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Journal Submissions

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By [Eszter Hargittai](#)

Publishing one's own work is essential in most academic areas. While some fields continue to put a lot of weight on books, writing journal articles is important in an increasing number of areas. The logistics of journal submission are not obvious. Nonetheless they are yet another aspect of academic professionalization that seems to go unaddressed in many graduate programs. In this piece I cover how you go about picking an appropriate journal for your paper and how you prepare it for submission. The assumption is that you have prepared a manuscript that you and your mentors feel is ready for consideration by a journal. (In some disciplines, refereed conference proceedings are more the norm. I suspect much of what is below applies to those cases as well.)

Finding an appropriate venue

With the myriad of journals out there, it can be daunting to figure out where you should send your piece. If you have mentors familiar with your paper (e.g., your adviser or the faculty member for whose class you wrote the first draft of the piece), talk to them for input. While it may be that faculty members are less familiar with your specific area, they may still have valuable advice. Another approach is to look at the bibliography of your paper and think about where your references appear. If you cite several papers from a particular journal then that may be a good target publication.

Another helpful strategy is to do a bit of research to see whether there are any special issues with your topic in the works at journals in your area. Special issues can come about in various ways. One is that experts in a field approach a journal editor and propose that they edit an issue of the journal focused on a specific topic. The upside of special issues focused on your general area of inquiry is that the special issue editors will likely be sympathetic to the topic of your piece. This matters, because convincing editors and reviewers that the question you are tackling in your paper is worthy of publication is often the first hurdle authors face in getting their papers taken seriously, so having a venue that is specifically focused on your topic can be a helpful starting point. Another nice aspect of special issues is that precisely because they bring together several papers about one topic, they may draw more attention to your work, thanks to its proximity to other related scholarship.

While browsing journal websites is one way to go about finding such opportunities, another helpful approach is to read through CFPs (calls for papers) that have been circulated on mailing lists. (Try, for example, running a search on "special issue" on the archives of a professional mailing list.) If you find one that sounds like a possibility, but you are not sure, send an inquiry to the special issue editor. In case you find a relevant match, but its deadline is far down the line when you are ready to submit, check with the journal editor or special issue editor to see whether they would review your piece immediately upon receipt. If they will not then this may not be a good option to pursue, given that you do not want your paper sitting on an editor's desk (more likely the journal's computer drive, that is) for months before consideration. This may not have to be the case, however. It may well be that the journal will get your piece out for review as soon as you submit your paper and you will receive a timely response.

Once you have settled on a publication, read the guidelines outlined on its site. These will address basic requirements such as bibliographic formatting and whether a title page is necessary. If you are not that familiar with the journal, then also consider looking through some of its issues to see whether your paper matches the tone and style of what

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gets published in it. If not then consider making some edits to your paper or reassess whether it is a realistic venue for your work.

Preparing your manuscript for submission

Many journals run a double-blind review process. What this means is that at least in theory, the reviewer does not know the author's identity and the author does not know the reviewers' identities. (Whether this is a realistic assumption is another matter, but despite online conference archives and Web searches, and even though many academic communities are rather small, the process does still often work to achieve an anonymous exchange.) Anonymous peer review requires that authors anonymize their manuscripts before submission. What does that mean? Authors should remove self-citations from the paper and any comments that may make the authors' identities known.

When I write a paper and cite some of my prior work, instead of writing Hargittai 2007 in the body of the work, I would mention Author 2007. In a similar vein, the bibliography would also include a line saying Author 2007 instead of the full Hargittai 2007 citation. If there are co-authors, the same applies. Instead of Hargittai & Hinnant 2008, the paper would simply reference Author 2008. (I once saw a manuscript submitted that used the following convention: Author & Hinnant 2008. I was baffled that the author thought this really meant an anonymized reference.) References are not the only possible signals of author identity. If you did your study on a campus with which you are affiliated, then either do not name the institution or do not use language that suggests that you administered the study at your own institution (this latter point is often assumed, however, so if you did not administer the study at your own institution then that may be worth spelling out in the methods section).

