A Graduate Student's Guide to Publishing Scholarly Journal Articles

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In recent years, arriving on the job market with published work has shifted from a desirable condition to a necessity. Even middling universities can afford to ignore applications from job applicants without peer-reviewed articles in scholarly journals. Thus, it is important for graduate students to focus as early as possible on publishing their work.

Fortunately, this is not as difficult as it sounds. Students who start thinking about publishing from the get go, and who take advantage of the resources available, should be able to place some of their work in scholarly journals before diving into the hiring pool. A few well-placed articles will keep them from sinking to the bottom. In this brief article I introduce graduate students to the three-step process of article publication—from seminar paper, to conference paper, to article submission and revision—and point out the advantages and disadvantages of various publishing options, such as collaborating with a professor or another graduate student.

The Seminar Paper

Choose topics for seminar papers that would make good articles. Your topic should be important theoretically and empirically. Seek to answer questions that matter, that are derived from current debates. One of the criteria by which journals will judge your manuscript is whether the topic is important. You will have to convince external reviewers that your topic is of interest to others.

Offering new data based on original field research is the best way to publish as a graduate student. Will you have an opportunity to do field research in the next 18 months? Will you have access to a data set or archive that has not been used for this purpose before? Will you conduct your own survey or elite interviews? You don't necessarily need to have access to these special resources until after the seminar is over. Your seminar paper will give you the opportunity to frame the research question and to conduct a thorough literature review of the topic. And be sure to cite all the senior people who work in your area. They may be the ones who review your paper for a journal. For the same reason be careful if you criticize established scholars. Be nice and recognize the contribution that the scholars have made before you criticize their work. When you turn in your paper ask your professor for feedback with respect to revising for publication and for advice on which journals might be appropriate. Better yet, solicit advice from several professors in your department.

Your seminar may be structured in such a way that you receive useful feedback from other students, as well as practice presenting your ideas orally. If your professor has not allocated time in the semester for such feedback and presentations, ask her permission to organize this yourself or in collaboration with other students in the course (Harman 1991, 537).

If you are unable to conduct field research, thanks to the Internet you may be able to incorporate primary sources anyway. Many countries have online newspapers with archives that go back for several years. Many governments also have web sites. This will enable you to obtain primary documents without doing field research. Check with your university library and see what special collections are available close to home (Cortada and Stone 1971, 61).

If you have completed coursework and have no appropriate papers to revise for publication, another option is to develop the "extra data" that you gather while doing dissertation research into a separate article. I guarantee that you will have collected more data or ideas than you can fit in your dissertation (Cortada and Stone 1971, 62).

The Conference Paper

Presenting your paper at a conference provides valuable opportunities to receive feedback on your work from specialists in your field and to network with other graduate students and professors at other universities with whom you may be able to collaborate in the future. Read the professional journals and newsletters of your discipline (*PS*), field, and subfield. Professional journals and their related web pages will list upcoming conferences, calls for papers, and proposal submission deadlines. It is easier for graduate students to have their paper ideas accepted at regional conferences. Once you have presented at a regional conference it may be easier to participate in a national conference, particularly if there is a "poster session," as there is at the APSA Annual Meeting. It is harder to have a paper accepted at the national conferences because professors may have priority and a larger pool of scholars increases competition. It is also easier to meet people at regional conferences, which tend to be less formal. Established scholars and other graduate students have more time to talk with you.

Once you know the paper proposal deadlines, think of long papers you have to write for classes and submit summaries of these as conference paper proposals. You may or may not have already written the paper, but if the proposal does get accepted you must write the paper or decline right away so that someone else can fill your place. Finish your paper on time so that you can send it to everyone on the panel before the conference. If you want to receive comments, the earlier you send it the better. If your panel has a discussant ask that person when they want to receive the paper and abide by that deadline. Discussants may be less generous with comments on a late-arriving paper or decline to comment at all. Bring copies of your paper with you to distribute at the panel and to give to people in your field that you happen to meet. Don't be shy about asking strangers for comments. Senior people want to keep abreast of what more junior people are working on, especially if your work is in their area. If you receive particularly enthusiastic comments you may want to ask the person if they would be willing to revise the paper for publication with you. A very senior person kindly offered comments on a conference paper of mine; he then graciously agreed to write the preface to the book from which the paper was drawn. Use the opportunity of presenting your work to build relationships with people in your

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field, both colleagues and those more senior.

