# Writing for Publication in Early Childhood Education: Survey Data from Editors and Advice to Authors

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## INTRODUCTION

Becoming a published author poses a challenge to many professionals in the field of education. Yet most professionals can meet this challenge if they are willing to expend the necessary energy, effort, and time. Of course, it is easier to make excuses than it is to commit words to paper. How often have you heard your colleagues (or maybe yourself) say, "I am too busy, I just don't have time." "Who would care to read what I have to say?" or "It is not my job." In reality, most of the reasons for not engaging in the activity of writing are simply masks for a lack of self-confidence, ignorance about the publishing process, or the perceived absence of writing skill. The good news is that the art of writing for publication can be learned; successful authors are made, not born (Henson, 1999).

To stay in business, journal editors depend on authors to submit high quality manuscripts; editors of early childhood education publications are no exception. Unfortunately, many professionals in early childhood education offer a variety of rationalizations for not writing such as, "I'm only a teacher," "I'm not well connected so I don't have any hope of success," or "My first attempts weren't successful; I guess I'm not a good writer." The primary intent of this article is to modify these attitudes and behaviors. This goal is accomplished in two ways. First, we provide detailed information on a wide array of representative journals in early childhood education that is of value for authors; and second, we offer concrete suggestions and strategies from prolific authors in the field of early childhood education.

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## EDITORS' SURVEY

The current endeavor represents an expansion and update of an earlier survey of publication opportunities in early childhood education (Gargiulo, Sefton, & Graves, 1992). Gargiulo and his colleagues analyzed information from 16 journals in which 2 were devoted to early childhood special education. The present survey sought information from 14 journal editors; 11 concerned with the field of early childhood education and 3 that focused on early childhood special education. Data from 5 journals were analyzed for the first time in this survey, including 1 additional publication dedicated to young children with disabilities. These periodicals in the field of early childhood represent a mix of journals that publish articles of various types, including practical, theoretical, reviews of research, and reports of original research.

Journal editors were individually contacted by mail in the Fall of 1999. Each editor responded to a structured questionnaire that looked at journal demographics, journal content and characteristics, publishing requirements, the manuscript review process, and technological supports (e.g., web sites, online availability of authors' guidelines). In a few instances, editors were contacted via telephone in an effort to secure additional information. Cooperation was obtained from all editors.

## JOURNAL AUDIENCE

It is essential that potential authors do their homework prior to submitting a manuscript. A common error of aspiring writers is failure to target their article to the journal's audience. Most journals have a primary readership; a lack of regard for this fact frequently leads to the rejection of a manuscript no matter how well it may be written. It is important that contributors know their journals. Reading several recent issues is one way to

determine the journal's audience while also getting a feel for the "flavor" of the journal. The three most common categories of readers identified in Table I were early childhood teachers, early childhood program administrators, and university faculty. The least common audience was parents and related services personnel.

Circulation size among journals also greatly varies. Readership of the publications listed in Table I range from less than 1,000 to 120,000 readers. Contributors should remember that size does not necessarily equate with quality. Journals with a small readership may be the premiere publication in a highly specialized area rather than being targeted toward practitioners in the field.

### JOURNAL CONTENT

The vast majority of journal editors (71%) indicated that they published thematic issues; although, the frequency of these issues varied. No journal publishes theme issues exclusively. Submitting an article for a specific theme is an excellent way of increasing your chances of acceptance. Generally speaking, editors receive fewer manuscripts for thematic issues than they do for nonthematic issues (Henson, 1999). Of course, your manuscript must be submitted prior to the publication deadline. The wise writer will review back issues of the journal as submission deadlines and topics are usually announced well in advance. By keeping abreast of forthcoming themes and planning writing activities in concert with the journal's emphasis, writers can dramatically increase their chances of publication (Gargiulo *et al.*, 1992).

Table I also reveals that over half (57%) of the journals that publish research, and both quantitative and qualitative research articles are considered. The number of such articles contained in each issue varies. Some journals only publish one or two research pieces per issue while other publications include approximately six. Reviews of literature/research are another common format in early childhood education journals. Approximately two thirds of the editors queried indicated that they publish reviews of published research; however, the number of such reviews per issue is small.