There is one possible exception to anonymizing bibliographic entries. It will depend on the journal's policy and /or the editor's take on the matter though so be upfront about it. If one of the authors of the manuscript is also the author or co-author of a piece that would be expected to be cited in the paper, then the author may opt to leave that citation in the paper as removing it would jeopardize loss of anonymity more than leaving it in would. This is less likely to be an issue during one's graduate school years, but it is a possibility, and so it is worth keeping it in mind. In such a case, a note to the editor would be important to explain why that particular citation was not anonymized, a note that you can include in the cover letter you send in with your paper (see below).

Possible reviewers

Some journals will ask whether you have suggestions for reviewers. While it is impossible to know whether editors will use your suggestions, it is worth including some names on the list to help the journal find suitable referees. When considering names to add, do not list anyone at your own institution or your adviser from a previous program, as these people have a conflict of interest. Also, avoid listing the giants in your field. If they are very well-known then the editor will likely think of them anyway. More importantly, if they are so prominent then the chances of them being able to say yes to a review amidst their many other obligations are small. This does not mean that established senior scholars should not or do not review journal articles, but the point of reviewer suggestions is more to draw the journal staff's attention to people they are less likely to know than to list the authors of classics on your bibliography.

When thinking about whom to suggest, consider who may be a sympathetic and fair audience for your piece. Reflect on interactions you have had with people and what impressions you have gotten of scholars you have seen at meetings. (A person who always seems like a curmudgeon or never has anything constructive to say may not be a great candidate for this task.) Of course, think about whose work your paper addresses and who would be interested in reading it based on the abstract. (Reviewers are usually sent a copy of the title of the paper and its abstract to decide whether they want to accept the referee invitation.) List 2-3 such names on the journal submission form if there is an option for it.

Letter accompanying the submission

Journal submissions should include a cover letter. This is not always required with online submission systems anymore, but there is still often room for it. This letter is addressed to the editor by the author (or in the case of multiple authors, usually the lead author). It states the submission of the manuscript for consideration and assures the editor that the paper is not under review concurrently at any other

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publication. In most fields – law is an exception – it is unacceptable to submit a paper to more than one venue at a time.

The letter should also include a list of omitted references taken out for the purposes of anonymizing the paper for review (see previous section). The journal submission guidelines will mention whether additional information needs to be provided in the letter or as a separate attachment. This can include such items as acknowledgements and author contact information. Sometimes these go on a separate title page. It is important to follow journal instructions as often papers are sent back without review until they meet all logistical criteria.



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Jeremy Martin

In my field, mathematics, self-mentions and self-citations are considered perfectly OK. You can even use the first person singular; it's not common but it is acceptable. Most journals do not referee double-blind -- for many papers, there are so few possibilities for who the author is that a referee could probably figure it out anyway. (The author does not know who the referee is, though.)

Overall, I get the impression is that the format and style of papers is much more flexible in math than in lab sciences.

2 months ago

Like Reply



Hoosier Prof

Jerry -- I'm not from your institution, if that's what you're asking. Many of us regular posters choose to remain anonymous, and there's plenty of personnel action out there to justify the choice when it's made. I encourage you to take the words we offer at their face value and refrain from passing judgment on our choice of alias.

3 months ago

Like Reply



Editor

I also suggest my students use "wall paper" (cites from the target journal) to demonstrate they've actually READ articles in the journal they're submitting. It also demonstrates the paper can make a contribution to THAT journal and hopefully the field. As an editor and member of several editorial boards, I am constantly amazed by the papers that are simply written and then sent without considering the venue or fit.

3 months ago

Like Reply



Chris Brown-Syed

Over the years, I've had reviewers complain that authors cited their own work too much. The function of a literature review is to place the current article in context. If you are the only one advancing a particular theory or viewpoint, that context may seem rather narrow to reviewers. By all means, cite previous research if it is important to the current work, but generally, I would

advise limiting self citation.

Each journal follows a recognized style. Consulting the most current APA or MLA manuals may resolve some stylistic issues, but when the piece goes to press, the line editors will probably re-work your references according to the journal's house style.

