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How to Know You are Ready to Submit Your Work to Academic Journals:
A Guide for Graduate Students and Faculty
Mary A. Garofalo, Ph.D.- NTLC Research Lead

Climbing the Mountain

As a graduate student or tenure-track faculty, research (the amount that you produce and publish) is core to your position, current and future. Whether in a doctoral program or trying to earn tenure, submitting your research to journals is a daunting task, only second to designing, implementing, analyzing, and writing up your research.

On your journey towards dissertation defense or working with mentors and/or peers to complete a research project, you are often required to have many eyes on your design, methods, analysis, and results, but also, the format of your written product. During dissertation writing, the chair of your committee will be the main point of contact and editor of your work. You will also have two other experts in your field examining your dissertation for issues or to make suggestions for improvements. These three members of your dissertation committee will help you present your research in the best possible way through many iterations of revisions and suggestions.

After a successful defense, one of the best ways to start publishing is to break off pieces of your dissertation and expand that area of your findings. That might mean analyzing the data set with different methodology, expanding on results, or partnering with someone in your field or someone across disciplines. Your dissertation is much more than just an end goal- in many ways it is actually the beginning of your research agenda.

Post-dissertation Research

Whether you are months or decades beyond your dissertation defense, you still have all of the skills and expertise to continue to publish your work. Using your dissertation as a guide, or exploring a whole new concept in your content area, you need to start thinking about your research interests. Once you have established your research agenda and have written your first piece of research, it is important to get feedback on your work from trusted experts in the field. You can look to your mentors or peers for feedback (van Teijlingen et al., 2012). You may want to think about offering a contributing authorship to those who give you feedback, so that way they are invested in the work and it can be a win-win for both/ all of you. Ultimately, this means that those reviewing your work would be able to use the contributing authorship on their Curriculum Vitae (CV) or tenure application.

It can often be difficult to assess our own work, especially a subject you have been utterly immersed in (it's the classic "forest for the trees" situation). Additionally, if you are recently re-entering the world of research publication due to changing job expectations or desire for promotion, there can be a great deal of pressure to submit. Many academics begin their

research journey with “imposter syndrome.” You are not an imposter, you have the skills and competencies to complete research. However, in the name of cutting down anxiety, having other recently published experts (peers/ mentors) in your field examine your work can bolster your confidence and, moreover, their commentary may give you the perspective you need to make your work really stand out.

Discuss Authorship Prior to Publication

Authorship and order in which authors are listed on a publication tells a story. For each discipline, the guidelines for authorship may differ a bit. Ultimately, there are some universal guidelines to help clarify who should be considered an “author” and how to determine an enumerated list of co-authors’ names.

According to Hundly et al. (2013), authorship should be earned not offered. Meaning every author listed should have completed some of the heavy-lifting of the publication. Some questions to consider when contemplating authorship:

1. Who was involved in the design, analysis, and the actual writing of the drafts?
2. Did the author in question have substantial contributions to (Hundly et al., 2013):
 - a. The conception and design of the study?
 - b. The data collection or analysis?
 - c. The drafting of the article and making improvements in the content of the article?
 - d. The revision process as well as the resubmission process?
3. Was the author in question more than just generally overseeing the article? If not, they should not be considered an author.

Additionally, when working with graduate students or researchers who have less experience, they should be given appropriate authorship, as they are often assigned the bulk of the writing, analysis, and interpretation. One’s experience or expertise should not play a role in authorship, or co-authorship credit. Authorship should solely be determined by contributions each individual makes to the article.

Steps to Ensure Best Chance of Publication

According to Ruiz Estrada’s (2021) quantitative analysis, there are some elements that have been proven to increase the probability of academic publication success. This list is also included. In ranked order of importance, Ruiz Estrada lists 9 factors that are the most significant in your publication journey (1 is most significant, 9 is least significant):

1. Methodology- Is your methodology and rationale for methodology sound?
2. Solid knowledge- Does your research cover the literature around this subject matter and situate your research within the context of the literature?
3. Writing skills- Are your writing skills demonstrating appropriate understanding of scholarly writing?