### PUBLICATION FORMAT

All journal editors expressed a preference for a desired length of the manuscript. As shown in Table II, however, a clear consensus was not found. Four editors preferred manuscripts between 4 to 8 pages in length while an equal number sought manuscripts 9 to 12 pages in length. Note that these maximum page lengths typi-

cally include the reference pages, assume at least 1-inch margins all around, and require 12-point, double-spaced print. Over 70% of the journals require that manuscripts be prepared according to guidelines published by the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association [APA], 1994). Two journals have their own specific guidelines. No editor currently allows for the electronic submission of a manuscript. Print copies are still the preferred means of submission; although, many editors now correspond with authors and reviewers via e-mail.

### JOURNAL CHARACTERISTICS

One third of the journals for which data were available do not invite authors to submit manuscripts for publication but instead rely entirely on work submitted at the authors' instigation; that is, unsolicited manuscripts. The average number of unsolicited manuscripts per issue ranged from a low of one to a high of nine with half of the journals publishing about five of these articles per issue. A journal's rate of acceptance is key information for contributors, particularly for those who may lack confidence in their ability to succeed at the publishing game. Table II reveals acceptance rates ranging from less than 10% to more than one third of the manuscripts submitted. In the majority of instances, editors reject about 8 out of every 10 articles they receive. Yet, just as circulation size does not equate with quality, a high rate of rejection does not mean that it is virtually impossible to gain acceptance. In the world of publishing, anyone can submit a manuscript anywhere and *Early Childhood Education Journal*, for example, receives several manuscripts per year that have nothing to do with early childhood or an audience of early childhood practitioners. Such inappropriate submissions contribute to high rejection rates and many rejections are merely "wrong numbers" of this type rather than pronouncements on the publication potential of a manuscript.

### REVIEW PROCESS

Table II provides useful data about the manuscript review process. Almost 80% of the journals use an anonymous peer review system for unsolicited manuscripts. This means that the reviewers are unaware of the author's identity when they critique the manuscript. The review process can vary in length from 1 month to more than 3 months. Once a manuscript is finally accepted for publication, most articles will appear in print in about a year depending upon such things as the backlog of accepted manuscripts and the number of issues

**Table I.** Primary Audience, Circulation, and Content of Representative Publications in Early Childhood Education

| Representative Questions | Child Care Information Exchange | Childhood Education | Dimensions | Early Childhood Education Journal | Early Childhood News | Early Childhood Research Quarterly | Early Education and Development | Journal of Early Intervention | Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education | Our Children | Teaching K-8 | Topics in Early Childhood Special Education | Young Children | Young Exceptional Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Primary audience** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Researchers | | X | | | | X | X | X | X | | | X | | |
| Administrators | X | X | X | | | X | X | X | | | X | X | X | |
| Parents | | X | | | X | | | | | X | | | | X |
| University faculty | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | |
| Child care workers | X | X | X | | X | | | | | | X | | | |
| Early childhood teachers | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | X | X |
| Related services professionals | | X | | X | | X | | X | | | | | | X |
| **Circulation information** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Estimated paid circulation (in thousands) | 25 | 12 | 21 | 5 | 24 | <1 | <1 | 6.5 | 5 | 30 | 120 | 2 | 102 | 6 |
| Number of issues per year | 6 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 4 |
| **Journal content** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Theme issues — Yes/No; frequency per year | Yes; 6 | Yes | Yes; 2 | No; 1 | Yes | Yes; 2–3 | Yes; Var.[a] | No; 1–2 | Yes | Yes; Var.[a] | Yes; 1 | Yes; 8 | No; —[b] | No |
| Empirical research articles — Yes/No; number per issue | No | No | Yes; —[b] | Yes; 1 | Yes; 2 | Yes; 4–6 | Yes; 6–7 | Yes; 5 | Yes; 6 | No | No | Yes; Approx. 3 | No | No |
| Qualitative research articles — Yes/No; number per issue | No | No | Yes; —[b] | Yes; 1 | Yes; 2 | Yes; 0–2 | Yes; 1–2 | Yes; 1 | Yes; 4 | No | No | Yes; Approx. 1 | No | No |
| Research/literature reviews — Yes/No; number per issue | Yes; Var.[a] | Yes; 1 | Yes; Var.[a] | Yes; 1 | No; 1 | Yes | No; 1 | No | No | Yes | Yes; 2–4 | Yes; Approx. 1 | No; Approx. 1 | Var. |

[a]Var. = variable.
[b]Missing data.

