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Targeting a Journal

So, you need to have some publications or, at a minimum, potentially publishable manuscripts to achieve your academic goals. There are various ways to go about this process.

One way is to simply to write an article—perhaps restructuring a seminar paper, culling research from your dissertation, or formulating research on an entirely new topic. Then, choose a journal and send out the article. Since journal editors typically state in their submission requirements that multiple submissions are not allowed, you're on the honor system to send the piece only to one journal at a time. This process has the advantage of being fairly straightforward: just open a page of journal titles and throw a dart to choose one! Or, pick the top journal in your discipline and hope for the best.

We recommend a second way to go about getting published: be strategic. Think of it as publication matchmaking—the right article for the right journal at the right time. All three have to align for it to be the right match.



ADVICE FROM A PUBLISHED WRITER

If you're seeking promotion and/or tenure, check the status of journals with your promotion and tenure committee. I have learned that if the top journal in your field doesn't want your piece, you need to know where to go next and what counts in your department and institution—and you need to be able to make an argument for such choices. This step is particularly important in multi-discipline departments where promotion and tenure committee members may not know that a certain journal is the top one in your field, even though it looks dodgy to them. This problem happened to a colleague who was in a newly blended department of library and computer sciences. He published several articles with journals well-regarded in his field, but the new department chair didn't think they were credible given his own disciplinary orientation. That impression lingered throughout the entire promotion and tenure process, and ultimately he was denied tenure.

In this strategic process, you follow a series of steps to achieve your goal:

1. Identify the scholarly or intellectual work you have produced that you want to communicate.
2. Consider what angle you would like to take.
3. Evaluate possible journals to approach.

Identifying What to Write About

The first step is to identify the scholarly or intellectual work you have produced that you want to communicate. Identifying what to write about is a major part of getting published. People who publish a lot don't do so just because people like them or because they have a magic touch. They publish because they do interesting and important research, speak to contemporary topics—whether arguing for or against them—and actually help to create the next hot topic.

What you write about should be something you've researched and want to communicate. Papers that make it to publication typically reveal the results or products of one's intellectual activity. Although many scholars have an impetus to publish because that fits their promotion and tenure requirements, others want to publish well beyond any requirement to do so. They want to publish to connect with the ongoing conversation in their field and to share study results and new approaches. Ask yourself:

- What thread of your work do you want to focus on?
- What do you want the field to be talking about?
- What should they be talking about?
- How can you contribute to that goal?

We certainly appreciate the need to publish for employment purposes, but that requirement wasn't developed as a mere hurdle to overcome and then to ignore after promotion and tenure. Publishing isn't something extraneous to the work that's happening in our various disciplines or teaching; publishing *is* what's happening in our disciplines or teaching. Publishing isn't a separate, scary thing that only the best, most confident, and smartest people can do. Publishing is our job as academics. Moreover, writing up an intellectual product just because you need a publication for your CV—from purely a drudge work perspective—leads to less-than-stellar writing and uninteresting papers that often fail to get published.



ADVICE FROM A PUBLISHED WRITER

My motivation for my first article was wanting to tell people about the gap I saw in our discipline. I wanted to talk to more than the six people who came to my conference presentation or my best friend who was sick of hearing me talk about it. I wanted to publish because I had a point (what I saw as an important point) that I wanted to add to the intellectual conversation on the topic.

To get published, you need to have something interesting to say. To publish frequently, you need something of potential *foundational value*, something that strongly influences later developments and that others will respond to and replicate, support and continue, or even object to in meaningful ways. In scholarly publishing, it isn't a bad thing to be polemic in approach. Other scholars' opinions are needed to help the discipline make strides and refine ideas.

Of course, it's important to know what approach certain journals take and whether they would even be amenable to your specific approach—or whether your piece would find external readers who are open-minded. If you know that you're proposing something controversial, then check with the editors to see whether it's something they would consider before you send it in and go through the process.



ADVICE FROM A PUBLISHED WRITER

I think novice writers struggle with knowing how to write for a broader audience as opposed to writing for a mentor or committee. This audience focus means knowing how to read and join the conversation by making small steps, not having to feel like you have the latest and most brilliant idea. Small changes and modest articles can be important and publishable.

That said, research usually isn't giant leaps—it's incremental work taken one small step at a time. One piece builds on another. The work doesn't have to be “new” or even on a grand scale. Think of it this way: from the outside we may see seismic shifts, but if you look at a discipline or author's body of work, you can see them working out these ideas in small chunks.



