

Taking the Leap Toward Publication

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Abstract

In this article we reflect on some of our interactions with graduate and new scholar authors via our work as long-standing members of the current and former Editorial Board of the Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education/Revue canadienne des jeunes chercheurs et chercheurs en éducation (CJNSE/RCJCE). Using our reflected experiences as a foundation, we discuss here some of the details involved in publishing a first article. The overall aim of this article is to demystify the publishing process and to inform graduate students about the required elements and processes involved in the preparation of their manuscripts and the subsequent process of publication from submission, to reviews, and editing. In turn, we hope to encourage new researchers and theorists to take the leap and publish their first articles.

Introduction

The Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education/Revue canadienne des jeunes chercheurs et chercheurs en éducation (CJNSE/RCJCE) is a publication sponsored by the Canadian Committee of Graduate Students in Education (CCGSE), a division of the Canadian Society for Studies in Education (CSSE), which is a national network of educational researchers. The primary mission of CJNSE/RCJCE is to guide graduate students toward beginning fruitful publication careers. The mandate of this journal includes providing graduate students with both publication and manuscript reviewing experience. Moreover, the overall focus of the CJNSE/RCJCE is to engage with graduate students through individual writing mentorships in order to produce better quality work and to lend insight into the various stages of the publication process. Consequently, the heart of this journal is the preparation and training of graduate students for disseminating their research.

The authors of this article, Candace and Maryam, have been long-standing members of the current and former Editorial Board of the CJNSE/RCJCE. As such, we take seriously the mission of the journal to educate and support graduate students in their writing efforts. We further assume the responsibility of rendering transparency to the publication process as a means of promoting graduate student work and expanding the amount of submissions of such work in a published format to represent the unique investigative journeys undertaken at various institutions. Publication experience provides graduate students with opportunities to hone their writing and editing skills.

Furthermore, graduate students aiming to begin academic careers following their periods of graduate study will be facing Faculty Search Committees that are increasingly looking for candidates who not only show potential for contributing successfully as members of university or college faculty. Such future academic career candidates are expected to indicate their current accomplishments as a means of highlighting continuous paths in teaching, research, and service. As such, there are greater expectations for current graduate students to publish their work.

Specifically, within this article, we discuss some of the facets of and significant details involved in graduate students' and new scholars' road to publishing their first articles. Through examination of our own experiences with publishing and editing, along with an exploration of our interactions with authors and contributors during our time at CJNSE/RCJCE, we identified a variety of areas related to writing and publishing that might seem opaque, confusing, or frustrating for graduate students who wish to begin their publishing careers. Thus, we set out here to clarify the publishing process. We address below the mechanical aspects of manuscript submissions, such as topic selection and management; journal choice; and manuscript editing processes. In addition, we deliberate over topical elements of publication of significance for graduate students who wish to move their findings or their efforts at preliminary theorizing outside of the graduate classroom to a broader audience of readers. For example, we demonstrate the differences between writing term papers and projects for graduate classes and preparing manuscripts for journals. We further explain the process of publication and ways to interpret and respond to reviewer and editorial comments.

Graduate schools are exciting environments that comprise and stimulate provocative discussion and thoughtful inquiry on some of the most significant current societal issues and concerns. For this reason, it is imperative that graduate students contribute their work to the ongoing dialogues and deliberative spaces in various fields. Furthermore, building research–writing skills and taking steps toward publication is fundamental for the establishment of academic lives. It is our intention with this article to inform graduate students about how to think about and prepare their manuscripts for publication. In turn, we hope to encourage new researchers and theorists to take the leap and publish their first articles.

First Steps

Taking the first steps toward becoming a published author might require engaging in a set of thought patterns and activities. That is, the road toward publication might even begin before writing. Conversely, taking first steps toward publication might prove useful for envisioning and delivering successful submissions from already formed pieces. In this section, we highlight some potential first stages toward publication. In particular, we discuss below the need to take a leap; to deliberate over journal selection; and to align your work with journal visions.