**Table II.** Publishing Requirements and Characteristics of Representative Publications in Early Childhood Education[a]

| Research questions | Child Care Information Exchange | Childhood Education | Dimensions | Early Childhood Education Journal | Early Childhood News | Early Childhood Research Quarterly | Early Education and Development | Journal of Early Intervention | Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education | Our Children | Teaching K–8 | Topics in Early Childhood Special Education | Young Children | Young Exceptional Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Publishing requirements** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Desired length of manuscript (typed double space pages) | 4–8 | 9–12 | 9–12 | 9–14 | 9–12 | 30–35 | Approx. 30 | 25 | 13–16 | 4–8 | 4–8 | 13–16 | 4–8 | 9–12 |
| Style requirement[b] | 0 | APA | APA | APA | APA | APA | APA | APA | APA | 0 | N.A. | APA | CHI | APA |
| Electronic submission? (Yes/No) | No | No | No | No | No | No | —[c] | No | No | —[c] | —[c] | —[c] | No | |
| **Journal characteristics** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Average number of pages per issue | >75 | >75 | 31–50 | 31–50 | 51–75 | >75 | >75 | >75 | >75 | 31–50 | >75 | 75 | >75 | <30 |
| Average number of "feature length" articles per issue | 9–12 | 4–8 | 4–8 | 12 | 4–8 | 4–8 | 9–12 | 1 | 9–12 | 4–8 | 4–8 | 4–8 | 9–12 | 3 |
| Average number of solicited manuscripts per issue | 15 | 12 | —[c] | 6 | 7 | 0 | Var. | 0 | Var. | 2 | 0 | Var. | —[c] | 0 |
| Average number of unsolicited manuscripts per issue | 1 | 6 | [c] | 6 | 2 | 4–6 | 6 | 6 | 9 | 1 | 4–5 | 5 | [c] | 3 |
| Percentage of unsolicited manuscripts accepted | <10 | 10–20 | >33 | 10–15 | 20–30 | 10–20 | 20–30 | 10–20 | 10–20 | 10–20 | <10 | 10–20 | 15 | 10–20 |
| Subject to peer review? (Yes/No) | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Subject to blind review? (Yes/No) | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Number of reviews per manuscript | 1–2 | 3–4 | 3–4 | 2–3 | 3–4 | 3–4 | 3–4 | 3–4 | 3–4 | 3–4 | 1–2 | 3–4 | 3–4 | 3–4 |
| Average review time (no. of weeks) | N.A. | 9–12 | 5–8 | 9–18 | 9–12 | 5–8 | 9–12 | 1–4 | >12 | —[c] | 1–4 | 9–12 | 9–12 | 5–8 |
| Reviews shared with author? (Yes/No) | No | Var. | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Publication lag (no. of months) | <6 | 12–18 | 6–12 | 12–24 | 6–12 | 6–12 | 6–12 | 6–12 | 12–18 | 6 | Var. | 6–12 | 24 | 6 |
| Review or publication charge (Yes/No) | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Is the journal indexed? (Yes/No) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| On-line availability? (Yes/No) | No | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No |

[a] APA = American Psychological Association, CHI = Chicago Manual of Style, N.A. = Not applicable, Var. = Variable.
[b] 0 = Other (e.g., author guidelines).
[c] Missing data.

published per year. Only one editor reported a publication delay of 2 years. None of the journals assess a fee to review manuscripts nor do contributors have to pay the publisher (a practice called "page charges") to see their work in print.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR BECOMING A PUBLISHED AUTHOR

The following suggestions and resources will increase your chances of success when submitting articles for publication:

1. Have something to discover or say and work from genuine curiosity and intrinsic motivation rather than obligation or trendiness.

2. Be reader-centered rather than author-centered; focus on questions your readers are likely to have.

3. Read widely and well from current and classic sources rather than counting on a few textbooks, a computer search, or the Internet.