4. Data and information- Are your findings significant? Is your sample size appropriate? Did you extrapolate the significance of your findings by analyzing appropriate data points and collecting appropriate information based on the rationale for your study?
5. Journal match- Does the subject matter of your manuscript match the content area and readership of your journal?
6. Co-authors- Are your co-authors listed appropriately and qualified to be conducting research with you?
7. Publication rank- If the journal rank is high, it may be very competitive to be published in. Have you considered a few journals to submit to?
8. Consolidation of ideas- Have you appropriately synthesized the literature, interpreted your results and connected these ideas in your findings and suggested implications for policy and practice?
9. Creativity- Is your research creative and outside of the box, in terms of subject, methodology, conceptual framework, or findings? If you are finding a great deal of research on your subject that is similar to yours, it is not likely to be published, as it has been done before.

Picking a Journal

As previously mentioned in the [“Journal Publication” document](#), there are thousands of academic journals to choose from. Using some of the guidance provided in the previous document, there are some further instructions to determine the best journalistic “fit” for your research. So, how do you determine which journals might be a good home for your research? According to van Teijlingen et al. (2012), you might want to consider the following:

1. The academic status and journal ranking, and impact factor;
2. The language that the journal is written in;
3. The readership of the journal;
4. The likelihood of your research being accepted;
5. The word limit from submission guidelines.

Aim to publish in a journal that has:

1. Aligned research topics with yours;
2. A readership who would benefit from your research;
3. A clearly articulated peer-review process and journal rank/ impact factor that suggests reputational strength.

It is important to remember that, although there may be several journals that meet the above criteria, **you can only submit your article to one journal at a time**. If you are submitting to more than one journal, there are ethical issues here, especially concerning the ideas of “self-plagiarism.” Each journal will include a questionnaire about your submission of research, asking if you have submitted elsewhere at the same time. If you do submit your research to more than one journal, you could be faced with reputational damages, your research flagged by journals, and possible academic blacklisting due to plagiarism.

Submission process

Once you have found a journal that you would like to submit your work to, you should review the submission instructions for authors, which are usually found on the journal's website or inside that journal itself. Most journals require electronic submission of all materials and to do so, will ask for your [ORCID id](#) in order to track your academic affiliation and previous submission. The author instructions cover the formatting guidelines for your article, including maximum page-length, spacing, word count, and submission of diagrams/graphics/charts. The instructions will also include the expected reference style (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.), how to deal with subheadings and any other particular guidelines set forth by the editorial team of the journal in question (van Teijlingen et al., 2012; Hundley et al., 2013). The instructions will also lay out which kinds of files are acceptable to submit to the journal such as Word, PDF, Pages, jpeg, and so forth.

Journals most often require the authors to submit a cover letter to the editorial team and/or the editor-in-chief of the journal. The cover letter should:

1. Introduce the authors;
2. Introduce the subject and thesis of the article;
3. Discuss the findings briefly;
4. Tie all of the above into a clear explanation of how this research aligns with the journal's audience and areas of interest.
5. Thank the editors for their consideration of your article.
6. Sign all of the authors names (i.e. get approval for the cover from contributing authors and then ask if their names can be added to the letter).
7. Use letterhead from the institution that you are working from or conducting research through (IRB approval).