Taking the Leap

While many graduate students understand the need to get their work published as a means of engaging in a research agenda and positioning themselves for academic careers, it can seem like a daunting task to actually submit a piece of written work to a journal. For some students, the fear of evaluation and possible rejection might loom large. For others, there might be confusion about how to go about the publication process. Writing and submitting a first journal article requires an initial act of confidence. Envisioning your work in published form is integral to fulfilling this goal.

As well, it is crucial to have a clear understanding about what you, as new researchers, bring to the table in your selected field. In other words, before you begin the process of developing a research project or a piece of writing into a potential manuscript, it is necessary to deliberate over your point of view or your data findings in relation to other work that has previously been published. This activity will help you to identify your vision, to articulate how your work differs from others, and to demonstrate the specific ways in which your work will serve as a contribution to your field and/or to a certain set of readers. This vision quest will strengthen the arguments that you shape in your writing and help to tighten the focus of your work. In addition, you will be able to clarify well in specific terms how your unique voice; experiences; and data findings will impact others. One way of approaching this task is to construct a concept or mind map that illustrates the theoretical and conceptual connections between existing and

emerging ideas/knowledge. While this process may help to improve your written work, in turn, this activity might provide you with concrete information regarding the potential of your manuscript for publication.

One way of familiarizing yourself with the publication process, and acquiring a published manuscript, is to submit a book review. If you have recently read a newly published work in your field you might consider reviewing it. Identify journals that may be interested in a review of the book and write to the editor to inquire if the journal would be interested in receiving a review of it. Generally, book reviews are shorter in length than a typical manuscript, and may provide you with beneficial experiences with writing for a journal's audience and synthesizing the background literature relevant to the topic.

We want to encourage all graduate students to take the leap toward publication. Confidence in your writing and a clear vision of your overall message will ensure your eventual success. However, it is also important to remember that journal article submissions are not only a means to an end, namely, publication. The submission of an article to a journal also represents an opportunity to get valuable feedback from which you can potentially advance your scholarship and hone your writing along the path to publication.

Journal Decisions

Gaining confidence in terms of your capacity for publication and clarity in your message are first steps toward seeing your article in print. Finding a home for your unique arguments and perspectives is also an essential primary task. One of the most important decisions that you can make on your journey toward successful manuscript publication is the correct selection of journals. If your paper matches the content and/or perspective focus of a journal, you are more likely to have your manuscript considered. Outlined below are methods for ensuring that you find a home for your manuscript.

Journal selection.

In any given field, there are numerous journals from which to choose. It might be helpful to locate the journals in your discipline and journals that are closely aligned with your investigative positioning. You may wish to begin this task by creating a list of 10 different words or terms that best describe the aims and perspectives of your work. Then, use those words as keywords for general searches on online databases, such as the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) <http://www.eric.ed.gov/> for relevant journal articles. Pay specific attention to the journals of preferred articles, and make a list of these journals as possible places for you to submit your own work. You might also perform a similar search for journals from the vantage of the content, audience, methodology, or theories connected to your work. Another option is to evaluate a journal by its 'journal impact factor' (JIF). This quantitative measure is simply a measure of the frequency that an *average* article in a journal has been cited over a specified period of time. The higher the value is, the greater the impact of the journal. For example, in 2010 the *Review of Educational Research* had one of the highest impact factors amongst education and educational research journals with a JIF of 3.127 (Thomson Reuters, 2011).

As graduate students, you have already read many journal articles, either as assigned course readings or for term papers, dissertations, or theses. Another way to explore journals that might be a good fit for your work would be to review familiar articles that you feel are related to your work and make a list of the journals in which they are published. We also encourage you to make a list of journals that you enjoy reading. If you feel that you frequently connect with the articles that are published in specific journals, it makes sense that such journals might also be a good match for your own manuscript. Journal selection is not a random process, and taking measures to ensure that your work is aligned with the focus of a journal will heighten your success with manuscript submission.

Visit journals.

Most journals have websites that provide important information to potential authors. Once you have compiled a list of several journals that seem to be a good match for your own work, type the name of the journal into a search

engine and visit the journal's website. You might wish to create cut and paste or printed files to keep track of the following information that is usually found on journal websites.

