibility for the shape and character of the journal. They generally also have editorial boards, usually drawn from the international academic community and chosen to reflect the range of interests of the journal. They may be more or less actively engaged in the processes of publishing the journal. Journals come out regularly, usually three or four times a year, and from time to

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time may have special issues edited by guest editors on particular themes. In most cases, however, each edition of the journal will present a fairly eclectic mix of papers, but all within the broad remit of the particular journal.

Another common misconception, but this time more often among postgraduate students and less experienced faculty, is that articles in professional journals are on a par, in research terms, with refereed papers in academic journals. Be in no doubt about this, among academics, academic journals are much more prestigious. But of course, writing for appropriate professional audiences is a means of achieving good dissemination of your work to those who might use it in theirs is important.

Some people think that writing for professional audiences is a good apprenticeship for doing academic writing. Indeed, early publication in professional journals can boost people's confidence, stimulate access to research fields and also help people experience the personal satisfaction of getting into print. But, these benefits are sometimes all too elusive and outweighed by two very serious risks.

First, the two genres are quite distinct, albeit related, forms. Professional journal articles based on academic research are really translations of academic writing for lay readerships. That is, they represent an attempt to render academic work more accessible to a wider audience. Logically, therefore, it is not possible to write for professional audiences before the academic thinking and writing have been done. Further, given that the genres are quite different, the writing skills you need to write for one do not necessarily translate into writing for the other.

Second, some inexperienced academics spend so much time and effort on writing for practitioners that they never engage with academic audiences, convincing themselves that they have done the academic job when really they haven't. A further problem for such people is that the quality of their writing for professionals is frequently rather poor because it is not grounded in the rigorous thinking and peer review processes that academic journals demand and provide. In short, putting the professional before the academic means that this stuff simply doesn't go through the academic mill and is therefore unrefined and unimproved.

Jennifer had established herself as a successful writer for the technical, professional press prior to commencing her research career. For these audiences, and for editors who paid by word length, she had developed a style that was very terse and directly factual. When she started her PhD, it took a long time for her to adapt her writing style to the more discursive, carefully argued approaches that are needed in academic writing.

Why publish in academic journals?

As an academic, you will probably have been subject to quite strong pressure from your institution to publish in academic journals, often because more publications mean more external funding for the university. Pressure to publish may also come from competition for internal promotion. However much universities say officially that they promote people for their teaching excellence, this is often patently untrue. Teaching is virtually always a secondary consideration when committees think about whether someone should be promoted or not. Whilst these pressures to publish are very real and often quite painful, we believe that you should not lose sight of the many much more positive reasons for doing such work.

- Publishing in academic journals is usually an immensely personally rewarding activity that can offer you a sense of progress, 'closure' as you finish one phase of your research, achievement and pride in yourself and your work.
- If you don't publish your work in academic forums you are failing to engage in wider academic debates or add to the body of publicly available knowledge in your field – which is one of the primary purposes of undertaking research in the first place. Remember that reading other people's refereed work helps academics to develop their own thinking, research and teaching.
- The rigorous review processes that your work will undergo will give it a certain standing or 'quality mark'. It is rare for papers to emerge from the review process unimproved – even if bruised authors are sometimes reluctant to admit it. Readers are likely to trust something that is as well written as it can be and which they know has been subject to scrutiny.

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This is especially the case if you are trying to influence non-academic readers who might use or engage with your research.

- Quite simply, publishing helps you to build your reputation and that of your research and field. This may be crucial to getting new jobs or promotion.
- If you make a contribution to the research income of your department and/or university by achieving a good publication record, you will indirectly benefit by being a member of a more conducive and better-funded research environment.
- A good publication record will also help when it comes to winning external research funding by making you look more credible. We deal with this subject in *Winning and Managing Research Funding*.

What can I publish?

The first key consideration in deciding whether to publish or not is whether you have anything worthwhile to say at this point. Premature publication is frustrating, messy and really to be avoided. Therefore do not waste your energies and efforts and those of journal editors and peer reviewers or try the patience of readers. Conversely, don't be so coy about your writing that you constantly delay submitting anything for publication because it isn't yet 'perfect'. Perfection is a chimera – it can't be achieved and you can waste a lot of time and energy seeking the holy grail of the Perfect Publishable Paper.

Here is a list of the sorts of papers that you might be interested in writing for publication:

- A paper describing and analysing your empirical or archival data from a research project. This can be written at various stages in the research process – you don't have to wait until the project is completed to write about it. Often researchers find it useful to publish 'along the way' once they have appropriate data to comment on. Of course, you should publish articles (and/or books) on completed research projects too.
- Most journals have special issues around particular themes from time to time. The themes are generally broad and, with imagination, you may be able to craft your research into a paper that fits them.