3 months ago

Like Reply



Chris Brown-Syed

For promotion and tenure purposes, many departments expect publications in a few of the "tier one" journals in their fields. Typically, tier one journals have high rejection rates. This can be frustrating for new authors. Arguably, a reasonable and measured output of publications, with some as lead or sole author, some as co-author, is just as important. In some fields, conference papers that are published in proceedings count for much, in other fields not much at all. Lead-time to publication can be important too, if one must keep up one's annual output. While e-only-journals guarantee quick turnaround and wide readership, in some fields they are still not highly regarded.

I would advise new authors to look at Ulrich's directory of journals, and to select venues by the journals' subjects and scopes. Do indeed ask a librarian for assistance - they manage the serials budgets and search the indexes regularly, so they know the turf.

Visit the publishers' websites, and look at their lineups. Browse the online contents pages. Write the editors with questions about the suitability of your article for that venue. Why wait for the possible disappointment of a rejection letter, and the lag-time caused by a mis-match?

Most copyright transmittal forms stipulate that you must only submit to one journal at a time, so your choice is important. I can't speak for them all, but generally, editors welcome queries. In the long run, they save everybody time and grief. As well, editors may point you to more suitable venues.

Another important consideration is impact. Journals that are indexed in the major databases are generally more highly regarded. Ulrich's and similar sources will list these for each journal. Citation counts are considered important by some P

3 months ago

Like Reply



Eszter Hargittai

Thanks for the additional comments.

Hoosier Prof, indeed, the next piece in my series will address what to do depending on the response the submission receives.

My experiences are with various social science fields. (You can see a list of where I've published here: <http://webuse.org/pubs/> .) I have also refereed papers for over 30 journals in a range of fields and most of them follow the double-blind review process although not all. I have seen other stand-ins for "Author", but the general idea is the same. I don't doubt, however, that fields differ in this regard.

Thomas Lawrence Long and others note that it can be advantageous to write with a specific journal in mind. I agree that this is a helpful strategy and I often employ it myself. However, I think it works better once one has a bit of experience with journal publishing. Most graduate students have just one or two projects in the works and only so much familiarity with different journals so I don't think it is realistic in all cases for them to write with a specific journal in mind per se. However, as I noted in the piece, once they settle on a potential outlet, they should see whether their style adheres to what they see in it and consider revising the piece to match.

Thanks to StevenB for pointing out that librarians can be a helpful resource for finding relevant publications.

3 months ago

Like Reply



Jerry Pattengale

Thanks for this piece. I concur with the "HoosierProf" (though not sure why she/he writes anonymously). At IWU, we have a few dozen scholarship funds, and proposals often ask for the three targets journals or venues. Also, a few pieces worth reading are "The Publishing Pipeline" by M. Bugeja (Iowa, in CHE a couple of years ago) and Lindsay Waters' "Enemies of Promise," a very lively and candid short read (we gave it to all faculty members). A rather general and engaging read by the prolific Keith Drury is "A Brief Guide for Writers" (Triangle Publishing). Also, for those wanting to frame data for publishing, great workshop speakers are Randy Swing (Pres., AIR), Paul Gore (Utah, and formerly with ACT), Byron Johnson (Baylor, ISR, previously at U.Penn), and Laurie Schreiner (Azusa Pacific, Sen. Scien. @ Gallup and co-developer of the SSI).

3 months ago

Like Reply



Hoosier Prof

Although I am glad to see clear-headed advice on manuscript submission, I disagree with a couple of suggestions in this essay.

The main problem is Ms. Hargittai's suggestion that the search for an outlet begins AFTER the manuscript has been written. I suggest you begin thinking about outlets when you begin to write. Yes -- even when you are crafting the conference paper. At least in my social science field and certainly in the natural sciences, journals vary considerably in terms of their disciplinary focus, conceptual and methodological preferences, audience, length and format. By focusing your attention at the outset, you are much more efficient with your time and more likely to find the right fit with a journal.

I also agree with "Mike" that author names should be anonymized only when there is an obvious risk of self-identification (such as citing your prior findings to support your present research model). In all other cases, it makes no sense to remove citations that demonstrate the scope of prior research.

I hope a future essay will advise junior scholars on the next stage of the review process. I find that a lot of my junior colleagues over-react or freeze up when they receive critical reviews. Understanding referee comments is the REAL key to a happy publishing experience.

