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# Tips for New Scholars on Academic Publishing

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# Academic Leadership Journal

## Introduction

Becoming an effective and well rounded leader in academia often requires proficiency in the three critical components of an academic career: scholarship, service, and teaching. However, the emerging focus on faculty scholarship as the most salient of these elements, particularly as evidenced through publication in academic journals for graduate faculties, has been well documented in research (Green, 2005; Green & Baskind, 2007). While the relative weighting and importance of scholarship is somewhat inconsistent across universities, disciplines, and faculty rank (Green, 2008; Price & Cotton, 2006), the publication productivity of faculty is the major correlate for graduate program rankings from the U.S. News and World Report and many graduate school deans consider it the “central criterion” for promotion and tenure decisions (Green & Baskind, 2007, p.282).

Recent studies estimate that most faculty members work an average of 50 hours per week and a substantial amount of this time is spent on scholarly activities such as writing for publication (Toews & Yazedjian, 2007). Those working in academic or research positions are likely to be spending the most time on such efforts as productive scholarship which is compulsory for advancing in these positions. According to Price & Cotton (2006), expectations for the number of publications needed for obtaining promotion to tenure has increased in recent years. Therefore it is not surprising that other studies have found that rates of faculty publications have increased to meet these inflating demands (Green & Baskind, 2007). An ongoing and successful track record of publications can be invaluable to a new graduate obtaining an academic position after defending his or her dissertation, retaining a job, and being promoted (Seipel, 2003).

Clearly, publishing is an essential element for a successful career as a scholar and academic (Hasche, Perron, & Proctor, 2009), and should therefore be heavily emphasized in doctoral training programs across disciplines. As recent graduates from doctoral programs, we (the authors) found this to be true in our experience. Upon starting a graduate program in 2002, we were quickly engrossed in an environment where scholarship and productivity were emphasized heavily. We since graduated in 2006 and 2007, and to this day we remain grateful to the professors and mentors who worked so diligently to ensure that we obtained the critical skills necessary skills to become independent and successful scholars. However, over the last four years in our new places of employment, we gained additional insight about writing for publication that we wish would have been included in our graduate training. These practical lessons we have learned would have greatly benefited us after we first graduated and were frantically trying to write and publish manuscripts in our new academic and research positions. Thus, we are passing along these 10 simple tips for new scholars from recent graduates in an attempt to promote a smooth start to your academic writing and publishing. We hope you find them as helpful as we have.

### Tips for academic writing and publishing

1. Expect the writing process to take time, lots of time

Academic writing is like learning another language; it takes time and practice. One of the major obstacles to productivity will be the time it takes to engage in this type of work (Cumbie et al., 2005). Truthfully, you are quite likely to grossly underestimate how long it will take you to complete any and every section of the manuscript, let alone the editing that will be needed after you have completed an entire draft. And please don't forget about the time required to develop the references section, write the abstract, and format the paper according to the journal guidelines; all of which take a substantial amount of time. Additionally, your paper may benefit from you putting it aside for a few days and then looking at it with fresh eyes...but this should be built into your timeline. You are much less likely to miss deadlines and be frustrated if you give yourself ample time in the beginning, and expect the process to be extensive.

## 2. Learn all you can from mentors, professors, and editors-then say thank you

Pay attention to the writing tips that you get from mentors and editors who are working with you on a manuscript. They will likely help you to improve your writing even beyond the current paper. It can be especially helpful to sit down and discuss the edits and changes that a professor or editor suggests for your writing. If you understand why they changed your wording/tense/format, you are more likely to remember the tip and less likely to make the same mistake in the future.

Yes, it can be a bit painful to get your paper back from an editor or your mentor professor with a great deal of edits and ideas for improvement. We propose setting your ego aside and trying to learn from their revisions and suggestions. The truth is, it takes a substantial amount of time to edit and comment on someone else's work in a way that teaches them to become a better writer. In fact, we did not realize until recently (now that we are on the other side of this partnership and are mentoring doctoral students of our own) how much faster it is to write a paper by yourself compared to the time commitment required to effectively mentor someone else on how to write a paper and provide them with the opportunity to learn (i.e., draft and revise). This is why we also suggest thanking the fine folks who are investing in your personal skill development by editing numerous drafts of your papers. They are working extra to ensure that you are learning in the process which is evidence of their commitment to your future success as an independent scholar and future leader in your field.

## 3. Research potential journals early

A great deal of your time and energy spent reorganizing and revising a paper can be saved if you research potential journals for your article early on in the writing process. Once you have an idea for a paper, seek out academic journals that may be a good fit. Review the scope and aims of the periodical, and the manuscript preparation and submission guidelines. This will give you critical insight into what types of papers they accept and who the target audience is. Additionally, you will find details such as page length, manuscript format, and word limit for the abstract. Once you identify the journal that you want to submit to, you can begin to tailor your paper immediately, which may reduce the number of changes you have to make prior to submission.

## 4. Ensure that your story is clear and concise

One of the most difficult aspects of academic writing specifically for a journal is ensuring that the story you are trying to tell is clear, concise, and contributes to the field. Your "story" is the major point of the paper, and it should be clear and consistent in your title, abstract, introduction, and every other section

of the manuscript. A common problem is that often the story is quite clear to the author—you likely know exactly what you want to say in the paper before you even start writing. But the clarity of your story for someone else (i.e., the editor, reviewers, and intended audience) is another issue altogether.