- A review essay, which takes a critical look at a range of literature in your field, synthesising it and building on it to develop new insights. This can be a good one if you are doing a doctorate and therefore having to really master a whole field of literature.
- A 'think piece' which develops theoretical insights and ideas within your field of enquiry.
- A response to someone else's work. You are more likely to do this when you disagree with someone, but sometimes journals invite specific individuals to respond to a particular piece of work.
- A methodological reflection in which you explore problems and dilemmas that may have arisen in the course of your research. Some fields give rise to much more of this kind of writing than others.
- Some journals have slots for shorter, less developed 'work in progress' reports. These may include a fairly straightforward description of an on-going research project. They can be a good way of getting into print when you are relatively inexperienced or anxious to get a major project 'on the map'.
- Other journals invite 'opinion pieces' about issues that are of current importance. These, too, tend to be shorter than the journal's regular articles and may be more polemic in style.
- Some canny people planning their doctoral theses do so in such a way that they can develop papers for publication in parallel with their dissertation chapters. In this way, they give themselves confidence that their work passes muster; polish, through the refereeing process; and a significant career advantage when they start applying for jobs.

Keep in mind, though, that some of the sorts of pieces listed above may not be peer-reviewed. Whilst you will need to make clear the level of scrutiny to which your paper was subjected, even non-refereed pieces can help to build careers and reputations, especially in the early stages.

What makes a publishable paper?

Even though the types of refereed papers that you might publish can vary enormously, there are generic qualities that journal editors and referees look for in all of them. Good publishable papers will have a

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majority, if not all, of the following characteristics. This list is adapted from Kenway *et al.*, *Publishing in Refereed Academic Journals* (1998):

- They present new knowledge, either in the form of substantive research findings, theoretical developments, new insights into existing debates, new analyses of existing knowledge or a synthesis of the literature.
- They are grounded in the relevant literature, demonstrating familiarity and engagement in an on-going academic conversation.
- They address new or familiar issues pertinent to the discipline or field.
- They ask and attempt to answer provocative questions in a persuasive manner.
- They are well written, with carefully crafted and sustained arguments.

How do I get my paper published?

Taking a paper from the first twinkle in your eye through to publication is, unfortunately, quite a long and complicated process. Below we take you through the seven stages from start to finish. Figure 1 presents these stages in diagrammatic form.

Stage one: getting ideas, doing research and writing

If you haven't even started on this stage, you need to read *Getting Started on Research* and also Chapter 2 of this book.

Stage two: giving conference and seminar papers

Once you have developed a paper you really need to take it on the road – taking it to conferences, seminars and workshops. Within reason, a good paper can't have too many outings – but watch that you don't give the same paper to the same people again and again. We deal with conference papers in detail in *Building Networks*.

It's important to use conferences, seminars and workshops as a way of getting feedback so that you can reflect on, refine and polish your paper until you have buffed it up enough to be sent to a journal. You can

Stage three: targeting a journal

Okay, you have written a paper that has been well aired, commented upon and subsequently and iteratively improved. Now you need to identify an appropriate journal to eventually send it to.

Finding the right journal takes time and effort. But investment at this stage will save you much energy and grief later on. Not all journals, as you will be aware, are the same. They embody different areas of interest, styles, methodologies, aims and objectives. You must achieve a reasonable degree of congruence between your paper and the target journal. Inevitably this involves some compromise in both how you rewrite the paper and the journals you try to get published in.

You will already have some idea about journals from your own research and reading for it. However, here are some more suggestions about how to initially locate journals that may be interested in your work.

- You could do a lot worse than consider the journals that you have been reading for your research. If you find what they publish interesting and relevant, it is likely that your work will fit well.
- Go to the library and browse through the journals on the shelves. All of them will have notes for contributors and statements of editorial policy, usually inside the front or back cover. You should also scan the articles in their back issues to get a sense of whether your work is congruent with the journal's remit and style. This can be a good way of shaping your thinking about where work might be placed. Be imaginative and a bit eclectic about what you look at and don't necessarily confine yourself to a narrow sphere of interest.
- Go to the websites of the substantial publishers of journals and look through their lists of journals. Various search engines, especially in library databases of journals, will take you to these sites. There you will be able to search for journals in particular disciplinary or interest areas. Each journal will have its own page, including its editorial policy, sample issues and articles (for free download) and notes for contributors.
- Ask your mentors or more experienced colleagues for suggestions. But beware – the increasing preponderance of research quality measurement exercises has often tended to lead to a mindless, lemming-like rush for certain journals that achieve iconic status. If your work fits nicely with such journals, all well and good.

However, we would strongly counsel against twisting and distorting your papers in order to try to squash them into a particular journal box they do not fit.