Scope and aims of the journal.

Every journal provides a description of its scope and aims. Read these statements closely to help you to consider which journals are the closest match for your own areas of research and writing interests. The scope and aims of a journal set out the vision that the Editorial Board has for the journal. Journal Editors and manuscript reviewers work together to ensure that all accepted manuscripts are directly connected with the journal's scope and aims. In fact, manuscript review forms often contain feedback items that are directly connected to the vision of the journal.

Therefore, if the aims and scope of your work differ widely from those of a certain journal, you might be less likely to have a successful submission. You might decide to move on to a different journal to submit your work, or you might wish to re-visit your work with the journal's scope and aims in mind. Sometimes it might be possible that your work is aligned with the scope and aims of a journal, but you have not explicitly addressed this facet in your work or developed this strand of thinking fully within your writing. In turn, you might already share a vision with a journal, and you can use the journal's scope and aims as a checkpoint for your own work as you prepare or refine a manuscript for submission.

Guidelines or instructions for authors.

A journal's guidelines or instructions page for authors contains significant information, such as types of acceptable manuscripts; page limits; minimum and maximum word counts, and formatting expectations. Many journals make use of the formatting regulations of the American Psychological Association (APA). Others may use different style guides, such as the Modern Language Association (MLA) or Chicago Manual of Style. Hybrid styles are sometimes used, with guidelines and examples given to authors on journal websites.

It is a worthwhile investment to purchase the style manuals used for your selected journals in order to be informed about the many rules and exceptions for particular styles. There are also good web resources. For example, you might consult with the following websites for general knowledge about the rules for various writing styles. For the writing style of the Modern Language Association (MLA) (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2011a), see (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>) and for APA (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2011b), see (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/>). Such resources are helpful for answering quick questions, although full manuals might be needed for further examples and discussions of exceptions to rules. Moreover, since hybrid styles might be used by journals, make sure that the cited examples and rules in a journal's website are followed above consideration of rules from other identified writing styles.

It is absolutely critical for potential authors to determine that their manuscripts follow all of the instructions that are outlined for authors. In fact, manuscripts might be rejected during a primary editorial review if there is a mismatch between the formatting and writing style that you employed within your manuscript and that followed by the journal. Additionally, ensure that you adhere to page and word limits. While minor surpluses of words or pages might be overlooked, a manuscript can be rejected if the page numbers overly exceed the limits set by the journal. As journal Editors, we have both been forced to make difficult decisions to reject interesting manuscripts because they were 1,000 or more words over the limit. Although it is possible to request that authors reduce their word count, such a large reduction entails much editing work and also requires a large chunk of a manuscript to be removed. It can be difficult or impossible to consider the merit of a manuscript as a future publication when such a great amount of the work will not actually be included in future editions of the piece. As well, such a negligence to the journal guidelines might signal to journal Editors a lack of care or preparation in your work. Finally, make sure that you do not submit a manuscript that has not been proofread. Ensure that your manuscript is free from spelling and grammatical errors; you do not want editorial errors to distract from the quality of the content of your manuscript. We address this issue in further detail later in this article.

The instructions for authors also outline other significant criteria for publication, such as the need for the inclusion of a statement on the originality of the work or the preparation of your piece for blind review. It is essential that you

are familiar with these requirements ahead of submission to prepare your work accordingly. Your task will be even easier if such expectations are known prior to writing your manuscript as a means of avoiding the need for extra rounds of edits at the manuscript submission stage.

Sample articles or journal issues.

It is also useful to collect and read several issues of selected journals if possible. Many journals will provide sample issues of their publications on their websites. As well, many university and college libraries will have print and online subscriptions that are available to all graduate students. Reading a variety of writing that has been accepted for publication can inform you about topics or points of view generally supported by the journal and potential writing styles or writing organizers that are supported by the journal. For example, you might notice that all of the articles in a certain journal contain sections that are itemized by numbers or begin with an argument based on statistics. Use these markers as cues in shaping your work to increase your success potential. Also, make sure to note if a journal accepts theoretical or opinion pieces or if they only accept empirical research.

