How to Get Published in an English Academic Journal

The seven steps to seeing your research reach an international audience

ENGLISH TRACKERS
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Getting your work published in an academic journal requires hard work and attention to detail. For some this an ultimate goal in its own right but there can be no doubt that, for others, publication at this level is an advantageous and necessary career step. If you want to get your name out in your chosen field, build your academic reputation or even just get your voice heard, then submitting to academic journals makes sense. Submission however, is not the same thing as publication. Although getting published is, in principle, not difficult, it can be more of a challenge if you are working independently or if this is your first attempt at publication.

1. Understand exactly what it is you are aiming at

We at English Trackers understand the process well. We've drawn on the experience of our academic editors, peer reviewers and some of our published academic partners to share our top tips on how to get your writing published in an English academic journal.

An academic journal is a periodical that presents, scrutinises, and discusses research. Much of the content in academic journals either presents new research or reviews books and previously published articles. The concept behind an academic journal is to allow researchers a platform from which to share knowledge and research-based findings. Journals publish two main types of article, solicited articles, which are directly requested by the publication and unsolicited articles, which an author submits to a publication him or herself. Before an unsolicited article is published it is reviewed by at least two subject experts, known as 'referees'; their reports will form a large part of the editor's decision as to whether to publish your article.

Understanding your reasons for submitting to academic journals will help you to make informed decisions. You may feel that your research is so important that it needs to be shared; you may need to develop an industry profile to further your career, or you may want the affirmation of having your research assessed as part of the editorial process. Understanding your reasons for writing the article can have a positive effect on your motivation during both the writing and the editing processes.

2. Make sure you submit your article to the correct journals

There are two main considerations when it comes to selecting the right journal for your article: journal impact and journal suitability.

Journal Impact

Journal impact measures the frequency with which articles in a particular journal have been cited in academic work. There is a formula that measures impact factor or IF which compares the number of cited articles in a given journal to its total number of citable articles. This formula is explained below in an example from the University of California, Irivine.[1]

'Calculation of 2010 IF of a journal:

A = the number of times articles published in 2008 and 2009 were cited by indexed journals during 2010.

B = the total number of "citable items" published in 2008 and 2009.

A/B = 2010 impact factor'

It should be noted that calculations of journal impact should not be used as a measure for the standard of the research in each journal.

Journal Suitability

Journal suitability refers to the appropriateness of a journal to your particular research. By selecting only suitable journals for your submissions, you can save time, effort, and occasionally cost. The following is a list of things you should be looking for:

- Look for names you recognise on a journal's editorial board.
- Ascertain whether a journal accepts the type of article you have written (for example case studies).
- Check in the latest issues for articles on similar topics to yours (some journals have a very narrow area of focus).
- Check that the journal is indexed in the ISI Web of Science lists.
- Check that the journal is included in electronic databases (appropriate to your subject), for example PsychINFO or EconLit.
- Avoid journals that are not available online (print only journals offer limited scope for citations of your work).

3. Write an article that is suitable for an academic journal

Writing an article for an academic journal that meets its referees' and editors' expectations is far more likely to result in a successful publication. Reading through published articles in your chosen journals, to establish their content, tone, and style is a good start, but there are more specific things that you can do to write an article that will get you closer to publication:

- Don't think of your article as a shortened version of your thesis; the difference in word count will simply be too great. Using your thesis as a reference, you should approach your article as a new piece of work.

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- Make sure that you understand the journal's word count requirements. This is usually somewhere between 6,000 and 12,000 words, but do check the journal's submission guidelines to determine if the recommended length includes or excludes notes. (Note that journals may have different word counts for different types of articles; for example, a review article may be considerably shorter than a standard article).
- Look methodically at published articles in your field. Pay particular attention to the structure and consider how the first sentences of each paragraph show different stages of the argument. Your argument is a like a story, one that is constructed by a series of questions which dovetail back into your larger argument. When you find an article with a structure that will work for your argument, use it as a model. You should also view your article as being in conversation with other scholars in the field. As part of your research, select several articles, written by other scholars, for citation in your own.
- Outline your article before you start. You will have done this for your thesis, but an outline is even more important for an article because you will need to write with more concision. The best outlines demonstrate a logical progression of ideas rather than a chronological one. By deciding on section and sub-section headings, and setting word limits for each one, you ensure that you have covered all you need to. From a motivational point of view, a detailed article outline will help you to stick to time-related writing goals.
- Be certain what your argument (i.e. your main idea or claim) is and make sure that you write it in clear language and include it in your abstract and the first paragraph of your article. Refer to it throughout the writing process. Use it as a guide, to ensure that you are not losing the thread of your argument. But do not repeat the same point unnecessarily.