- Sign up for the various journal electronic alert lists that are available. These can take the form of simply giving you the contents pages of journals in your sphere of interest, or may give you abstracts of articles. You can put in your own key words and, provided you choose them sensibly, this will be a useful way of finding out which journals publish your kind of stuff.

Handy hints for targeting journals

We have told you how to look for journals, but what exactly are you looking for? Remember that you need to take a really focused, strategic approach to this important task.

1. The stated editorial policy and your impression of the papers carried should give you a clear picture of the kinds of themes and issues that the journal seeks to address. Eliminate those journals that really have no interest in your areas of concern, broadly construed.
2. Sometimes journals have a particular epistemological, theoretical or indeed political leaning, either stated or unstated. By and large, you should respect these stances and not send your work to a journal that is patently out of sympathy with your own stances. On the other hand, sometimes you may be pleasantly surprised to find that journals with a reputation for publishing only papers of a certain type would actually welcome a broader range of submissions. This is most likely to be the case where the editorial approach is non-positivist because, by its nature, such thinking is open to differing notions of knowledge creation (see also *Getting Started on Research*). If in doubt, it's always worthwhile contacting the editors and sending them a short abstract of your article to check out whether it is the kind of thing that, in principle, they would consider.
3. Journals have different attitudes to publishing a range of styles of writing. Some will welcome experimental writing or poetry. Others are committed to the standard academic generic forms. If you have

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written something experimental or unconventional, there is little point in sending it to a journal that does not and will not include that kind of writing.

4. Look at the list of editors and the editorial board to see whether the people included do your kind of work or are interested in it. Some journals also publish an annual list of people not on the editorial board who have reviewed papers for them. It's worth looking at this to see what kinds of people are receiving the papers. Don't send a paper to a journal that regularly uses reviewers who might be unsympathetic to your work and/or your area.
5. There are a number of practical issues to which you must also pay attention. For instance, journals accept articles of different lengths. Some want very short submissions while others are prepared to accept much longer articles. This will be stated in the guidelines for authors inside the back or front cover of the journal and on their web page. Failure to heed these guidelines makes editors very grumpy.
6. Journals have different turn-round times for the refereeing process and lead times for publication when accepted. Sometimes this information appears in the journal itself as a footnote to each paper. There are a number of complex factors that impact on lead times. The vagaries of research quality assessment exercises can mean that there is a rush to publish before the exercise deadlines, swamping journals. Sometimes editors seek to cluster papers that they think fit well together. Putting an edition of a journal together can be a complex jigsaw puzzle, especially as editors are limited in the number of pages they are allowed to have in each issue. This means that you may be moved up or down the queue, depending on the length of your paper, as they try to make the most economical use of the space available. If getting your work out within a tight period is crucial to you, then you should check out all these issues with the editor before you submit. New journals can be a good place to send your articles if you want them out quickly, as they are often in search of good material in order to make an impact with their early issues.
7. You should keep an eye open for information about upcoming special issues that may suit your work. These will be put together within a particular time frame and the guest editors often need to solicit, review and accept the appropriate number of articles quite quickly.

8. Pay attention to whom the journal is aimed at. It is, for example, a waste of time to send an article that has relevance only within your own national boundaries to a journal that promotes itself as being about genuinely international issues.
9. An increasing number of journals charge authors for submission or publication of papers. These charges can be substantial. If your institution does not pick up such fees, or you have to negotiate it, then that is another consideration in your journal selection. It is also a consideration to be built into any research funding applications.
10. Conversely, in the UK at least, funds exist to encourage journals to publish papers from academics in low to middle-income countries. Moreover, journals gain international prestige by showing that they attract authors from a wide range of countries. What can sometimes look like a closed shop isn't necessarily so.
11. Don't waste your time and energies trying to get published in a journal if you have had a huge argument with the editor. Conversely, try not to fall out with important journal editors.
12. Try to pick journals that you wish your name and work to be associated with – generally those that will help you to gain prestige and academic standing in a particular area. Thus journal selection becomes an important part of your networking and career-building work.
13. As time goes on and you build up your publications record, spread your wings a bit and don't always publish in the same place or places. At the same time, it is good to develop a relationship with the editors of particular journals, and you may want to publish in some places more than others. The key here is to keep the right balance.
14. Get to know editors by getting yourself introduced to them or going to their presentations at conferences. You can help to build up a good relationship with journals by undertaking what are sometimes regarded as thankless tasks, such as doing book reviews. As time goes on, and you get more established, you may be asked to be a reviewer or referee for articles submitted to the journal. It's always a good idea to be helpful and amenable in doing such work because then you will be regarded as a good friend of the journal. It won't mean that bad papers get published or that you will have an easier ride, but it may help to ensure that you and your papers are dealt with promptly and efficiently.