TIPS & TRICKS

You're not responsible for completing the entire 5000-piece puzzle of a research, educational, or intellectual problem—only one piece of it.

Consider What Angle You Would Like to Take

Any article idea needs not only a thesis—or an argument—which should emerge from your completed research, but also an angle from which you want to address that thesis. Sometimes that research is empirical in nature, and other times it's more theoretical and based in a new reading of the existing literature. Either way, your work involves framing a question and defining a research focus; the article itself fulfills that purpose.



AN EDITOR'S NOTE

Many fresh PhDs don't immediately understand the importance of being edited. They might get upset or even angry when an editor makes suggestions of substantive revisions. Avoid the temptation to think of your writing as inviolate and perfect. It's a hard lesson to learn, but it's an important one. The well published writers will be the first to tell you to listen to your editor.

Think about these questions:

- Do you want to write something informative and expository or argumentative and polemical?
- Do you want to report on your study's data results?
- Do you want to elicit change or confirm the status quo?
- Do you want to teach your colleagues educational strategies that work in particular settings?
- Do you want to fill a gap in the research literature with a study that you've conducted?

- Do you want to argue for a new perspective or framework on an existing topic or question?

Any of these goals are good reasons for writing a paper on the topic of your choice.

This guide walks you through the entire publication process once you've decided on a topic: journal selection, writing the piece, revising it, sending it to various editors and arguing for it through submission letters, and the like. Your topic may shift and change throughout the writing and submission processes, and it may further shift as you revise from reviewers' feedback. That's okay. Such changes are refinements of your thinking and writing, and these are natural and necessary parts of the process. Although it may feel like you're being told to change your perspective or that you've done something wrong in your initial paper, these changes suggest that people are interested in what you want to say and are helping you to refine your approach. Therefore, take such advice as a positive sign. Everyone needs an editor!

Finding the Right Journal/s for Your Article

The process of finding the right journals for your article is a bit like the process of finding the right topic. You likely won't be published if you don't know what people are talking about in the field, and that conversation is found in the journals and collected-article books that exist or are just being published while you're doing your research or scholarly activity, thinking, and writing. The current conversation is one with which you need to be familiar; more importantly, it's what you want to join. However, because publishing venues may be scarce and are especially important to new scholars who need to demonstrate their research chops, joining the conversation means extending it or contributing to it in a significant (but likely a small) way—or finding a new way to view or shake up a current idea that is challenging the field. That's why dissertations often contain excellent material for at least one publication relevant to and of interest to the discipline.



AN EDITOR'S NOTE

When I was a novice writer, I wish I had known how to read academic journals purposefully in order to grasp their style and conventions and then how to build that understanding into a proposal or draft. All of my early journal publications emerged out of conference presentations and were pretty happenstance. I did get two articles published as a graduate student, mostly because I had some (very raw) talent with writing. At the time, I lacked a coherent writing process. I assumed one could only write when inspired, which I rarely was. I lacked discipline and structure and was resistant to following directions and guidance.

How do you locate the right journal for your article? There's no one right way. Following are some basic strategies, which are summarized in Figure 1.

Journals You Read: Start by looking at the publications you're already reading. These could be publications in your field or in other fields. Because you're already reading them, you know the intended audience because you *are* that audience. As you read through these journals, think about the writing styles and approaches they accept. Which one/s tend to match your potential topic, angle, writing style, or other interests?



AN EDITOR'S NOTE

Novice writers need to do research on journals. It's a mistake to submit to a journal you haven't read—while it's possible to get published under those circumstances—it's not the optimal. The lack of knowledge typically shows in submissions and is often a turnoff for regular reviewers/editorial board members. Scholarly publishing is about joining a conversation on issues and concerns related to a field.

Therefore, think and act the way good authors do:

- Research the journal and its typical topics, canonical authors, and standard citation practices.
- Revise your work sufficiently so that the piece can stand alone as a theoretical research article. Many new scholars base their publication submissions on their dissertation work, for example, and make the mistake of referring to “chapters” that no longer exist.
- Move beyond the standard literature review to have a point of significance about a topic. While it's important to cite canonical work, it's important to move beyond that gesturing to clarify how the author is adding to the conversation.

Journals Already Publishing Articles on Your Topic: The next place to look is the reference lists of the articles and books you're reading related to your article's topic. Annotated bibliographies and other texts' reference lists will lead to more articles, which in turn lead to more reference lists to peruse. And finally, dissertations are a great resource because the reference lists tend to be comprehensive.