4. Invest many ideas and resources into your manuscript rather than hoarding them for some future project.

5. Accept full responsibility for a carefully crafted manuscript rather than expecting others to "clean up" a flawed manuscript for you.

6. Recognize the limitations of word processing; just because you can move a paragraph quickly, that doesn't mean it belongs there.

7. Approach reviews and critiques of your manuscripts as opportunities to hone your craft rather than as ego threats.

8. Read articles and books for style and seek out books that will help to improve your writing instead of always focusing on content (see Appendix A)

9. Subject your work to peer review by colleagues before you mail it off for anonymous peer review.

10. After you have said to yourself, "It's done!", let your manuscript get cold, come back to it, and rewrite it at least five more times.

11. Build credibility with the editor and conform to the manuscript submission guidelines rather than ignoring details (see Appendix B for a list of website addresses).

12. Don't trust your memory of referencing styles; master the rules of APA (1994) style and consult the rules often until they are ingrained. (Jalongo & McCracken, 1997).

A common question of authors seeking to publish is: What do reviewers and editors want? Appendix C is the set of criteria that are used to evaluate manuscripts submitted to *Early Childhood Education Journal*.

## CONCLUSION

The work of professionals dedicated to the care and education of young children must emanate from a commitment to the field. Authors need to approach writing with a fundamental spirit of generosity, whether they are sharing ideas in a practical article, revealing their insights in a theoretical/review article, or reporting the results of their investigations in a research article. It is a privilege to be in a position to influence the thinking of a field as diverse, dynamic, and important as early childhood education. Following the guidelines set forth in this article will enable you to disseminate your work in professional periodicals and reach a wider audience of colleagues committed to the very young.

## APPENDIX A: RECENTLY PUBLISHED RESOURCES FOR WRITERS

### To Cope with Writing Anxieties

Boice, R. (1997). Strategies for enhancing scholarly productivity. In J. M. Moxley & T. Taylor (Eds.), *Writing and publishing for academic authors* (2nd ed., pp. 19–34). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Byrd, P., & Benson, B. (1994). *Problem/solution: A reference for ESL writers*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Maisel, E. (1999). *Deep writing: 7 principles that bring ideas to life*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.

Perry, S. K. (1999). *Writing in flow: Keys to enhanced creativity*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books.

### To Inspire You to Write

Berg, E. (1999). *Escaping into the open*. New York: Perennial/HarperCollins.

Dillard, A. (1998). *The writing life* (2nd ed.). New York: HarperCollins.

King, S. (2000). *On writing: A memoir of the craft*. New York: Scribner.

Lamb, B. (1997). *Booknotes: America's finest authors on reading, writing, and the power of ideas*. New York: Times Books/Random House.

Rhodes, R. (1995). *How to write: Advice and reflections*. New York: William Morrow.

### To Improve Writing Style

Adelstein, M. E., & Pival, J. G. (1997). *The writing commitment* (5th ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College and School Division.

Murray, D. M. (1998). Unlearning writing. *Learning Matters* http://www.heinemann.comhbbc/lmv2n6p1.html (Retrieved from the World Wide Web November 27, 2000)

Roorbach, B. (1998). *Writing life stories*. Cincinnati, OH: F & W Publications/Story Press.

Trimble, J. R. (2000). *Writing with style*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Zinsser, W. K. (1998). *On writing well* (5th ed.). New York: Harper and Row.

## To Coach You in Publishing

Edelstein, S. (1999). *100 things every writer needs to know*. New York: Perigree/Putnam.

Henson, K. T. (1999). *Writing for publication: Keys to academic and business success*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Jalongo, M. R. (2001). *Writing nonfiction for professional audiences: A guide to the craft*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Luey, B. (1995). *Handbook for academic authors* (3rd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Moxley, J. M. (Ed.). (1995). *Publish, don't perish: The scholar's guide to academic writing and publishing*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Moxley, J. M., & Taylor, T. (Eds.). (1997). *Writing and publishing for academic authors* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Thyer, B. A. (1994). *Successful publishing in scholarly journals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## Books of Quotations About Writing

Safire, W., & Safir, L. (1994). (Eds.). *Good advice on writing*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Winokur, J. (Ed.). (1999). *Advice to writers*. New York: Vintage/Random House.