Preparing Your Manuscript

Once you have envisioned yourself as a published author and you have completed your homework, you are ready to prepare or refine your work for manuscript submission. It is essential at this stage to return to your list regarding your vision, perspective, and points of argument. As you move forward in working on your manuscript, remind yourself of new lines of thinking that you might have to offer readers or new evidence on a topic. Make sure that you translate your arguments lucidly and explicitly in your work. Adopt a critical lens in your review of previous literature and highlight gaps that you are filling.

Term Papers as Manuscripts

As graduate students, you continually develop innovative ideas and key research concerns through engaging in coursework. While it might be tempting to want to present an A+ term paper to a journal as an article manuscript, it is essential to recognize that a term paper is not a journal article. Specifically, journal articles and term papers are differentiated by their divergent goals and targeted audiences. At the same time, term papers, or sections of Master's theses and doctoral dissertations can be developed into journal articles. Nevertheless, such a transformation of writing requires editing in tandem with a consideration of the content focus and the expected audience for the mode of writing.

Article Aims: Content

While engaging in and overseeing the review mentoring process at CJNSE/RCJCÉ, one of the most pressing and continuous tasks that we have noticed is the need to help graduate students to develop their graduate school writing for publication. The mission of CJNSE/RCJCÉ is to aid graduate students in establishing publishing records, which includes such forms of mentoring. However, editors of other journals have honed a careful eye toward distinguishing course work from manuscripts, and decisions for rejection are sometimes based on such a variation in writing mode. For example, a literature review chapter in a thesis or dissertation might comprise an excellent discussion of literature that is significant for a certain study. However, transforming such a chapter into a publishable literature review is connected with a different goal. An author would need to ensure that the literature reviewed is representative of a subject or an area of study, rather than narrowed to the focus of your research investigation. In addition, such an article would need to present a point of view or argument, whereas a literature review chapter in a thesis or dissertation is used to support the argument of the study in terms of topic, focus, methods, findings, and educational importance.

As you prepare an article and/or shape a term paper into an article, it might be helpful to think through some questions as guides in your work. For example, you might ask yourself whether you are presenting new ideas in your

writing. Sometimes it might seem difficult to tease apart whether what you are saying is really new in terms of an area of research or a review of literature. You might wish to think about turning the wheel rather than inventing it, and be sure to express your new ideas upfront in your piece. If your work does not have anything new to offer or if you do not make an argument for this, you might meet with diminished chances for article publication.

As you work on your piece, you might further deliberate in detail over what new connections among theories you might offer to readers. Ask yourself whether you are adequately showcasing novel arguments about existing ideas and/or challenging current notions in particular fields with a critical perspective. This step is necessary for shaping your work toward publication, regardless of whether you are crafting a literature review, a research paper, or a position piece.

A publishable manuscript sets forth and underscores a focused argument. In many cases, term papers might be oriented toward proving what a student has learned during class discussions and via course readings. For this reason, term papers might be geared toward proving what a student knows about a selection of readings or a set of related topics. Even though a synthesis of ideas contributes toward grounding an argument, manuscripts for publication are formed with a specific perspective in mind. As you prepare or refine your work for publication, ask yourself the following questions as a means of becoming a critical editor of your own writing: Is my purpose clearly articulated and am I responding to my defined goals? Does my article, from the main body to the conclusion, align with my thesis comments in the introductory section? These questions might prove to be helpful in ensuring that you construct a careful perspective within your work. Such interrogations might also help you to maintain the content structure of your piece.

In our work at CJNSE/RCJCE, we often remind potential authors to make use of references throughout their work. While some ideas in a paper might be novel or highlight new theoretical associations, it is also important to ground all of your ideas in a body of literature. Previously, we mentioned that much work entails turning the wheel rather than inventing it. Connecting your thoughts to the notions of others or comparing the findings of your study with those of another, somewhat similar inquiry might reinforce the novelty of your own argument or perspective. You might wish to ask yourself whether your arguments and comments are well-supported with references. Referencing your comments and arguments delineates linkages between your work and other work in related areas, thereby supporting your efforts to both connect with and further expand areas of study; knowledge in a field; comprehension of a block of literature; or methodological considerations. Consequently, making use of references showcases that you know the previous work in related areas; supports your statements, concerns, and points of view; and solidifies the overarching significance of your manuscript.

