

Secrets of Academic Publishing

1. How to Get an Article Published

- Keep it short.
- Make two or three good points, provide the best evidence you have for these points, and stop.
- Mention in your review of the literature at least two members of the journal's editorial board.
- Submit your manuscript to a journal which has recently published similar work and cite at least two things recently published in that journal, preferably by people you know or who are likely to approve of the approach used in your research.

Editors have to pick reviewers. Acceptance of an article depends more on the choice of reviewers than on the merits of the research because reviewers tend to disagree, sometimes wildly, on the same manuscript's merits.

Editors are busy, we take shortcuts. We look to see who on our board you have cited, or whose work in our journal you have cited, or who we know personally or professionally whom you have cited. Up to a point you can guide us in our choices.

Review is never really blind. Most fields are small and people know each other's styles, methods, terminology, and key reference citations. As a new researcher you will tend to be identified with your advisor or principal research mentor. Reviewers are always curious about authorship because it is usually relevant to our judgments: you give the benefit of the doubt to people who have earned it, or people who are trained by well-known mentors. The journal may blank out your name and references to your own work, but not those to your mentor's work.

Blind review is really rather pointless; someone who cannot identify you or your provenance is probably not competent to judge your manuscript. Grant applications, where serious money is involved, are not usually reviewed blindly. The reputation of the investigator is considered central to their ability to carry out the proposed project. Their research experience is no less relevant to the final publishable product.

Reviewers need to be anonymous to keep the enterprise minimally honest (as it is, there is a lot of horse-trading), but blind review seems rather pointless to me. Work around it.

The function of *the review of the literature* in an article is to show that you know the relevant work by significant people in the field. It is very much a sign of club membership, and not much more. Good writers weave this into their *theoretical discussion*, but otherwise it is the theories you are actually going to use that count, not general literature on the topic. It is really pointless to cite things you aren't going to use, but it is expected and it is wise to do so. Insightful theoretical discussion is the hallmark of good researchers, but it is also hard to do well, and

very hard to do in a short space. Keep the theory section short; most reviewers are not really interested, and few readers will be, unless you are publishing in a theory-oriented journal. [Note: European journals take the theory section much more seriously than U.S. journals, as a general rule.]

Make your point, present your evidence (be selective, don't dump redundant evidence on busy readers), make your point again, and stop. Editors and readers will bless you.

Almost all articles which are accepted for publication require revisions.

Sometimes fairly extensive revisions. Regard this as helpful, not as punitive.

Articles to some degree are meant to reflect the state of the field, not your personal opinions (put those on your website!), and you should compromise with reviewers' suggestions. *Only those suggestions endorsed by the editor need to be taken seriously*; others are optional, do not follow those that would unduly lengthen the article or lead you off-topic.

Do take seriously all points of misunderstanding; they arise not from stupidity but from the inherent ambiguity of language. Rephrase to reduce the chances of other readers' making the same misinterpretation; sometimes you need to add a few key words to sharpen the contextual cues for readers.

Once you have been published in a particular journal, you are likely to have work accepted by that journal again in the future, but probably not more than one article per year. It's a good idea to *cultivate two journals* as your home base, and alternate submissions to them.

If your manuscript is rejected, do not despair. Everybody gets rejected, a lot, at the beginning of their careers. Why? Mainly because you either have not followed the advice above, or because you have not yet picked up the particular style and currently fashionable discourses of the subject. Probably you just submitted to the wrong journal or got the wrong pick of reviewers. *Read articles in the journal you are submitting to before you finalize your manuscript.* Try to lightly imitate the general style and recurrent concerns and buzzwords; show that you belong to the club.

Of course it is also possible that what you wrote is not considered important enough for a first-rank journal. *In every field there is a hierarchy of journals.*

It is nearly impossible to write a professionally executed research article with empirical data in it that no one will publish. Take a look at some of the useless and meaningless stuff that gets published in the average journal. (Do you know that most journal articles are never requested from libraries, and so far as we can tell are never read by subscribers either? about one article per issue actually matters to anyone). Your work cannot be worse than what gets published by other people.

