Guest Editorial

Demystifying the Scholarly Publishing Process

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Introduction

Graduate students are strongly encouraged to begin publishing as soon as possible during their studies for a number of reasons (Allison & Frongia, 1992; Huff, 1999). Having a publication or two greatly increases their chances of obtaining a scholarship and prepares them for a career in academia, if chosen. In addition, students and their institutions are measured by the quality and quantity of their publications. After graduation, as hiring committees sort through applications, candidates with publications stand out because this is a strong indication that they possess the attributes of a professional scholar. However, given the publishing process tends to be poorly understood (Murphy, 1996) novices may feel uncertain about how to proceed. Fortunately, the literature on academic publishing demonstrates little mysterious about the process, and students should therefore make it a priority to become familiar with the basic recommendations made by the experts. To this end, this article outlines the key points which recur throughout the literature on how to write for scholarly publication.

Why Publish?

There are reasons why graduate students need to take publishing as a serious course of action, beyond strengthening scholarship applications and making oneself attractive to prospective employers. Scholarly inquiry is a collective endeavour and publishing is the most basic means of participating in the conversations going on in any field (Huff, 1999; Olsen, 1997). The research process cannot be considered complete until findings have been shared with others (Huff, 1999; Wolcott, 1990; Woods, 1999), and the main avenue for this is through publication. Furthermore, writing is considered important to scholarship because it helps to clarify thought and thus facilitate the production of new knowledge (Elbow, 1982, 1995; Huff, 1999; Moxley, 1997; Richardson, 2000; Wolcott, 1990; Woods, 1999). Huff maintained that "[g]ood thinking and good writing are intrinsically linked" (p. 6). Not only is writing a means to clarify, organize, and record current ideas and research findings, the writing process helps generate new ideas.

The Research on Writing for Publication

Research has demonstrated that the incidence of productive writers within a given discipline is less than 15% (Boice, 1997). Why do so few write? According to Boice, one of the main reasons given by academics for not writing is that they are too busy. Most graduate students would likely agree that this is the main reason for their own failure to get words onto pages. In his work with academics, Boice found that rather than a lack of time, the issue is really a question of the misconceptions many scholars have about writing. Many feel that they need huge blocks of uninterrupted time, when in fact studies have shown that the most productive writers work steadily rather than engaging in what Boice referred to as, "binge writing." Therefore, if one is serious about publishing, it is best to find time to write. Huff (1999) explained that the problem is "the managed parts of life (teaching schedules, committee assignments, even monthly Cub Scout meetings) easily drive out the unmanaged" (p. 23). In other words, to get the writing done it is necessary to set time aside by scheduling it into daily life.

Boice (1997) also emphasized the importance of the psychological dimensions of writing, which is a question of generating the right attitude. For example, if workload is viewed as overwhelming and drudgery, it becomes just that. Having a regular writing schedule is an effective way to reduce the experience of being overly busy. While writing must be made a priority (Boice, 1997; Huff, 1999; Moxley, 1997; Silvia, 2007; Woods, 1999), it should not be the exclusion of everything else. In fact, Boice found that a common belief of unproductive writers was making writing the highest priority. He claimed that those who make writing a "modest, realistic priority" (p. 22) tend to be more prolific writers. Being too focused on writing can actually undermine productivity, for the "highest-order intentions have the lowest behavioral probabilities" (p. 22). If writing becomes the most valued activity, it carries demands for time and perfection that encourages most people to avoid it. According to Boice, the most productive writers tend to write during more weeks of each semester, even the busiest ones. His research proved that writing thirty minutes a day, five days a week, can be sufficient to produce several academic essays per year. Therefore, it is best to try to write daily, preferably at the same time each day, even when you are not in the mood.

Silvia (2007) similarly regarded a regular writing schedule as the single most important factor in writing productivity, but his definition of what counts as writing is somewhat unique. For Silvia writing is, "any action that is instrumental in completing a writing project" (p. 19). This may include reading related articles, drawing up outlines, and organizing notes. He did not believe in the existence of writer's block among academic writers. If you are not producing much, Silvia asserted it is due to a lack of engagement with the writing process. Hatch (1999) agreed that one can always write 'something'. Once you get some ideas onto the page they are there to work with. Hatch's own writing routine began early every day and often involved writing two or three pages. She tended to write for two to four hours without fail every day, and without necessarily having an agenda. Hatch explained that she often wrote to find out what she thought. After some time, the pages she produced began to have some coherence. When she located something interesting she began to focus in earnest, which led her to start a first draft. She reflected that the many pages written until this point may never be seen, but they have served their purpose – the generation of ideas.