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Again, this is part of building a network within your academic community (see *Building Networks* for more on this). Having such a relationship will help you to approach the editor with your ideas and have constructive discussions about how to take them forward.

15. The single most important thing in choosing where to publish is to select journals which suit your work, which you are interested in and which allow you to make the best possible impact. Other things being equal, however, try to target the most prestigious journal that you realistically have a chance of getting your work into.

Journals are often ascribed ‘national’ or ‘international’ labels. As a matter of course, virtually all journals seek to be seen as international. If we started picking at the thread of what makes a journal national or international, we could fill the rest of this book. Ultimately, whether a journal is of national or international importance is a matter of judgement. The international relevance of research, even if it deals with a local subject, is a key marker of excellence. For journals, an international dimension is a necessary but not sufficient condition for excellence. That international dimension might be connoted by the breadth of the editorial board and the origins of the articles but, most important, by whether the papers themselves are capable of speaking to audiences beyond narrow national boundaries.

Stage four: preparing your paper for submission

The task of preparing your paper for submission to a journal is quite complex; Figure 2 shows the process. Preparing a paper for submission involves the synthesis of three important constituent elements: your pre-existing paper, the feedback that you will have received on it and the specific requirements and characteristics of your target journal. We call this process ‘drafting and crafting’. What you will be doing is gently moulding your paper so that it is beautifully written, academically robust and irresistible to your target journal. When you have done this, you will need one last round of polishing before your ‘baby’ is ready to go off.

For this stage you should already have the draft paper, feedback and journal requirements to hand. You can’t start without them. There are two key aspects to drafting and crafting: content and form. Both need

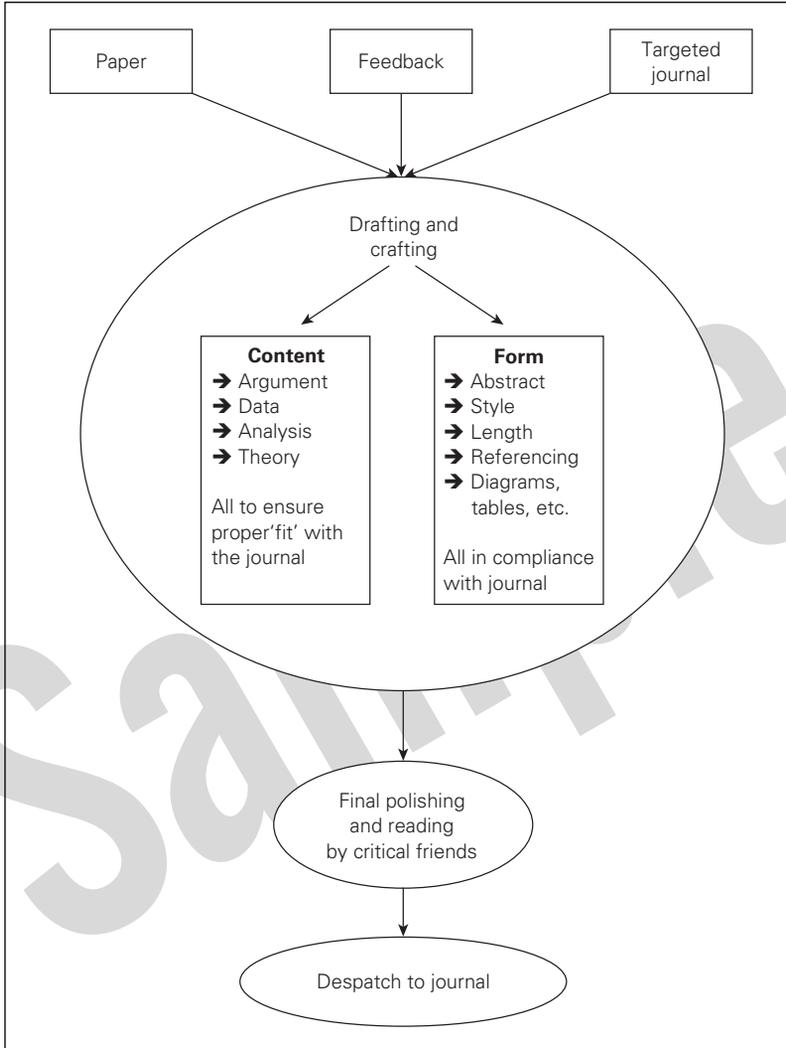


FIGURE 2 Preparing a paper for submission to a journal

to be carefully addressed if you are to be successful in getting your work published. The two textboxes below give you a checklist of things that you have to pay close attention to. You may also find it helpful to refer to *Getting Started on Research* and Chapter 2 of this book.