Make a list of journals in your area in rank order of prestige (consult your mentors about this).

Make a realistic judgment how high to aim for the first time (usually number two or three for new researchers, except maybe for the principal result of your dissertation, which could make number one if well written). If you are rejected at that level, work your way down the list. Always revamp the manuscript slightly to pitch it to the editorship, likely reviewers, and reader interests of that journal.

You can send to more than one journal at the same time, but don't get caught doing this. Editors and reviewers spend time and money vetting your manuscript; even if they reject it, they don't want to be wasting their time. If two editors send your near-identical manuscripts to the same reviewer (not unlikely), you are in trouble. Even a kindly reviewer cannot personally contact you to warn you to withdraw one of the manuscripts; he or she is not supposed to know who you are.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket. You should be planning and writing lots of articles; some of them will be winners. Be very careful however not to publish something that is really mediocre early in your career, especially not in a widely read journal. It can happen and it will do more harm than good for you.

Early in your career you will be pigeon-holed. People in the field will associate you with a particular methodology or research interest or theoretical approach. Be sure you are happy with this because you may be stuck with that identification for quite a while. Your first book is your opportunity to change it if you're not happy with it. One or two articles will not do the job.

If you can turn a phrase, invent catchy, but sophisticated-sounding names for concepts or phenomena you write about. If the name catches on, you will gain status in the field.

Some Important Journals in the fields in which I work:

- ***Linguistics and Education***
- ***Semiotica***
- ***Functions of Language***
- ***Language in Society***
- ***Mind, Culture, and Activity***
- ***Journal of the Learning Sciences***
- ***Discourse and Society***
- ***Critical Discourse Studies***
- ***Discourse Processes***
- ***Social Semiotics***

These are journals in which people whose work interests me, particularly in discourse analysis and social semiotics, frequently publish. A great deal of the

interesting work in these fields is also published in edited volumes as individual chapters by various researchers.

2. How to Get a Book Published

It is amazing that academic books get published at all.

The only reason they do is that most university and major research libraries have standing orders to buy all the books from certain publishers in certain fields. That is a guaranteed market, and the publishers know exactly how big it is and how long a book they can afford to publish for that market and still make a profit. In minor academic fields, that cut-off point is about 200-250 pages.

Most such books are never read and are remaindered at deep discount or tossed out by publishers. Many publishers don't even print more copies than they are sure will be taken by libraries. You will be out of print almost as soon as you are in print.

It usually takes a book to get tenure in most non-science disciplines at better universities. Exceptions are made for people with two or more really good articles per year, some of which actually get cited by other people, and those for whom significant people in the field other than your mentor are willing to write strong letters of recommendation.

Academic publishers dream of really profitable books. Generally these are books by established authors with major reputations. But there is another route to a marketable book, and *marketability influences acceptance of book manuscripts, research quality aside.* You need to address a larger market. Publishers know that the larger markets in the human sciences are in education-related topics, popular-psychology topics, and new media and technology topics. They also know that a book that can be used in courses, even advanced graduate courses, has a larger market. A few publishers count international markets, but this is often neglected. The US market is the market for most academic purposes.

European book publishers like books by Americans that they can sell in both markets. But the prices of their books are so high that only libraries can afford them, and very few do much marketing for the book, nor do they issue softcover versions (unless there is also a course market and the book sells well).

Marketing Points. The following claims make the book more publishable:

- The first book in a new field
- The first intelligible book in a new field
- A book that has practical uses, e.g. explaining methodology or reviewing and comparing significant (that usually means European) theories
- A book that applies a new approach to some well-known and widespread problem or issues
- A book that has policy implications

- A book that applies and in part popularizes the work of a well-known theorist in some new area

Books, like dissertations, are long. There is room in them both for what will make the book marketable and for what you want to say about your research.