In some cases, presenting at a conference may lead directly to publication. It is common for editors of special issues of journals, of new journals wishing to recruit good manuscripts, and of forthcoming edited volumes to attend conference panels with complementary themes in order to fill out a planned volume or issue (Harman 1991, 538). For that reason, take your presentation seriously. A publisher, editor, future employer, or funder might be in the audience. Never, ever, under any circumstances, read your paper word-for-word, even if you have to give your presentation in a language that is not your most familiar. Nobody over the age of 10 wants to be read to. People will walk out, read the newspaper, or eat their lunch. You will be remembered as an amateur. Prepare an outline or notes to refer to and practice until you feel comfortable. Obey the chair's time limit, which may be as few as 10 minutes. You are giving a commercial for your paper, not presenting it in its entirety. If people want to hear more they will obtain a copy of the paper. This is great practice for the job talks you will be giving in the future.

Publishing an Article

Once you have revised the paper repeatedly, the most important decision is to which journal you should submit it. You may only submit it to one journal at a time, so choose wisely. I keep a file of submission guidelines from journals in my field. These are listed in the front or back of the journal, or on the journal's web site. Make photocopies of the submission guidelines from journals you regularly read and keep them in a file (Harman 1991, 538). You might also consult the APSA's *Getting Published in Political Science Journals: Guide for Authors* (Martin and Goehlert 2001), which lists the submission guidelines, acceptance rates, and publishing policies for 118 journals. In order to determine the best venue for your manuscripts, and to learn how to write for particular journals, it is wise to take the advice of Meaghan Morris (1998, 500): "the first step towards writing for scholarly journals is to acquire the habit of reading them."

New journals are particularly good publishing prospects. If you join the professional association in your field you will receive mailings about new journals. They also buy advertising in professional journals and conference programs. New journals attract fewer submissions than established journals so they accept a higher percentage of those they receive. Specialized journals are also a good bet, since they receive fewer submissions than journals with a more general scope, and many are quite well-respected. Top journals in your field may publish less than 20% of the material submitted. My first articles were published in new journals, all of which later became established, respected journals (*Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, Global Governance, Party Politics*). If your seminar is in the area of law, and you are unable to do field research, a law review might be your best bet. The prestige of publishing in a law review will depend upon your field. If your area is international or constitutional law, it might serve you well, but since law reviews are not peer-reviewed, this is a second-best option.

Of course, some graduate students publish work of such high quality that they are able to place it in the top political science journals. If you will not be on the job market for at least 18 months, it may be worth your while to try your luck, since you'll have time to send it some place else if your manuscript is rejected. To determine which journals are "top journals," consult a ranking of political science journals, such as Garand and Giles' (2003). Bear in mind that such rankings are highly controversial and may omit excellent publishing venues.

Be sure your article is written well and has no grammatical and typographical errors. If English is not your native language, ask or pay a native English speaker to proofread your article prior to submission. All it takes is a few typos, missing words, or grammatical errors for the reader to form an opinion of you as "careless." If your presentation is sloppy perhaps your research and analysis are as well (Morris 1998, 506–507). Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* is a terrific guide to writing well. Adhere to length requirements and be sure that your citation style is flawless. Nothing screams "graduate student paper" more than sloppy citations.

Allow three months to hear from the journal. If you haven't heard by then, it is acceptable to email the editor and politely inquire about the status of the piece. It may take 6 to 12 months. You can decide to withdraw the piece if you are tired of waiting, but never send it to another journal without withdrawing it from the first.

It is rare that an article submitted to a journal is accepted as is. Your article may be rejected or you may be asked to make revisions and resubmit it. You will receive a set of two-to-four reviews of your piece from scholars working on similar topics. Most reviewers will sincerely try to give you constructive criticism. A minority are poor colleagues and provide mean-spirited comments or ones obviously intended to prevent you from publishing in "their" field. Some reviewers are methodologically or theoretically biased (Harman 1991, 538). Some are "cruel and stupid" (Morris 1998, 509). You may become angry or depressed when you read these reviews. If you give it time you will probably find something beneficial in most of them. I have found that the external reviewers get smarter and more helpful after I have peeled myself off the ceiling and read my work with fresh eyes a few weeks later. It's a bit like getting a pie in the face: it is startling, unpleasant, and a bit embarrassing at first, but leaves no lasting damage. And sometimes the pie tastes pretty good.