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Content

- Has your paper got a carefully sequenced, logically organised argument that fits together and works like the finest Swiss clock-work? If so, is it explicit, so that you minimise the amount of work the reader has to do?
- Is there a clear and strong relationship between the argument and any evidence, data or other material that you have used?
- Is your analysis of any evidence, data or other material methodologically sound, clearly described and well justified?
- Have you drawn on appropriate theoretical resources and used them in ways that elucidate your arguments rather than obscure them? Are you sure that you have properly understood the theory that you have used? Do not, on any account, rely on derivative writings, as interpretations by others may be misleading or inappropriate.
- Overall, does your paper 'sit' well with the kind of work published in the journal and your intended audience?
- Finally, and most important, is your work credible as a publishable paper, albeit possibly with some revision? You must on no account use the journal review process instead of doing the drafting and crafting work yourself with the assistance of critical friends/mentors/advisers/supervisors and taking the paper around to conferences and seminars.

Form

- The overwhelming majority of journals require an abstract along with the paper. This is a very short (usually 150–200 words) summary of what the paper says. Abstracts are important because, if or when your paper is published, the abstract will be used by potential readers in deciding whether your work may be of value to them. Reviewers of your paper may also utilise the abstract as part of their work. Brevity does not mean that this is an easy thing to get right. Make sure that the abstract matches what the paper is actually about. ▶

- ▶ • Have you written your paper in the designated house style of the journal? For example, have you complied with guidelines on matters such as capitalisation, the spelling conventions, the use and positioning of footnotes and/or endnotes, punctuation and so on?
- It is vital that you adhere rigorously to the designated referencing style of the journal, so that all your references are complete, none has been omitted and there are no redundant ones from earlier drafts. This will be easy if you have taken our advice in *Getting Started on Research* and invested in a good bibliographic database package. Otherwise, you will just have to be pedantically methodical and careful. Failure to adhere to referencing guidelines is a major source of aggravation for editors and a good way to get on their bad sides. Consider it to be one of the Seven Deadly Sins.
- Is the layout of your paper on the page clear and comprehensible? Does it follow the guidelines for the journal? For instance, most journals ask you to include diagrams, graphs, pictures and so on as appendices with a note in the text where the typesetters should insert them. Usually journals request that the manuscript is double-spaced and that your name does not appear anywhere other than on the title page (except possibly in the bibliography, although you may choose to insert 'author' here instead of your name). We explain below why this is an important requirement.
- Is your paper a suitable length for the journal? Sometimes this is expressed as the number of words (usually by non-US journals), whilst US journals commonly use a page (i.e. 'letter size') length. Watch out for the fact that US paper sizes can vary quite markedly from those used elsewhere.
- Are your diagrams, graphs, figures, tables, pictures and so on clearly labelled, of good quality and obviously related to the written text? Don't rely on colour unless you know that the journal will use colour printing.
- Don't forget to use the spellchecker. Don't rely on it entirely, as some misspellings don't get picked up. Rebecca once missed a critical 'l' off her curriculum vitae when talking about her 'public sector research'. Grammar checkers is sometimes helpful too, but didn't rely on it because their often wrong.

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Your paper is almost ready to go. Whilst we caution against obsessive polishing which actually rubs the gilt off, it is worth while at this stage to get your critical friends and mentors to give the thing a final read over if they have the time and interest. Whilst you should be your own best critic by this stage, they may pick up on things that you, because of your closeness to the work, have missed. If time permits, put your paper away for a few days and then come back to it with fresh eyes and re-read it. A little bit of distance can really help you to see the wood for the trees. At this point you may do a bit of final tweaking, but it shouldn't be much. This may all sound like hard work, and it is. But you should be proud of your work and want it to be seen in the best possible light.

Finally, at last, you are ready to despatch it. All journals make it a condition of submission that the article is being sent only to them. Abide by this rule or you will lose credibility with editors and peer reviewers. There is a sensible reason for it – the reviewing process is time-consuming and expensive hard work for all involved. Nobody wants to go though it, thinking they are helping you, when you are in fact two-timing them.

You now have to write a letter to the editor. We think that it is a good idea to introduce yourself if you are likely to be unknown to them. If you do know them (perhaps because you have been doing good networking work at conferences, etc.) then remind them where they met you and perhaps what they said. If they know your doctoral supervisor/adviser or mentor, then remind them of that too. Don't be pushy, but do exude a nice quiet confidence that you are a worthy author moving in the right circles and doing interesting things. Tell them a little bit about what the paper is about (maybe just one sentence), but don't repeat the abstract. It can also be helpful to explain a bit of the paper's background – perhaps that it is derived from work on a major funded project or how you came to be doing it. Keep all this networking and contextual information very brief.