Additionally, the paper should be written concisely; most periodicals have strict page limitations so your writing will need to be succinct. Next, ensure that your paper is adding to the knowledge base in your field. What are the benefits to the reader? What are the implications for practice, policy, and future research? Your paper will be stronger if these questions are clearly answered and addressed. If you are at all unsure about whether or not your story is clear, concise, and contributes to the field, ask someone you trust to read it and give you honest feedback. You are better off attending to these issues prior to submitting the manuscript to a journal.

#### 5. Draft, edit, proof-read; repeat

This is so important; edit your work. When you submit your paper to a peer reviewed journal, the editor sends out copies to other hard working academic professionals in the field to read and provide feedback. It is unfair to waste the valuable time of your future or current colleagues forced to read and comment on a poorly written paper. And ultimately, submitting a poorly edited or first draft of a paper to a journal will significantly slow down the rate at which you have articles published. The upside of multiple drafts and lots of editing on the front end is that hopefully you will have more papers accepted, and will need to complete fewer revisions (as requested by the reviewers and editor) to get them published on the back end.

If you have access to a professional editor or writing support, by all means use these phenomenal resources. If not, try to have a senior faculty member or mentor with a strong track record of academic scholarship read your paper and give you feedback. At the very least, you and your peers can establish your own peer-review system where you edit and comment on each other's papers in order to increase the quality of what you submit. This would benefit everyone who participates, as it can increase your own writing skills to edit someone else's work.

#### 6. Keep reading scholarly articles

If you want to learn how to write academic papers, there is no substitution for reading them! Immerse yourself in the language and formatting of good writing, and you will have a better idea of what is expected and publishable. Notice how the authors tell their stories in clear and concise ways (tip # 4), and how they have disseminated important results to better both research and practice. You cannot successfully write for a peer reviewed academic journal without knowing what is expected (at least we couldn't), so keep reading good research to learn what the standards and expectations are for publication.

#### 7. Double-dip when you can

Take full advantage of opportunities to publish from work that you have completed even if it was originally written for a different purpose. For doctoral students, this may include revising and reformatting a paper that you wrote for a class assignment. For new investigators, this may mean reworking a grant proposal or a report that you wrote and turning it into a manuscript to submit for publication. If you have already collected and analyzed data, or written a literature review for another

purpose, why not add to your curriculum vitae (cv) with another publication? An additional paper or two that are generated from your own previous work can greatly assist you when you are on the job market or trying to get promoted.

#### 8. Discuss author order early; revisit the conversation as needed

Because there is such pressure to “publish or perish” in many institutions, people in many departments are beginning to collaborate more in order to increase their productivity (Price & Cotton, 2006). Consequently it is understandable that first and second author roles are coveted. We cannot emphasize enough how much better it is to discuss the intended order of authorship in the very beginning stages of writing when collaborating with others. Even if the conversation feels uncomfortable, it is necessary and can prevent far more awkward conversations in the future.

Frankly, the order of authorship should also dictate the unique contributions from each collaborator-so it is critical that it is explicitly discussed and agreed upon. While there is not one established set of guidelines used across disciplines for what distinguishes the first author from the second, and so on, there are some that exist that can be a good reference point for you. The APA Ethics Code outlines some general authorship guidelines that can be found in the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the APA Manual (American Psychological Association, 2010, pp. 18-19). However, folks can have very different opinions about what level of effort and contribution constitutes authorship order-so it is even more imperative to establish an agreement about these details with your collaborators in the beginning stages of manuscript preparation.

Also, it may be pertinent to consider how the best laid plans for work can be completely derailed by unexpected life events. The original plan for authorship may not work out in the end due to unforeseen problems or changes. By agreeing that you will renegotiate the order of authorship as needed throughout the writing process may be a good precaution to preserving good working relationships and even friendships for the future.

#### 9. Rejoice at a revise and resubmit

Once you have submitted a manuscript for publication take time to celebrate the accomplishment– this is an important rite of passage for many doctoral students and academics. But please do not be discouraged when you get a ‘revise and resubmit’ response back from reviewers and the editor of the journal, this is actually a good thing. It means that with some revisions (which, it is only fair to say, can vary substantially), you will likely have this paper accepted! If your first response at reading the comments of the reviewers is to feel defensive, it may be helpful to wait a day or two prior to addressing them in the paper, remember-the goal is publish, and this is a well established part of that process. Getting a paper out is a great first step toward building your track record of scholarly publications and becoming a leader in your field!

#### 10. When you have the chance, return the favor

Remember the folks who provided you with opportunities to write for publication when you were a doctoral student or new professor? Remember how much time they spent editing your work and helping you to become a better writer? Well, hopefully you have not forgotten these labors of love, because when you are more established, have quality data to write from, and good ideas about how to

disseminate the results it will be your chance to return the favor. Help a doctoral student improve their skills, guide a new professor through the steps of crafting a manuscript, and help him or her just like someone else did when they were investing in you.

### Conclusion

The three general responsibilities for faculty members working in graduate level programs are scholarship, teaching and service (Green, 2008). Though the emphasis on each of these three components varies by institution and rank, there is a clear need for effective scholarly writing skills in order to successfully pursue a career in academia or research (Green, 2008; Hasche, Perron, & Proctor, 2009). We present these ten tips to further encourage and promote the successful publishing of academic papers for new scholars and future leaders. These tips are certainly not all-inclusive nor empirically supported, but we do have anecdotal evidence from our own past and current experiences that supports them. As a result, we actively adhere to these strategies now in our own manuscript writing efforts and wish we would have known about them when first starting as new researchers and professors after graduation from our doctoral program. We hope that these tips help you in your future scholarly writing efforts.

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