Editors often choose external readers from opposing theoretical or methodological approaches, which invariably results in conflicting reviews. For example, I once received a reader report urging me to focus on a single case study, together with a report insisting that large-N statistical analysis is the best way to go. Editors understand that you will have to decide among competing views. If a review is particularly nasty, biased, or perfunctory, you may ask the editors to get another review to replace it (Harman 1991, 538). They may or may not agree. If you think the reviews are way off base you may send your article to a different journal without changes. This is a crapshoot. Even exceptional work may receive ridiculous reviews.

When you resubmit your article include a letter explaining what changes were made and what suggestions you ignored, with your reasons for not making the suggested changes. Editors do not expect you to make every revision suggested. The more junior you are the more revisions you should expect to make.

Should You Collaborate?

It may be advisable for you to publish with a professor in your department. When choosing a professor with whom to publish, bear in mind that junior professors may be under more pressure to produce their own work and may be less willing to work with you. More senior professors may have more time and incentive. They may not be getting into the field as often as they used to and working with you is a way of keeping current. Don't be offended if a professor declines to co-write with you. She may just be too busy, or may not be interested in the

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topic, or simply may not like co-authoring. Collaborating with you is more attractive to a professor if you are willing to do most of the work, turn around drafts quickly, and take criticism and suggestions without arguing. If you want to do it your way, do it yourself. Even if you do most of the work, it is common for the professor's name to go first on your article, although many generous professors strictly follow the alphabetical-order rule. You should discuss this at the outset to avoid confusion (Abbott and Sanders 1991, 106).

You might approach the professor of a seminar for whom you wrote a paper and ask if he or she would like to co-write the paper with you for publication. Typically, you will have done the literature review and will undertake original research; your co-author is helping organize the article better, develop the argument more convincingly, and direct you to sources you have overlooked. Alternatively, approach a professor to whom you are assigned as a research assistant. Suggest an article idea related to the work you are doing together, such as a new question to test against the data set you are preparing, or a new case to compare with the one on which you are working. Another option is to approach a professor who is on your dissertation committee. You may have a chapter, idea, or data from your dissertation that would make a good article. He or she is familiar with your project and may have great ideas for extensions of your work.

Collaborating with another graduate student is a great idea. It not only enables you to share the workload, it can be a stimulating experience and produce a higher-quality article (Abbott and Sanders 1991, 180). There may not be someone in your department who would be an appropriate co-author. Moreover, in some programs students are so competitive that working together on a project would be difficult. But as you progress through the program, conduct field research, and attend professional conferences, you will meet students from other institutions working on similar topics. If you are unable to travel to conferences, browse the online conference programs in your area of research for the names of people working on related topics. Offer to exchange your work and you might discover a potential co-author.

Working on an article with another graduate student will give you an opportunity to write something comparative; for example, you may find a colleague working on the same topic in different countries or on different cases within the same country. Journals like comparative articles. They appeal to a wider audience. Collaboration also provides an opportunity to expand your methodological horizons. If you are primarily working with qualitative methods you might seek out someone with quantitative skills, and vice versa. It is often the case that people who obtain advanced quantitative skills do not have time to develop knowledge of a particular topic or region. The partnership between you and this person may last throughout your career.

When choosing to collaborate, remember that hiring and tenure committees may not give you full credit for co-authored articles. This is a particular concern for people at the end of the alphabet. Your name will almost never go first and, thus, have less visibility (Abbott and Sanders 1991, 180). If you are a non-native speaker of English, co-authoring may give hiring committees the impression that your English writing skills are not adequate to publish on your own.

Final Thoughts

Numerous books offer advice to academic authors at all levels. Among the most useful are Luey's (2002) and Silverman's (1999).

If you are planning to revise your dissertation to publish it as a book, be wary of publishing too much of it in journals. Publishers are reluctant to accept book manuscripts whose principal contributions already are available for free. Weigh the relative advantage of publishing the main contribution of your dissertation in a top journal against the possibility that a prestigious university press may decline to publish it for that reason. While you are attending professional conferences talk to the publishers in the book exhibit to whom you plan to send your manuscript and inquire about their policies.

Remember that academic publishing can be frustrating. Decisions are not always fair. Good work is rejected and mediocre work is published. If your work is good and you try to get something out of the reviews that you receive, and you keep sending it out to journals and trying to improve it, you will publish it eventually. Think of it as a game. The more you play it the better a player you become. Learn from your losses and don't take criticism personally. Be humble about your wins, since your success is partly attributable to luck. Improve your karma by being a conscientious and generous reviewer of the work of others.

Note

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