A successful first book makes you very welcome at that publisher for your second book. It may also make your work of interest to other publishers.

Academic publishers are usually looking for good manuscripts, i.e. marketable ones that also have academic quality. They hang out at conferences in the exhibit areas and they talk to people to keep up with what's going on. They especially talk to their current authors. ***Get an author to introduce you to a publisher's representative.*** Make a very, very sketchy suggestion of a possible topic you are writing about and drop in a few key buzzwords. Before doing this, make sure that those buzzwords are not already over-published (with all fashions the point is to keep ahead of the pack; in academic marketing you want to be just at the crest of a new fashion, but not too avant-garde). If they show any interest, get their business card, and follow up with a letter that contains a more detailed, half-page, idea. Ask if they would like to see more.

It is unwise to just send a manuscript to a publisher without prior discussions and negotiations. In most cases authors get a book contract on the basis of a chapter outline and one or two sample chapters. New authors may not get the contract but just encouragement to submit the completed manuscript. That is enough.

Manuscripts are reviewed just like journal articles. It is harder to know who it will be sent to, but their current authors are likely and major publishers also have favorite academic advisors, often known as "series editors". It is a lot easier in fact to ***place a book with a series editor*** than with a publisher, and you should follow the announcements from publishers to see what new series are being established. Pitch your ideas to a series editor at a conference, or get a personal introduction to him or her from your mentor or someone else. New series are usually looking for manuscripts. You can initially contact a series editor by mail. Doing so with a publisher is less likely to produce results without a prior personal contact.

You can ask people who have recently published books in your area how they like their publisher or editors. This can sometimes lead to an introduction to an editor.

For a first book, any academic publisher is great. Your book will probably cost too much, be kept too short, not be marketed very well, and be quickly out of print. But it's a book.

If you are ambitious, or already thinking about a second book, choose your publisher more carefully. What matters as between academic publishers is marketing. You want a publisher who will exhibit your book at conferences, mail

out announcements of it, include it in widely distributed general mailings, and even place it in bookstores. The point is not to get rich, the royalties are very small on these books. The point is to get your book read and known by more people.

Some publishers are also easier to get along with in the editorial offices than others, but this changes with personnel and should not be a major consideration except in extreme cases. Talk to someone who has published a book with a publisher recently.

Some publishers also take a very long time to produce a book; you wait your turn in a long queue for publication. Marketability prospects move you up the queue. Big publishers are generally better for speed and marketing services than small ones, but small ones may give you more help and personal attention.

The top publishers in terms of the prestige of books published in the fields in which I work are:

Cambridge University Press -- language, culture, society
Routledge -- critical theory, postmodernism, feminism
LEA / Erlbaum -- social cognition
John Benjamins -- language, discourse, semiotics
Kluwer -- science education
Elsevier/Greenwood/Pergamon -- language, culture, education
Taylor & Francis / Falmer Press -- social theory, language, education

Of course books by prestigious and well-known authors are also published by presses that specialize in sure bets, such as Harvard University Press, University of Chicago Press (more adventurous), and Stanford University Press, but these are not good bets for first books or new authors. These major university presses also, of course, publish books by their faculty and alumni.

Other good academic publishers in these fields include:

Oxford University Press -- language, education
Mouton / de Gruyter -- language
University of Texas Press -- critical theory, literary theory
Johns Hopkins University Press -- postmodernism, literary theory, hypertext
SUNY Press -- education, social theory
University of Minnesota Press -- social theory, discourse
Cornell University Press -- social theory, discourse

There are also smaller academic presses, such as Pinter / Cassell, Longman, and Arnold in England that publish good work in social linguistics. U.S. authors appeal to smaller U.K. publishers because they may bring access to the large U.S. market.

The publishing industry is in great flux these days. Many smaller publishers are being bought out by larger corporations and survive only as "imprints" or book-

brands. What matters is the editorial team and their academic advisors. Find a senior faculty member who follows the publishing game closely and seek advice on the current situation.