## APPENDIX B: WEBSITES OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS AND MAGAZINES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Consult these websites for the current editor's name, e-mail address, and manuscript submission guidelines. These addresses will take you to the guidelines for authors.

*Child Care Information Exchange*
 (Exchange Press) www.ccie.com

*Childhood Education*
 (Association for Childhood Education International) www.udel.edu/bateman/acei/cehp.htm

*Dimensions of Early Childhood*
 (The Southern Early Childhood Association) http://www.seca50.org/dimensions.html

*Early Childhood Education Journal*
(Kluwer Academic Publishers) http://www.wkap.nl/journalhome.htm/1082-3301

*Early Childhood News*
 (Discount School Supply) www.earlychildhoodnews.com

*Early Childhood Research Quarterly*
 (Ablex Publishers) www.udel.edu/ecrq

*Early Education and Development*
 (Wide Range Inc. and Pediatric Psychology Press) www.widerange.com/childhood.html

*Journal of Early Intervention*
 (Council for Exceptional Children) www.fpg.unc.edu/~jei

*Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*
 (Association for Childhood Education International) www.udel.edu/bateman/acei/jrcehp.htm

*Our Children*
 (National Parent Teacher Association) www.pta.org

*Teaching K–8*
 (Zaner-Bloser Publishers) www.teachingk-8.com/html/submission.tpl?stamp=100516031142001

*Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*
 (Pro-ed Publishers) www.proedinc.com/contact.html

*Young Children*
 (National Association for the Education of Young Children) www.naeyc.org/profdev/publications.htm

*Young Exceptional Children*
 (Division for Early Childhood) http://www.dec-sped.org/YEC/

## APPENDIX C: EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR *EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION JOURNAL*

### Some Points to Ponder as You Review

Does the **title** of the manuscript accurately reflect the content? Could a person read the **abstract** and get a clear sense of what the article will be about? What about the **key words**? Will they be useful for indexing the work so that other researchers can find it?

Is there an opening paragraph that **identifies the topic and a clear focus**? Does the author make her or his stance on the issues clear? Could a reader decide, within the first page, if this article is of interest or is there a long and unnecessary preamble?

Does the opening section **preview** what is to come? Is there a succinct overview of the major parts of the article?

Does the **content** of the article have appeal for the audience of *Early Childhood Education Journal*? Is there material that is timely or innovative? Is the content significant or even timeless in its appeal for early childhood educators and the allied professions?

What about **documentation**? Is the information provided accurate and up-to-date? Does the author seem to be aware of leaders in the field and present a balanced view? Are authoritative sources of support cited?

What is the **quality of thinking** behind the manuscript? Do you have the sense that the author has ploughed deeply into the relevant literature and reflected carefully upon the trends, issues, and controversies associated with this topic?

What about **style**? Is the language clear and direct so that readers at different levels with understand? Are unfamiliar terms defined?

Does the manuscript have **life**? Are general ideas supported by specific examples that demonstrate the author's concern for young children and commitment to the field? Does the author's voice convey the message that she or he has really lived with these ideas and experienced them personally, rather than just writing about them?

What about overall **organization**? Does every paragraph really belong where it is placed? Does one section of the manuscript flow into the next seamlessly? Is each paragraph cohesive?

Does the author make effective use of **headings and subheadings** to guide the reader through the content?

Are **tables, figures, and other illustrative material** carefully chosen and worth the added expense of publishing them? Has the author included material that others in the field will find helpful? Are there examples of young children's words and work, as appropriate?

Is the article **carefully prepared**? Does it adhere to the style requirements of the American Psychological Association's style manual (4th ed.)? Are all of the references in the proper format? Is it free of spelling and typing errors or does it show signs of haste in preparation?

Is the manuscript **succinct**? Does it get to the point and stay on the subject? Are there some obvious places where it could be improved by skillful pruning?

What about the **conclusion**? Does the manuscript give a sense of revisiting the main ideas briefly? Does it give the reader a feeling that all of the ideas have been tied together?

What about the **reprint/republication potential** of the article? Would you recommend it to a colleague as course material? Can you envision the article as a reprint in a book of readings later on?

Mary Renck Jalongo
*Editor*

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