Think about your own discipline's preferences for dated materials. The humanities tend to value both current and past texts depending on their fundamental value to the field. Literary criticism and history are two among these. The social sciences certainly value current publications particularly as they may take foundational ideas and apply new thinking to them. Some of the sciences (e.g., biology, chemistry, engineering, and mathematics) advance so quickly that only the most recent pieces are useful. For example, *Cell*, a biology journal, has so many excellent submissions that move the field forward at a rapid pace that they publish every two weeks.

Graduate Course Material and Mentor's CVs: Authors need to have both depth and breadth when it comes to places to publish, and many of those who don't publish probably don't have that. It's likely that many schools don't explicitly teach or address the useful skill of learning about where (and how) to publish. However, graduate course syllabi and texts do lead the wise student to helpful resources. It's also useful for students to look at their teachers' and mentors' CVs, as well as the published CVs of disciplinary leaders, to find different publication venues.

Calls for Papers/Project (CFPs): You can find CFPs at the back of some print journals, posted on popular disciplinary listservs, on journal websites, and even on Facebook groups (e.g., Medieval Studies Calls for Papers). Sometimes CFPs are targeted to particular topics, like special issues of a journal or an edited collection. Other times, they are more general and simply call for articles relative to the discipline. CFPs offer specific ideas for the issue through the explanations they provide and questions they pose for scholars to consider. They provide good information both for forming an article and for writing about it in a letter of submission.

Google It: Google has several resources for identifying scholarly journals. Even though a Google search is not the most targeted approach, you never know what might pop up. As the Google option says, "Are you feeling lucky?" Start with a simple Google search. Then move onto Google Scholar, a Google service that only searches scholarly literature. Searching a topic on Google Scholar is a quick way to see your topic through the lens of an expanded disciplinary universe of scholarly research. Additionally, it offers the bonus feature of seeing how many times particular articles are cited by other scholars, which both indicates the importance of a topic and the benefit of certain articles to your own literature review.

Work with a Librarian: Work with your institution's librarians to research journals. Contemporary librarians are experts in online research, and they can teach you what you need to know about using the most recent search engines as well as help you form your online search strategy using the best keywords and strategies. Take advantage of this service. Research librarians won't fault you for seeking their assistance; that's an essential part of their job. This resource is something scholars advise students to do, but often forget to use themselves.

Expand Your Scope: We all tend to look in the directories and in the online locations we know. Try expanding your research universe for journal possibilities. For example, look to see whether an international journal might be appropriate. Also, consider a new online-only journal that is just getting started as well as other multimodal and multidisciplinary journals. Be aware, though, that newer journals may not yet count toward tenure or promotion if they are online or haven't

yet established their credibility. That said, some new journals have top-notch scholars developing and editing them. Look over their material and talk with a mentor about the journal's potential.



Figure 1: Finding the Right Journal for Your Article

Ask Colleagues: Finally, network with colleagues—especially formal mentors—to discuss where you should try to publish. People love to give advice. Ask them how they got their own publications. You can post this query on Facebook or on listservs you follow. You can reach out to colleagues through email or when you see them at conferences and professional meetings. While not necessarily your personal friends, colleagues care about the disciplinary field and the quality of work that people like you produce.



ADVICE FROM A PUBLISHED WRITER

If you're trying to strengthen your tenure or employment dossier, be familiar with the stated and unstated metrics that your department and college use. Be sure to **follow those metrics**. You need to know whether your academic department or institution requires a certain number of publications in high-profile journals and whether they will consider publications in less well-known journals as being “half” of one in a high-profile journal.

You also need to know whether web-based journals will be sufficiently well regarded for your publications. Despite a strong trend of blind reviews and high-quality publications in many web journals, some institutions, like mine, still don't respect online journals or hold them in as high a regard as traditional print-only journals or those whose beginnings were in a print-only era. If you choose web-based journals (and many are quite good), be prepared to argue for your choice. I've done it successfully as have several of my colleagues. I'm sure that soon we won't need to argue for the validity of web-based journals.

Evaluating Whether the Journal is Right for Your Publication

Once you've identified a journal as a potential place to publish, it's time to evaluate whether the journal is right for your article. Such evaluation engages the following steps, which are summarized in Figure 2.

Author Guidelines: Start by reading the author guidelines. They usually identify the intended audience, and typically they're thorough about what potential authors need to consider. But you will need to do more than this initial effort. Sometimes the journal is going in a new direction and the editors are in the process of updating published guidelines. Or, if you're planning to

submit an article draft to a special issue or edited book collection, the author guidelines or other necessary information may not be as clear. You won't know this until you dig a little further. An email to the editor may clarify things for you. Additionally, you can email the editor with your thesis and ask whether your piece is something he or she would consider or be interested in. If you're uncertain, it's a good idea to ask questions; experienced scholars do this all the time.