Please note that once you submit your article, the turn-around time for reviewers to respond varies by journal. The instructions will usually outline a time frame to expect a response from the reviewers. This can be anywhere from 3 days to 6 months. If your submission is not a fit for publication, due to a conflict in subject matter or audience, you will hear from the editorial team rather quickly, in that they will not spend time reviewing the whole manuscript if they do not think it will be a fit for their area of interest or their readership. However, once you submit your manuscript, there are 3 likely responses you will receive from the editorial team of the journal:

1. **Rejection**- this happens often when the subject, readership, or both are not aligned with the journal **OR** when there are methodological uncertainties, unclear findings, or general concern for the ethics, rigor, or significance of a study.
2. **Revise and Resubmit (R and R)**- this response suggests that your article has merit and the reviewers and editorial team feel that if you make some major/minor revisions, they will reconsider your manuscript for publication.
3. **Acceptance**- this rarely is the first response to a submission. If you receive an approval for publication, it will most likely be after several rounds of R and R. That's correct- you will likely be submitting and resubmitting the article over the course of several months

with several iterations of edits and revisions. With any luck and persistence, you will have your manuscript published.

Revise and Resubmit (R and R)

More than likely, you will receive an R and R. Do not be discouraged- this is a good sign. It means that the editorial staff sees value in publishing your work. It also means they have very specific instructions on how they want to see your manuscript improved in order to be further considered for publication. Following their feedback to the letter is extremely important. You will most likely receive feedback from 2 or more reviewers. Each reviewer will make comments throughout the manuscript and provide you with written documentation of their insights, suggestions, concerns, and requirements to be changed. In order to demonstrate your commitment to publication, you need to address each of the reviewers comments/ suggestions/ concerns. The best way to do this is to create a “reviewer matrix” where you track the comments, changes and location of each edit you make based on the feedback. You would submit this matrix with a new cover letter each time you revise and resubmit.

Please see Table 1 below for an example of a “reviewer matrix.” The **RED** language is the actual commentary from the editor/ reviewer. The **BLACK** is the introduction of the issues discussed and how they were addressed. The **BLUE** is the authors’ actual changed language in the manuscript to address concerns of reviewers.

Table 1. Reviewer Matrix Example

Reviewers’ Feedback – Areas of Improvement	Author’s Response	Page #
<p>Request to build on the context of the study provided. Reviewers accurately surmised that there was much more going on behind the scenes at the research site, based on the interview responses, as stated:</p> <p>“The context of the study should be stated more outright. I inferred that this group of teachers were dealing with a situation where there was a mandate from</p>	<p>The authors worked to state the context for the study outright. For example, on page 7, the authors stated:</p> <p>The dynamics within school bureaucracy are important to understanding the individual narratives of participant teachers. The context of this study is significant, especially in relation to teacher proxy efficacy, with administrative implementation of a co-teaching initiative the focus of the data and analysis of this study. The areas of concern are, broadly; (a) bureaucratic overreach; (b) punishment; (c) lack of transparency and; (d) incomplete oversight.”</p> <p>To address these concerns, we organized the section based on the four areas that were demonstrated throughout the</p>	<p>p.7-9</p>

<p>admin that special ed teachers would co-teach with general education teachers and that is what most of the interview comments seem to be in response to—but the authors should explain this.</p>	<p>narrative and discussed the context of the study and the participants more in depth, organized by the four areas of concern stated above. For example, on page 8, the authors stated under the subsection “Punishment”:</p> <p>“Simultaneous to informing the faculty of the new co-teaching model, the superintendent worked to remove self-contained classrooms. This removal came in the form of a reprimand based on poor classroom performance and below average state test scores. Given this narrative as presented, co-teaching was understood within the system as a punishment for special education teachers, who would no longer have their own classes or classrooms, rather than a philosophical commitment to student learning.”</p>	
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There is a possibility that even with several resubmissions, your manuscript may not be chosen for publication. When that happens, it is important to get right back to finding a journal match that works better for your content and submit again. You are free to submit to another journal **only after** you have received the rejection from the first journal in writing. You should not submit to other journals before you have closed out any business with the first journal. Don't give up! If you believe that your research has merit, there is a credible journal out there for you.

References

Hundley, V., van Teijlingen, E., & Simkhada, P. (2013). Academic authorship: Who, why and in what order?. *Health Renaissance, 11*(2), 99-101.

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