- Consider writing with other people who are also writing. This may seem contradictory to your way of working, but communal writing may help you to focus, stay disciplined, and feel more confident.
- When ideas don't flow, or your mind jumps to another section of your article, jot down quick notes about your nascent ideas to ensure that you don't lose them.

4. Edit your article then edit it again

Before you ask for feedback on your article, you should make sure that you have completed the following editorial steps:

- Use a standard grammar and spelling checker, first making sure that it is set to the English that the academic journal has requested, i.e. British English or US English.
- Read your article out loud. You will find it easier to read it section by section, but read the whole article aloud through at least once to check for easily missed mistakes like jarring changes of tense or voice.
- Consider paying for a professional English editing service. No matter how good your standard of written English, editing your own work is very difficult. A professional academic editor will look specifically at key elements of your writing including sentence structure, content organisation, flow, and style. They will be able fine-tune any issues by rearranging sentences and substituting the right words. They will also be experienced in successfully organising content for publication in academic journals.
- Don't forget that any revisions requested by the journals you submit to will also need to go through a rigorous editing process.

5. Submit your article to an academic journal

There is more to submitting an article to an academic journal than sending it. Each journal will have slightly different submission instructions so take your time to find these and read them very carefully. One way to make sure that you have followed all of the instructions is to print them out and tick off each one, as it is complete. Submissions instructions may include, but not be exclusive to:

- A statement reinforcing the requirement for **original research**.
- Manuscript **length** in detail and with reference to tables, figures, research notes, and references.
- The use of **titles**, **keywords** and **abstracts**, especially with regard to search engine optimisation (**SEO**).
- **Formatting instructions** including font, point size, margins, spacing, indents and specific heading formats.
- How **headings** should be used and formatted
- **Referencing** requirements, since they may not be the same as the ones used for your thesis.
- How to present **tables** and **figures**.
- How to present **acknowledgements, if permitted**.
- An outline of **copyright permission** responsibility (usually with the author).
- How to make **online** or **physical** submissions.
- A **list of documents** to be submitted along with format instructions (usually PDF)

Academic journals have strict submission requirements regarding the **use of the English language**. If you submit an article that is considered to have serious deficits, it will be returned to you and not considered. Many journals suggest that you refine your use of English by engaging the services of a professional editing service.

All submissions should be accompanied by a covering letter and this should be subject to the same editing procedure as the article itself. A covering letter should not be a rewriting of your abstract; it needs to explain concisely the most thought-provoking elements of your article, and the reasons you feel it is pertinent to that particular journal. In essence, your covering letter should be an attractive overview of your article.

6. Receive article feedback and deal with it appropriately

If there is one thing that is certain when submitting an article to an academic journal, it is that you will receive and will be expected to respond to feedback. Make sure that you have already sought feedback several times and well before you get to the submission stage. A good point to start with is your detailed outline; ask colleagues, professors or even academic friends for feedback before you commence your formal writing. This will get you off to a great start.

We all receive feedback in different ways; our response is dependent on factors that include previous experience, expectations, and feedback delivery. When you receive refereed feedback on your academic article, it is important to respond to it in a professional manner, even if you don't agree with what has been said.

The timing of your response to feedback is important: if you leave your response too long, you will give the impression of disorganisation or indifference; if you respond too quickly, having failed to consider your answer fully, you run the risk of ranting or providing ill-tempered answers. Acknowledge receipt of the feedback immediately, but feel free to take several days to respond specifically to reader reports.

When composing a response to feedback always keep in mind that your article still has a chance of being published; you may be asked to revise and re-submit. After ensuring that you understand the required changes, make them carefully, and use a separate document to record a summary of the relevant changes you have made. If you don't agree with specific criticisms, you can challenge them, but first ensure that you have proper justifications for doing so.

The best way to deal with feedback is to see it as an expected and welcomed part of the submissions process. Your article will be more polished and therefore more likely to be cited once you have followed feedback suggestions. It is an exciting opportunity to have your writing reviewed by a panel of experts. Taking a positive approach to feedback will help you to deal with the possibility of feeling disappointment and rejection. It is important to remember that all the articles you read in academic journals have been edited and revised several times.

7. Post publication

When you finally see your article published in an academic journal, you will feel justifiably proud and will have made a significant step towards accomplishing your career goals.

All you need to do now is put it on your CV and start writing your next piece!

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References:

1. UCI University Library. 2017. Measuring Your Impact: Impact Factor, Citation Analysis, and other Metrics. [ONLINE] Available at: http://researchguides.uic.edu/if/impact. [Accessed 29 September 2017]

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