

## Book Review: Publishing Journal Articles

by Blog Admin

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In this accessible and informative book, **Lucinda Becker** and **Pam Denicolo** seek to introduce the best practical strategies available to help academics maximise the chance of success in getting work published. Offering advice on topics including coping with writer's block and handling rejection, it will certainly be a useful introduction for some and an invaluable guide for many others, finds **Johannes Wheeldon**.

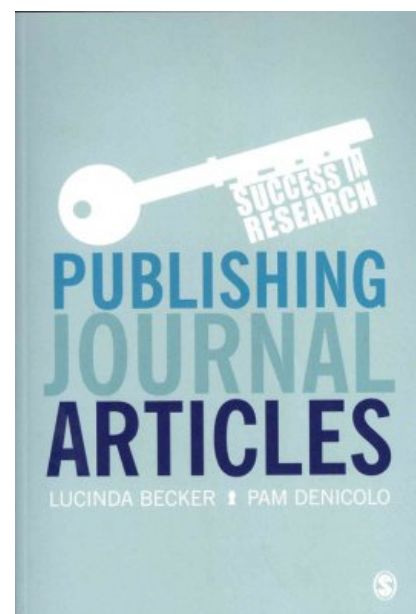


**Publishing Journal Articles. Lucinda Becker & Pam Denicolo. Sage. January 2012**

### Find this book:

It goes without saying that to succeed in the increasingly market-oriented academy, one's ability to conduct and publish research is essential. Yet as Helen Sword has pointed out, few know why they write the way they do. Many have picked up bad habits or become stuck in disordered disciplinary discourses. Instead of clearly communicating the significance of past work, presenting current understanding, or justifying future projects, academic writing often betrays Derridian delight in our collective Sausserian subterfuge.

*Publishing Journal Articles* by Lucinda Becker and Pam Denicolo is short, accessible, and useful contributions that will help readers overcome some of their own foibles. Full of suggestions, advice, tips and techniques, this short book presents writing as a series of choices to be considered. Throughout, it offers reflections based on the author's impressive and varied experience. As part of the *Success in Research* series, this effort seeks to assist researchers to better organize, present, and manage their writing careers. It largely succeeds.



Organized into 9 chapters, the book takes readers through various steps in the writing process including: researching journal outlets, selecting a topic, planning and completing articles, as well as working with editors, handling rejection, and thinking about intellectual property. While some might suggest this book is more suited for an undergraduate audience, I would recommend it to anyone who spends more than 100 hours per year writing. There are tips within these pages that even seasoned authors will appreciate. For example, the discussion on the use of visual techniques and approaches to assist authors to plan and organize their writing is fantastic. As someone with significant scholarly interest in this area, I was pleased to see that spider charts, flow charts, and mind maps identified as separate tools of the trade, each with their own particular strengths (pgs 36-40).

Another useful chapter focuses on writer's block, in which one's ability and energy seems unequal to the mountain of work to be completed. The authors outline a number of useful strategies – some obvious and others perhaps less so. I appreciated the suggestion that writer's block is simply part of being a writer. Giving ourselves permission to take a break, go for a run or walk, or veg out watching bad television once in a while is good for the soul and one's mental health. Becker and Denicolo suggest part of this process involves becoming aware of your own strengths and weaknesses as an author. The suggestions on writing simply, revising drafts, and finalizing your own work (pgs 84-85) managed to provide a number of helpful techniques in one place. In addition, the chapter on learning to stop writing puts a novel spin on an age-old problem. Building fences around manageable problems involves clearly defining the aspect of a topic, or issue you seek to explore (pgs 95 -103).

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The section on recovering from rejection gets at another underexplored aspect of the academic life. Few realize when they embark on this journey that they will be face near constant rejection. The creative life is a process of imagination, organization, engagement, and presentation. Most often it involves frustration and we all will face more rejection than success. I was pleased to see the frank discussion on this topic. When combined with the section on working with editors and reviewers, the authors offer some important insights that are an essential part of getting work published, coping with stress, and staying sane amidst it all. Finding the balance between acknowledging critique and retaining your own perspective is vital, and the authors remind us that it is (and must be) a near constant work in progress. The discussion in this section (pgs 115-118) may alone be worth the price of the book.

Despite the numerous strengths of this book, there are some issues that ought to be outlined. The first is tied up with the challenges of producing a general and accessible book on a topic that has specialist needs and disciplinary dimensions. To their credit the authors acknowledge this challenge. However, I found myself wishing they had explored the different kinds of research articles, their aims, and perhaps most importantly their structure. These differences are more than learning to adhere to the style requirements on various journal websites. How we present 'knowledge' says something about how scholarship is being collated and disseminated. Likewise, I found the lack of any discussion on citation styles odd. While different disciplines have their own view (APA, MLA, Chicago etc), the authors missed a chance to demonstrate the similarities and differences between and among them. While it was nice to see some discussion of the Open Access movement and academic standing (pgs. 21-27), more detail on attribution in an Internet age and the problem of 'salami slicing' – whereby authors publish essentially the same findings in different journals with only modest changes. Given the shifting the boundaries of how and why we cite, present, and publish our work (pgs.130-135), more of the author's assessment and advice on these complex topics would have been welcome.

The second is the limited view taken of the value of visual techniques. After the useful introduction to their use, it would have been great to see more examples in subsequent chapters. While their utility in planning and organizing should not be ignored, they are more than that. Given the widespread interests in visual techniques to demystify analytic strategies, present findings, and develop new approaches to info graphics to display a wide variety of information, other uses might have been considered. While a detailed discussion on these topics is no doubt beyond the purview of the book, at the very least the authors could have used maps and diagrams to draw attention to key themes, suggestions, and strategies in subsequent chapters. Too often, useful and important advice is buried in one dismal grey box after another.

My final concern is the failure by the authors to address what I consider to be a worrying trend by researchers in numerous fields. The failure to explicitly and honestly acknowledge the imperfections associated with research mocks academic integrity. In medicine it is the differential diagnosis that acknowledges counter views, in qualitative research these efforts are referred to as 'reflexivity.' In quantitative research, the focus is on the limitations of one's sample, methods, and the associate inferences that can be drawn from one study, no matter the design. Pretending scholarly work is without fault is perhaps the most dangerous development in the neo-liberal academy. It must be confronted. While my view is that all journal articles should include a limitations section of this kind, and all serious scholars must subject their work to the same searching criticism they apply to others, I would have liked to see some discussion by the authors on this topic.

Of course no work is perfect and my personal preferences ought not deter interested readers from reading the book. In such a short work, it is remarkable how well the authors have done providing the sort of tips, techniques, and strategies too often young scholars must discover on their own. Despite the limitations expressed above, I recommend this book for its many strengths. The focus on encouraging authors to integrate their writing – past and present – into their teaching and the discussion about how to make scholarly work more accessible online and elsewhere is important. The advice gleaned from the author's own experience ought to be considered carefully by those learning to play the academic journal game. This will be a useful introduction for some and an invaluable guide for many others. The authors should be commended for finding ways to offer general tips that transcend disciplinary boundaries.

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