Article Aims: Audience

It is also useful during manuscript preparation to deliberate over the potential groups of interested readers for your paper. This focus might help to ensure that all parts of your manuscript are clear and logical, but not overly detailed. Ask yourself the following questions: Is this article aimed at theorists, practitioners, or both? Do I include terms that might be specific to certain fields? Do I provide concise definitions of all important terms, especially those that have major significance for my paper and terms that might have varied definitions for different fields of study and perspectives? Have I created a balance in my paper, where I describe a movement, a perspective, or a field in enough detail to make it easily understood by readers while acknowledging readers as intelligent and informed with basic topic knowledge? Making use of these questions as checks for your manuscripts will aid you in presenting an informed and cogent argument that is structurally aligned throughout your work.

As well, a concentration on these questions will help you to transition a term paper, or a section of a thesis or dissertation into a publishable article. The main audience for term papers, theses, and dissertations are professors, and they are targeted as an audience to whom you must indicate what you know. For this reason, such works often present information in historical or linear formats as a means of displaying comprehensive knowledge of a field or of a topic. Moving toward publication, it is assumed that readers are informed about the field and/or about the topic. They will approach a published article as an additional source of knowledge in a certain area, and assume that you are also informed about the historical underpinnings of the field or area of interest. Readers desire to learn something new, and employing the self-check questions above can help you to streamline your paper toward shaping a novel argument from this stance.

The Editing Process

Journals usually make use of stringent reviews of all submissions, and spelling; grammatical; and formatting errors may disqualify your paper. To make the most of the editing process, it is a good idea to take a step back from your paper and read it with a critical eye. Always be sure to use your word processor's spell check program, but also make sure the spell check has not made errors. Spell check should not be relied upon as the final word. This advice can especially be true in terms of spelling differences when journals follow either U.S., Canadian, or British spelling conventions, or a hybrid system of spelling that might not be recognized by a spell check program that is set for U.S. spelling regulations.

Even if you are confident in your writing style and you feel that you have a strong grasp of spelling or grammar, it is always useful to have an extra set of eyes look over your paper. You might wish to make an appointment with the writing clinic on your campus for a review of your work. Some authors have also found it to be beneficial to form a writing group with colleagues to review each other's work. Working together with your peers might provide you with confidence in your work, while increasing the flow of ideas about ways to improve your paper thematically and technically.

In preparing work for a manuscript submission, it can further be highly useful to understand where your writing strengths and weaknesses lie. For example, you might enjoy cultivating exciting ideas but retain a tendency to avoid providing references for all arguments and comments. We encourage you to explore a few pieces of your writing and make a list of three strengths and three weaknesses in your writing. Conversely, you might wish to find a writing partner and trade papers for completing this task. This activity might allow you to have a more objective inspection of your work and the potential to gain valuable feedback prior to submitting any material to a journal.

Manuscript Submission

Once you have written and carefully edited your work, it is time to submit your manuscript to your chosen journal. Be sure to follow all instructions for submission, including whether submission is on-line or via regular mail. Make sure that you submit the required number of copies of your work, as some journals request multiple copies of your manuscript for their review process for submissions via regular post or multiple files for electronic submissions. For journals that are labelled as blind review, do not put your name on the cover page. Instead, follow the expectations for blind review submission for your selected journal. These expectations might include the creation of a separate cover page that has the title of your work; your name; your institutional affiliation, and your full contact information. If you are submitting your article electronically, make sure to remove the digital markers that identify you as the author to ensure that the review is, in fact, blind. It is also a good idea to compose a professional cover letter to the journal Editor with the name and address of the Editor, the name of your paper, a statement that you have not submitted the article to another journal, and your name and full contact information.