Check the journal's requirements regarding submission – do they want hard copies (if so, how many) and a computer disk or are they willing to accept electronic copies only? If so, will they accept them by email or do they want a disk? Keep your own copies of what has been despatched. Make a note of the date, but do bear in mind that the next stage (see below) can take a very long time, so you need to put it towards the back of your mind and not worry. Finally, put it all in the post/send the email and go out and celebrate in whatever way floats your boat.

Stage five: the waiting game – the review process

We thought you might find it useful to have a description of what happens to your paper while you are doing all that waiting.

When the journal editor receives your paper the first thing that they will do is to give it a quick read-over to check the following things:

- That the paper is in the right area for the journal and that, for example, you are not a dentist who has accidentally sent a paper to the *International Journal of Oral History*.
- It is in the required format for the journal or near enough so that it is worth sending out for review.
- Whether it is intended for a special issue or the regular journal, and any other exceptional issues that you may have raised in your covering letter.
- Most important, they will check whether it is of a sufficiently high standard to be worth sending out to review. Editors are very aware of how hard academics work and of what a lot of work it is to review a paper properly. They don't want to alienate their all-important pool of reviewers by sending out papers that wouldn't pass an undergraduate examination.

Gender and Education is the leading feminist journal in education. As such, it is committed to assisting inexperienced and/or unsupported academics to be able to publish in it. The journal rule is that all articles must be reviewed by at least one member of the 20-member editorial board. It became apparent that the review process of the journal was being used by authors as a kind of work avoidance, with too many half-baked papers being sent in and reviewed time and time again. This placed an intolerable burden on the editorial board and, indeed, on other reviewers. As a result, the board decided that papers could no longer be resubmitted more than once.

A good editor who is unhappy with your paper at this stage will send it back to you with a letter of explanation. Once the editor is satisfied, they will do two things. First, they will send you an acknowledgement informing you that they have received your paper and sent it out for review. If you have sent a paper off and don't hear anything for a

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month, it is worthwhile emailing the editor politely to double-check that the paper has actually been received. However, you should not hassle and harry. Second, they (or their administrative assistant) will remove the title page with your name on it from the manuscript. They will also check to make sure that your name doesn't appear in other places, such as the headers or footers, and that you have not cited yourself in ways that identify you as the author. If you are identifiable in any way, they may well ask you to resubmit the paper rather than compromise the blind peer review process.

The editor will then give it a reference number and send it to at least two selected referees together with the journal's evaluation sheet, which asks them to comment on various aspects of your paper and to indicate whether it is publishable. Part of their response will be intended for your eyes but the editor may also offer them the opportunity to make comments just for the editor's eyes.

Who are these referees? They will usually be experienced academics and researchers whose expertise fits them well to critically evaluate the suitability of your paper for publication. Although they will not officially know who the author of a paper is, they may well be able to guess if they have been busy out and about at conferences or reading the journals in which you have previously published. They will usually not be people in your own institution or whose help you acknowledge, although this has been known to occur.

The reviewers will be asked to return the paper within a limited period – often about six weeks. However, because this is the kind of work that academics struggle to find space to do, papers for review often get relegated to the bottom of the pile and they do not manage to meet their deadlines. What this means is that the poor old editor (or their administrative assistant) will have to write reminding them that they have a paper to review. How quickly such a reminder is sent out after the due date for the review depends very much on the journal's administrative resources. You can help yourself here by submitting the best possible paper that precisely meets the journal's requirements. A well written paper on an interesting topic will incite the reviewer to do their work much more promptly than one that they approach with dread terror. This is another reason to write a really sparkly abstract, as nine of out ten reviewers will at least scan it when they open the envelope/attachment from the editor before putting the article at the bottom of their overflowing in-tray.

It has to be said that reviewers vary in quality. Some do a wonderful job whilst others are vindictive, destructive and self-obsessed or just

plain lazy. They are so heterogeneous that we can't begin to describe the gamut of behaviours. However, we give you below two completely fictional pen portraits of the Reviewer from Hell and the Reviewer as Angel.

The Reviewer from Hell

Professor Nick Beelzebub is not really an active researcher and is living on his past reputation. However, he always agrees to undertake reviews because he enjoys the power it gives him as a gatekeeper over his younger and evidently brighter peers. He delights in tearing a paper to pieces without making any constructive suggestions for revision. He is firmly fixed in his own research paradigm and will not countenance any alternatives. His comments on others' papers always start from the premise that they should have adopted his favoured approach and the fact that they haven't means that the research is valueless. That is, he never judges anybody's work on its own merits but only by reference to his own beliefs. The reviews are peppered with unfortunate and hurtful phraseology such as 'the author completely fails ...', 'this is weak and insubstantial work' and so on. Old Nick has no regard for the feelings of the nervous authors who will be receiving his commentaries. It is either impossible to divine from his reviews what needs to be done to make the paper publishable or his demands are completely unrealistic and inappropriate.