3 months ago

Like Reply



Anonymous

This looks like great advice for people in some fields, but it's worth specifying which areas it's based on. For example, in mathematics, special issues exist but only rarely and on the fringes, and mathematicians wouldn't be advised to seek them out. There is no double-blind review, and it is rare to be asked for suggested referees. So the advice in this article would be mostly irrelevant or counterproductive for math grad students.

3 months ago

Like Reply



StevenB

I would like to add another strategy to your fine list of ideas for identifying appropriate journals for a manuscript - and I encourage colleagues to think about this even as they are writing the draft - in order to shape it to the language, style and tone for that publication.

Seek out your librarian subject specialist. Most academic libraries assign their librarians to different departments based on subject knowledge (I currently serve our College of Education) of the disciplines. Your librarian has a great familiarity with the journal literature of the discipline. It's our responsibility to build the collection through evaluation - so we know the literature and where a certain manuscript might best fit.

If we don't then we can tap into tools such as Ulrich's Periodicals or journal impact reports to identify some potential titles. I was once asked by a faculty member to come up with some high impact titles in a particular discipline. The answer came in the form of an article I uncovered that analyzed the top 20 or so journals in that discipline.

Researchers may not think of asking librarians for this sort of help, but I recommend it.

3 months ago

Like Reply



Josh Hall

I find the author's comment regarding the proper way to anonymize manuscripts interesting. My view has always been the same as Mike's and in the dozens of articles I've refereed in economics I've never seen anyone use Author (Year). I'm wondering in which fields this is a convention because it seems quite odd. After all, if I am refereeing a paper and it says "We build off the work of Author (2008) who estimates a model..." and I have no way of knowing the paper being referred to, how does that help the refereeing process? Whereas self-citations do not identify you, unless you cite yourself a dozen times and you are not well-known. Readers from other disciplines, can you help clarify for me?

3 months ago

Like Reply



Thomas Lawrence Long

Good general advice, though as you know, some details will differ depending on the discipline.

The most important strategic decision is the selection of the journal. In fact, many highly productive scholars report that they do not write and then choose a journal, but, instead, choose a journal first, then write an article for that journal.

Author queries to editors can also be very helpful in determining suitability. An editor will know what is already in the pipeline, so may wave you off if something similar is about to be published.

Author guidelines on Web sites or in the pages of the journal can sometimes be outdated (especially if a new editor has come on board and hasn't had time to update them).

Discipline specialist librarians can be invaluable in helping scholars select journals, with access to databases like Ulrich's to find specialty publications.

Scholars seeking tenure or promotion also need to keep in mind their school's or department's expectations about journal rankings and "impact factors."

Finally: Read or skim the past year's volume (all issues) of articles! As a former journal editor, I was often dismayed by submissions that came from people who had no clue as to what we published. (They didn't make it past the editor to a reviewer.)

I've posted a link to your helpful article on the NursingWriting Web site (a resource for nurse writers and scholars): <http://nursingwriting.wordpress...>

3 months ago

Like Reply



Eszter Hargittai

Reading Mike's comment, I realize now that my description of anonymous citations was not sufficiently clear. When I say that you list "Author 2007" in the reference list, my point is that you list as much and that is it. You do *not* list the title of the piece or where it was published (of course that would make it identifiable!). It is a line with just "Author 2007" on it period.

It depends on the journal, but if its policy is anonymized manuscripts then indeed you will have to remove self-citations (regardless of whether you refer to the piece in first person or not) with the exception of the case I mentioned in the piece.

3 months ago

Like Reply



Mike

You DONT need to remove your name from your previous publications that you'd like to cite. You just need to avoid all such phrases as "As I've argued elsewhere". In fact, what you've suggested is *less* anonymous, because you still leave in the title of the article/ book, and any reviewer can find out your identity by Google. (And if your previous work is any good, he/ she probably doesn't even need to Google the title, because he/ she probably already will recognize your book/ article by the title, even without your name attached).

So: cite the book/ article with your full name on it; just don't include any phrases that indicate that it is YOURS.

And anyway, as you say, if you've presented the article at a conference, it's probably online anyway, and can be Googled by a reviewer.

3 months ago

Like Reply



Jason Mittell

I would add that as you do your due diligence about a journal, it's worth researching the journal

3 months ago

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