Read through Back Issues: Read through a year or two of back issues of the journal. Pay attention to what subject matter and types of articles are published versus what the guidelines say will be published. As you do, identify topics, themes, perspectives, and genres of interest.

Writing Style: Check the journal's writing style. Is it jargon heavy focusing on a specific audience, or does the writing style make topics accessible to a broad audience? Do authors write in the first person or is the prose formal? You're making these observations to determine whether the journal's writing style is one in which you're comfortable working.

Is the Journal's Intended Audience Your Article's Right Audience? Consider the intended audience to determine whether and why they would want to read about your topic.

- Is your topic already part of the conversation in this field/journal?
- Are you a member of this community and want to apply your field's approach to this topic?
- Did you find this journal because they're doing a special issue on your topic?
- Do you want to introduce something new into an ongoing conversation? This approach is what more established scholars typically do, and you can do it too.
- How could you join the ongoing conversation in this community?



AN EDITOR'S NOTE

The number one mistake novice writers make is pitching proposals and articles that are not relevant to the mission of the journal. Read the directions, please! A close second is failing to be familiar with the conversations going on in the field and in a journal. Overstating the originality or impact of an article also is a big problem.

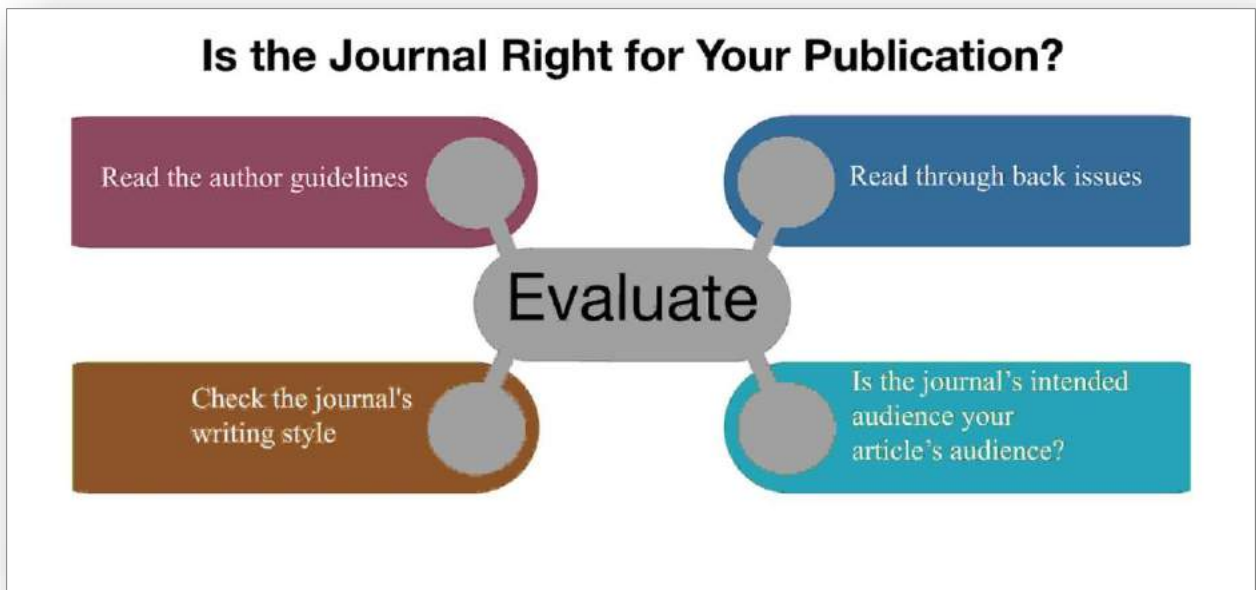


Figure 2: *Is the Journal Right for Your Publication?*

Print versus Online

Things are changing in the publishing world. Where print once ruled in terms of publication prestige, raw economics have leveled the parity playing field, removing the stigma of online publications. A journal's quality doesn't automatically change just because it's published online—even though that's what many academics once thought. Anonymously, or blind, reviewed texts still are the gold standard regardless of delivery options. Currently, many new scholarly journals are deciding to publish solely online for cost reasons. Nearly all print-based publications now have online editions or portable document format (PDF) options for accessing issues, making delivering scholarship online an established and respected part of the academic landscape. Few publications can ignore the power of being online and accessible to many more readers.