The Reviewer as Angel

Professor Angelica Hope is a successful academic, who is quietly confident about her own abilities and expertise. She undertakes reviewing work assiduously although she has trouble fitting it in with her heavy work load. This means that she sometimes keeps papers for longer than she would really wish to. Her comments are invariably honest, straightforward and constructive. She aims to help authors

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- ▶ present their own work and ideas in the best way for them and the journal. When asking for a paper to be revised, she will give very clear and precise advice on how to go about it. She may recommend additional literature that would be useful or further analysis work. When she has finished writing her comments, she carefully rereads them and tries to imagine herself as the author receiving them, asking herself the question 'How would I feel if these comments were about my work?' This doesn't mean that she never has negative things to say. Furthermore, if she really thinks that a paper is unsalvageable, she will say so and explain why.

Once the editor has, eventually, received the reviewers' comments they can make a judgement about what should happen to your paper. The editor's job is a crucial one at this stage, as they may have to arbitrate between reviewers who disagree or make judgement calls about how much they should encourage you to revise the paper and resubmit it to them. Whatever the decision, the editor will write to you explaining it and enclosing any reviewers' comments. Opening that envelope/email can stimulate emotions from ecstasy to despair and dread terror and/or extreme anger. These emotional reactions are never completely attenuated, no matter how senior people become. You need to allow yourself to have the reaction but then think about how to move your paper along. A number of different sorts of editor's decisions are possible.

Scenario 1, and very unlikely, your paper may be accepted as it stands with no revisions or amendments. Let's be frank, this is very unusual so don't beat yourself up if it doesn't happen to you.

Scenario 2, the editor may accept the paper subject to relatively minor amendments that do not require it to be sent out for review again. The sorts of things you might be asked to do are, for example, to clarify the use of diagrams or graphs, to define your terms better, to strengthen the introduction or conclusion, to rewrite the abstract more clearly or to improve the referencing. This is far from an exhaustive list – it's just meant to give you a feel for the kinds of things regarded as minor revisions.

Scenario 3, and a very common category, you may be asked to make major revisions and then resubmit for reconsideration by reviewers.

Here the kinds of revision required will be more substantive and may require quite significant reworking either of the theory or data analysis or the structure of the paper. Reviewers should give you quite detailed and clear feedback on exactly what needs to be done and you need to pay careful attention to it.

Scenario 4, your paper may be rejected outright. Rather like asking someone you really fancy out on a date, rejection invariably hurts. There are many types of rejection and many reasons why a paper may be rejected. For instance, the paper may be deemed inappropriate for the journal. If that happens, you should not have had to wait too long, as a good editor should have picked this up before sending it out for review. In such a circumstance, some editors will offer suggestions of alternative journals to which you might submit the paper. Alternatively, the paper may be deemed irredeemably poor and not capable of sufficient improvement to make it publishable in that particular journal. Remember that no judgement is truly objective and that the reviewers' and editors' decisions may be prompted by fundamental epistemological or theoretical differences – they may simply not see the world in the same way that you do. Alternatively, the quality of your work may not have been very good and the reviewers should explain clearly in what ways your paper is deficient.

Barry received a hurtful rejection on a piece of important work that he had been doing. He realised that he had sent it to the wrong journal when one reviewer wrote, 'Why does the author keep saying things like "Our interviews showed" – qualitative interviews can show "nothing"?' Barry subsequently revised the paper slightly and it appeared in a prestigious edited collection.

Stage six: what happens next? Acceptance or rejection

So you have heard back from the journal on the outcome of the reviewing process and have received the editor's decision. When there is no consensus among the reviewers as to what should happen to the paper, the editor should provide a lead. This is usually phrased

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something like 'I suggest that you concentrate on Reviewer A's comments.' If there is disagreement between reviewers and the editor does not give a lead, then you should contact her or him to clarify exactly what they want you to do.

Anwar received the editor's letter and reviewers' comments on a paper he had submitted to a journal special issue. The decision was that he should revise and resubmit the paper for further reviewing. When he read the reviewers' comments, he realised that the two sets of suggestions would take the paper in completely opposite directions and that he could not possibly fulfil both reviewers' requirements. However, the guest editors of the journal had not indicated to him which reviewer to focus on. When he asked what to do, he was told that he should make his own decision on this, so he followed the suggestions that were more in line with his own thinking. The resubmitted paper was sent back to the reviewers. One reviewer (and you can guess which) pronounced the paper much improved and recommended publication without further ado and as a matter of urgency because of its immediate importance. The other reviewer said that unfortunately the changes made to the paper had 'rendered it unpublishable'. Happily for Anwar, the editors decided to follow the first reviewer's opinion.