Although free-writing is an effective way to get ideas flowing (Elbow, 1982, 1995; Hatch, 1999), some writers prefer to organize their thoughts before beginning to write a paper. They find it helpful to make a plan or outline of what they want to say, early on (Huff, 1999; Wolcott, 1990). For those able to do this, it may save time later on. Other writers begin by writing a title and abstract first. Whatever one's preference, what seems most important is to write daily, without fail. Procrastination is the biggest enemy and can take various forms. For example, Moxley (1997) described the "extensive planner" (p. 7), as someone who spends too much time in the pre-writing stage reading, taking notes, and doing research, thus effectively avoiding writing the actual paper. If this sounds familiar, it may be helpful to break a project down into manageable tasks. This involves specifying and ordering the tasks that must be accomplished to complete an article, and then deliberately selecting the time and place for those tasks to be done (Huff, 1999). Good management might appear to be obvious, but Boice's (1997) research illustrated that few academics actually take the time to carefully plot out precisely what needs to be done to complete a writing project.

Tips to Get Published

Presenting at Conferences

Boice's (1997) research suggested that another important habit of productive writers is the willingness to share their writing with others in its formative stages. Presenting work at conferences is considered an intrinsic part of the research and writing process (Huff, 1999). Huff considered writing and presentation of work allies to each other. Not only is it necessary to be clear about arguments when preparing a verbal account of the work, presenting work offers valuable feedback from the audience which can be used to strengthen a paper. The work that goes into preparing for a conference presentation involves the kind of organizing that will directly benefit writing. Boice concluded, "good presenters ensure that the audience remembers their message; academic writers need to do the same" (p. 96).

Writing the Title and Abstract

The abstract and title are key components of scholarly writing, and thus require considerable thought. When responding to a conference call for papers, for example, selection is based upon participants' ability to write an effective abstract and title. Therefore, getting these items right is essential. Wolcott (1990) advised that writers start thinking about an effective title right from the onset of a study or writing project. Along with the abstract, it locates the work in a particular scholarly conversation, but at the same time should appeal to the largest possible audience (Huff, 1999). The title has to represent the whole. It not only needs to attract attention, but must specify the topic so that the work shows up in the right databases and computer searches. The abstract plays the same role but has to supply more content. It provides readers with a summary of the paper, hopefully in a way that will entice readers to read on. Huff explained that with the title and abstract an author is "trying to sell and inform, entice and codify" (p. 67), and stressed the importance of keeping one's audience in mind. Revising the title and abstract also involves refining one's understanding of the content of the paper.

Submitting Work for Publication

In regards to scholarship or job applications, experts agreed having articles in student publications or in professional newsletters is better than having no publication at all. In this regard, submitting to a non-peer-reviewed publication might be one option. This would be a good way to gain experience working with editors, and it demonstrates interest in and ability to publish. As one example, a high-quality mentoring journal, such as *The Qualitative Report*, an on-line publication, treats manuscripts with the same review process as with other peer-reviewed journals. However, the main difference with peer-reviewed journals is work, to be accepted, must meet a basic level of suitability for an academic piece. As well, peer-reviewed journals have an editorial team committed to providing feedback and support needed to get the work published. This is the same mandate and process with this journal, *The Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education (CJNSE) / Revue canadienne des jeunes chercheures et chercheurs en education (RCJCE).*

When ready to submit to a peer-reviewed journal, it is best to do some research on the journal in order to find the right one (Jacobsen & Edmonds, 2008). For instance, it is best to consider whether a particular journal is suitable in terms of its content. First, reviewing recent articles in the journal will ensure there is a right fit for the work. Second, on each journal's web site are the aims and scope of the publication as well as the acceptable areas of the research and method for manuscripts. This preliminary information gathering will save time whereas rejection may occur if a journal is carelessly chosen. This will unnecessarily delay efforts to get work into print. Once a list of possible places to publish is identified, write something targeted to the particular readership of the publication. After having identified three or four potential journals, submit to the first one on the list, being sure to carefully follow the guidelines for submission set out by the journal. Most journals have this information on their web site.

Academic journals are very specific about the writing style that papers must adhere to. A number of scholarly journals, including the *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne des jeunes chercheures et chercheurs en education,* and the *Educational Researcher*, require that the writing style follow the most recent edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (i.e., *APA* style). Journals also often indicate which model of English spelling they use in their publication, such as the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary.* As well, they can set out guidelines related to the required font size and line spacing for manuscripts. If an article is based on research with human participants, journals might require proof that the project has received the appropriate ethics approval. More important, journal editors assume that a work submitted for review is original and unpublished, and has not been submitted elsewhere. In other words, academic writers may only submit a particular manuscript to one journal at a time. Once submitted, Huff (1999) suggested to "celebrate submission as a victory in itself" (p. 121). Reward yourself for having gotten this far.