The Submission Process

After submitting your piece to a journal, be prepared to wait! Reviews of manuscripts can sometimes take several months. Some journals only review or accept manuscripts at certain times of the year, which can extend the time that it takes to get any response from the journal regarding your manuscript submission. Although it may be tempting, remember that you may not submit the same manuscript to different journals in the hopes that one journal will respond positively. You also may not resubmit your work to another journal unless you have had an explicit rejection notification from the journal to which you originally submitted. It is also important to remember that an article publication is a process; submitting a manuscript to a journal is not the end of the submission process. While carefully crafted graduate course work might result in the immediate and final response of a high grade and positive comments, acceptance of an article with a journal usually signals further work ahead. You will likely receive much feedback from several reviewers, and you may be expected to edit your work accordingly.

Is my manuscript accepted or rejected?

In our experiences as potential authors, we have noticed that it is sometimes not clear whether our papers have been accepted or rejected from a journal. We encourage you to read letters from Editors and all reviewer comments carefully. There are generally four types of responses which you might receive. The first type of possible response is that your manuscript is accepted *as is*. That is, your manuscript will be published with no further revision. This type of acceptance is extremely rare. A much more common type of response is *revise*, in which you are asked to revise your paper and respond to reviewers' comments. Upon the referees and/or the Editor's review and acceptance of the revisions, your paper will be published. Another type of response you may receive is one of *revise and resubmit*. In this situation, the referees' feedback may indicate that extensive revisions are necessary before your paper may be ready for publication; however, the Editor is still interested in your manuscript. You may be writing about a topical issue, or your research may be of particular interest to the journal. In this situation, you are asked to address the referees' comments, and then resubmit your manuscript for another round of peer review. Finally, in the event that your feedback from a journal results in an absolute rejection, (the fourth type of response you may receive), do not give up on a manuscript that you believe contains an argument that is of significance for dissemination. Use reviewer comments as an opportunity to improve your work and choose a new journal for submission. Your rejection may also stem from a misalignment between your work and the journal's scope and vision.

Paper Revisions

Do not take a *soft no* for an answer. Even if some of the commentary from reviewers might sound quite negative, or you might be provided with a comprehensive list of changes to make in your work, it is a possibility that your work might be accepted with further, if extensive, revision. If the reviews to your manuscript reveal suggestions for major changes, do not lose heart. You have a window of opportunity to continue to work on your paper. Sometimes reviewer suggestions seemingly do not match your goals or they might even oppose each other. Try to accommodate as many suggestions as possible while staying true to your original vision. Once you have revised your manuscript, re-submit it to the journal. Include a cover letter that outlines in detail the revisions that you have made.

De-Mystifying the Review Process

A de-mystification of the review process might further provide you with insights into how to get your writing in print (or on the Internet). As such, the following recommendations might work toward shedding much light on how decisions are formed regarding manuscript acceptance and rejection. The best way to be successful at publications is by becoming as informed as possible about manuscript reviews and article selection. While every journal has different standards for manuscript reviews, learning about review decision-making can be broadly useful. You may wish to locate *reviewer* tabs on journal websites and sign yourself up as a volunteer reviewer.

Volunteering as a proposal reviewer for conferences may also help you to de-mystify the review process. Another great way to make manuscript publication a familiar and successful experience is by sharing battlefield stories with your colleagues. You might find it extremely valuable to share with friends and writing partners some of your positive or negative experiences that you might have had with either journal article or conference presentation submission.

Final Thoughts

Throughout this article, our aim has been to support graduate students and other new scholars with the publication process. Recognizing the importance of establishing a record of publication at the outset of an academic career, we discussed above some steps that might increase your chances of success. At this time, we wish to reiterate that publishing is not related to luck or circumstance. A published article is the culmination of a great amount of hard work, and we believe that the tools that we highlighted in this piece have the potential to be useful for understanding and participating in the creation and successful submission of a manuscript. We hope that you are ready to take the leap toward publication, and we look forward to reading your published work.

References

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