What you do once you receive a response from the journal depends upon which of the scenarios listed above your paper falls into. Let's go through each in turn.

Scenario 1, unconditional acceptance. In this case there is nothing to do at this stage except celebrate.

Scenario 2, accepted subject to minor revisions. You need to pay very close attention to what you have been asked to do and think carefully about how to respond to each suggestion. You shouldn't make compromises that make you feel uncomfortable or that you don't agree with, but you shouldn't be truculent or resistant to what may well be sensible suggestions. When you have finished the revisions, write an itemised letter to the editor setting out how you have addressed each and every request for revision. If you have

declined to follow any particular revision, you need to explain in detail why.

Scenario 3, revise and resubmit. Here the suggestions are likely to be more general than specific and will undoubtedly require quite a lot of work. Again, you need to think carefully about what has been suggested and you may well need to take advice from your mentors and critical friends on how to approach the task. Again, when you have finished your rewrite, you need to construct a careful letter to the editor explaining how you have addressed the reviewers' comments. This letter will normally be sent back out to the reviewers with your revised paper. Your paper will then go through the same process as before, often being returned to the original reviewers. If you have done the job properly your next letter from the editor should be of scenario 1 or 2 type.

Scenario 4, outright rejection. You need to take a cool, long look at the reasons why your paper was rejected. It may take a little while before you feel able to do so, as you will undoubtedly feel hurt, undermined, angry or offended (or some combination of these) by the rejection. It is particularly important that you do return to your paper to see how it could best be salvaged. If you have taken our advice so far, it is likely that with sufficient effort you will be able to make a publishable paper out of it.

Having reappraised your paper in the light of the feedback you have received on it, and after taking advice from suitably experienced colleagues, you may genuinely believe that the rejection was a product of unfair reviewing, ideological conflicts or even personal animosity. In such circumstances you should send the paper, perhaps with some revision in the light of feedback, to another journal.

If, however, you realise that the paper was indeed very weak, you need to decide whether or not you can actually rescue it. This will involve you going back to the drawing board to restart the process at an appropriate point. How far back you go will depend on how bad you think your paper is and the reasons for the problems with it.

Stacey had recently completed her PhD and developed her first substantive journal paper from it. She received a crushing and ineptly worded set of brusque comments back from the reviewers and an outright rejection from the editor. In consequence, it took her a while

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- ▶ to regain her self-confidence and equilibrium. She took the paper to one of her senior colleagues, who she felt would be able to advise her. He suggested resubmitting the paper to a journal in a completely different disciplinary area where Stacey had no particular expertise, although she had called upon some of the theoretical resources of that discipline. She was uncomfortable with the advice, as it seemed to her that it did not take her or her paper seriously, was quite dismissive and had little chance of being a successful strategy. She went to another senior colleague, who spent some time helping Stacey to address the serious weaknesses in her line of argument so that she could resubmit the paper to a journal in her own disciplinary field. At the same time, she procured technical assistance from another experienced colleague who helped her address the criticisms of the statistical data in her paper. Clearly, reworking the paper at this level is taking her some time, but she has much more chance of success this way.

Stage seven: the technicalities of proofs and copyright

Once your paper has finally been accepted there will be what will probably feel like an age (and may actually be one) before anything seems to happen. Editors like to have a substantial number of accepted papers 'in the bag' in order to give themselves flexibility in putting each edition of the journal together and to save themselves nightmares about not having enough papers to publish. When things finally happen, you will be expected to act yesterday. It usually goes something like this. All of a sudden, when you are least expecting it, are about to give birth or go on holiday, you will receive printer's proofs. These are copy pages of the paper as it will appear on the page in the published journal. These days they are likely to be sent electronically as a read-only PDF file.

The editor will ask you to check the proofs for spelling errors, serious omissions of chunks of text, missing or inaccurate references, etc. If you have done your job properly up to now, you should have very little work to do at this stage unless something has gone wrong with the typesetting – unlikely but it does happen. However, you do need to proof-read very carefully and don't get so carried away with the beauty of your own prose that you miss glaring typos. Editors will be furious with you if, at this stage, you seek to make amendments (rather than

typographical corrections) to the text. And rightly so – the technicalities of actually putting a journal together are immense and amendments at this stage can be financially costly. If you really do need to make an amendment it will need careful and sensitive negotiations with the editor to see if it is feasible.

Along with the proofs, you will receive a copyright assignment form. We dealt with the issue of intellectual property rights (IPR) in Chapter 3. You and any co-authors will be asked to sign the form and return it with the proofs. This form is very important, as without it the publishers will not go to press with your article in case you sue them for breach of copyright.

Both the proofs and the copyright matters need to be dealt with as a matter of urgency – usually within two or three days of receipt.

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