When a journal accepts an article for publication, the author will be asked to sign a contract assigning copyrights or publishing rights to the journal in question. This means that any individual or institution wishing to copy or reprint an article must seek permission from the journal or author. There are also restrictions placed upon the author of the manuscript with regards to the possibility of publishing the article elsewhere. Again, such details are usually

available on a journal's web site. Not adhering to the rights of others can cause serious academic repercussions. One's reputation can be negatively affected.

Revising and Resubmitting

All writers must expect to be asked to revise their work (Murnighan, 1996). Natriello (1996) pointed out that the vast majority of papers appearing in journals have undergone substantial revisions since the first draft. Being invited to resubmit should be taken seriously as it is an opportunity to get published. Ashford (1996) considered it "a significant achievement" (p. 126) as this is an indication the journal is interested in the kind of paper, and there is potential for turning it into an article they would consider acceptable. It is crucial not to make the mistake of thinking editors and the reviewers cannot be satisfied. Olsen (1997) advised that "whenever an editor encourages, calls for, or even mentions a revision, do it. Most journals will not invite a revision unless the editor thinks that it has a reasonable chance of success" (p. 132). Before resubmitting, it is important to carefully consider the comments of the reviewers. Ashford (1996) considered dealing with feedback the most important part of the publishing process. It is advised not to take negative comments personally, but instead view suggestions, ideas, and questions as a chance to improve your work (Murphy, 1996). Reviews can be tremendously constructive. They can help clarify work and bring forward views not considered. When required revisions are made and the manuscript feels ready for resubmission, remember to submit the best work but not to expect perfection (Huff, 1999). A paper held onto for too long may never get resubmitted.

Edmonds (personal communication, 2008), the editor of *CJNSE/RCJCE,* stressed that the timeline for the publishing process is quite lengthy. Patience is required and deadlines set out by journal editors need to be respected (Jacobsen & Edmonds, 2008). The time it takes to hear back after an initial submission can vary a great deal – from six to eight weeks (e.g., *Studies in Information and Media Literacy Education*) to six or seven months (e.g., *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*). If such information is not available on a journal web site, an inquiry can be made directly to the editor(s) before submitting a manuscript. In all dealings with editors and reviewers, remember that as volunteers these individuals devote many hours to their work on a given journal, and an attitude of respect should always be maintained (Jacobsen & Edmonds, 2008). The academic publishing world is very small, and disrespectful behaviour can follow an author.

If a manuscript is rejected outright -- and the majority are – avoid becoming overly discouraged. Moreover, revise according to the reviewers' comments, seek feedback from colleagues, and resubmit to the next journal on the list. Murphy (1996) firmly believed that "virtually every piece of research you do will eventually find a home if you look hard enough" (p. 131). The review process is subjective, and what one journal will not accept may be welcomed by another, especially if you have revised according to given feedback. Huff (1999) considered the review process itself as "part of the conversation of scholarship" (p. 125), and contends that the most likely factor leading to publication is a strong commitment to revision and resubmission. She stated:

> It surprises me that many people fall by the wayside just as they reach these final stages of the writing process. I think this is because they realize that after all the work they have done, there is considerable work to do before publication success (p. 127).

For this reason, Ashford (1996) advised new scholars to develop realistic expectations early on regarding the publication process. This process is not easy as the work involved can be extensive, and it takes time. Ashford added, "having this expectation allows one to handle the process better, without feeling that one is singularly (and uniquely) unsuited for this profession. This expectation is critical for continued persistence – the essential behavioral strategy" (p. 121). Ashford also maintained that those who are most successful in publishing have several projects going on that do not require their attention simultaneously. The tendency "to think in terms of multiple projects at different stages" (p. 122) is important in the publishing process. Establishing and actively managing a portfolio, where ideas for future writing projects are recorded, will create material to draw on for future work (Huff, 1999). This could be ideas developed in term papers or small research projects.

Conclusion

It is evident from the literature that the two most important attitudes for any author to have with regards to the publishing process are an openness to feedback and a willingness to persist. Allison and Frongia (1992) contended that, "[p]ublication is 10 percent inspiration, 40 percent organization, and 50 percent determination" (p.2). With this in mind, the challenge of getting published for the first time may seem less mysterious. Rather, scholarly publication might be best thought of as being within reach of anyone willing to commit the time and effort.

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