

PUBLISHING YOUR FIRST JOURNAL ARTICLE

WHY PUBLISH?

The phrase 'publish or perish' is widely known and accepted in the academic community. It refers to the pressure on academics to publish their work frequently and constantly in order to obtain employment or to further their careers. This situation has come about largely due to intense competition for employment in the field. Indeed, the pressure to begin publishing work starts even before students have completed their postgraduate degrees. Today, many postgraduate students seek to publish their work while completing their degrees in order to enhance their chances of success in finding employment after graduation.

This article is meant to serve as a guide to postgraduate students, especially those completing a Masters or PhD, who need to know what steps to follow in order to publish their first journal article. The advice contained in this article refers to publishing in peer-reviewed academic journals. Students should also seek advice from their supervisors, who will have detailed knowledge of publishing in their specific field of research.

WHAT TO PUBLISH

The first decision a postgraduate student will need to make is whether to transform a chapter from his or her thesis into a journal article or to write a stand-alone journal article from a separate piece of research. There are advantages and disadvantages to both options.

When using a chapter (or several chapters) from a thesis as the basis for a journal article, it is important to make the correct selection and ensure that the material is appropriate. A journal article must be a complete piece of research on its own; that is to say, it cannot refer to information contained in other sections of the thesis not included in the journal article. The journal article must introduce a narrowly defined topic, provide an original piece of scholarly research on that topic and be self-contained.

One advantage of converting a thesis chapter into a journal article instead of undertaking another research project, of course, is that the postgraduate student will not be creating more work for him or herself during an already busy time. Another advantage is that if a student is able to publish a section of the thesis successfully in a peer-reviewed journal during his or her degree, this is an encouraging sign that the thesis itself will be accepted by examiners (although it is no guarantee).

The second option, conducting a separate and smaller research project in order to write a journal article, has the advantage of ensuring that the resulting journal article is self-contained and stands alone as a separate piece of work. It also has the advantage of extending your knowledge and expertise, and demonstrating capabilities that many employers are looking for in staff (for example, dedication, determination and the ability to multi-task). However, the disadvantage is that it will require further research to be completed before an article can be written, which can be time consuming.

WHERE TO PUBLISH

It is advisable to consider which journal you would like your article to be published in prior to writing the article itself. This is because every journal has its own formatting, style and referencing guidelines. To save time, it is suggested that you first write your journal article following the guidelines of the journal in which you aim to be published.

There are many factors to consider when choosing the journal or journals in which you would like to be published. It is recommended that you write a list of suitable journals, in order of preference. First, you should search the internet or your university's library website for a list of all the journals in your field of research. You can then narrow this list according to relevance and quality of the journals. Search through issues of journals to see if they have published articles on your specific topic in the past. You can also check your bibliography or reference list as you might find that the majority of your sources have come from one or more journals. If this is the case, these journals might be a good place to start.

While the quality and reputation of journals is important, you might not wish to aim for the highest quality or top-ranked journal in your field for your first publication, since this could increase the chances that your article might be rejected. You should compile a list of between five and ten journals in which you would like to be published, in order of priority, and approach them one at a time.

HOW TO WRITE THE JOURNAL ARTICLE

Once you have decided on the journal you plan to submit your journal article to, visit the journal's website to find information on the format, style and language guidelines. It is very important that you follow the specific and individual guidelines of the journal correctly. These guidelines will also let you know approximately how long your article should be, and will normally provide minimum and maximum lengths. Check whether your article should be written in British/Australian or American English, which referencing style you should use and how to format your article (including font, spacing, margins, headings etc).

If you have converted a chapter of your thesis into a journal article and your thesis follows different guidelines, you can simply submit your journal article to one of our experienced academic editors for editing and we can alter the article so it conforms to the journal's guidelines for you. We will alter the article for you so that it conforms to the journal's guidelines. Our editing conforms to the Australian Standards for Editing Practice, so while we are unable to change the content of your article (i.e. the information, research or ideas it contains), we are able to make changes to the style, language, format and referencing of your article.

HOW TO APPROACH PUBLISHERS

When submitting journal articles to journals for consideration, it is vital that you only submit each journal article to one journal at a time. Almost all journals will refuse to consider an article for publication if it is being considered for publishing elsewhere. Most journals, as part of their official submission process, will require you to declare that your work is not under consideration elsewhere.

First, ensure that you follow all the publisher's guidelines correctly when writing your article (or submit your article to us for academic editing to ensure it follows these guidelines).

Second, visit the journal's website to find information about their submission process. Again, it is very important that you follow the specific and individual guidelines of the journal correctly. Some journals only accept electronic submissions, some journals only accept hard copy submissions through the post, and other journals will accept submissions in either format or require both. Submit your journal article to your first journal following their submission guidelines.

The peer-review process can be time consuming. It can take between six weeks and six months before you will receive the journal's formal decision. Some journals have a two-stage review process. First, one of the journal's editors will review the article to decide if it is worthy of peer review. If your article passes this first review, it will then be sent to one or more anonymous peer-reviewers (academics who are experts in the field upon which you have written). After what can be a lengthy period, you will then receive either an email or a letter from the journal relating their decision. Often the decision will be accompanied by the reviewers' reports or comments. If your article has been rejected for publication, it is vital that you request the reviewers' reports or comments (if you have not already received them) because they will contain valuable information that you can use to improve your article prior to sending it to another journal for consideration.

It is rare that a first-time author will have his or her first journal article accepted for publication by the first journal to which it has been submitted. If this happens to you, congratulations! If it does not, do not be discouraged. Rejection is a normal part of the publishing process and all authors have been rejected at one point or another. If your article is rejected, use the comments provided by the reviewers to improve the article if you can. Then, you will need to prepare your article for submission to the next journal on your list. You may need to change the style, format and referencing of your article each time you submit your article to a different journal, in order to ensure that it adheres to the journal's guidelines. You can either do this yourself or submit your article, along with the journal's guidelines, to one of our professional academic editors, who will then do it for you.

If you follow this process diligently and are open to advice and criticism from your peers, which you may need to take on board to improve your article, you will be successful in obtaining your first publication.

You can read more about how our professional academic editors can help academics to publish their journal articles, conference papers, chapters, monographs, books and manuscripts through our professional editing service for academics.