

“An insider’s guide to getting your scholarly articles published”

Jay Black

I’d like to combine some of my own insights from 20 years’ experience as a journal editor, with some ideas from Mark L. Knapp and John A. Daly (2004), *A Guide to Publishing in Scholarly Communication Journals*, 3rd Ed. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 68 pp. ISBN 0-8058-4952-1. \$14.95 paperback.

Knapp and Daly take communications scholars through the submission process, the review process, and the revision and resubmission process. They also provide seven appendices: the author’s cover letter, a sample manuscript review form, a constructive critique, proofreader marks, an assignment of copyright form, examples of letters of acceptance, rejection, and revise/resubmit, and the publication policies and procedures manual for the International Communication Association. Many of the observations in this small book are generic, and would help scholars in a variety of disciplines. Putting my own spin on Knapp and Daly:

- Having good ideas and doing sound research are necessary but insufficient factors in being published. You have to be a writer, a communicator. You have to have something to say, and skill at saying it.
- Two primary motives for scholarly publishing: (1) sharing research findings and (2) advancing your career. (Can you imagine writing one article that’s worth nearly \$700,000?)
- Read the journals to which you’re submitting. Carefully. Note their target audience, their tone, the trends they’ve been exploring lately—note what’s hot and what’s not. Stay alert to theme issues, which are particularly good places to join a community of scholars.
- Aim for the correct target. You might want to start high (First Tier Journal), but have a grip on reality! (Two or three years down the road, you may publish that masterpiece in a lesser journal.)
- Don’t submit something that’s not ready for prime time, or just to see if your idea will fly. A conference paper is probably not ready for publication, but a revised post-conference paper may be. That’s because conference papers are judged on a “comparative” basis, and journal articles on an “absolute” basis.
- Let your scholarship speak for itself. Don’t write an overly-long cover letter, and for heaven’s sake, don’t beg or plead for publication based on your desperate need for tenure or promotion.
- Follow submission guidelines to the letter. (Most journals have their guidelines on line or in each issue.) The quickest way to turn off an editor is to insult her turf/territory/pride and joy. (Yes, editors have egos. In fact, it’s not a bad idea to know about the editor’s own scholarship. But be careful of pandering!)
- Don’t overwrite (in particular, stay within the journal’s word/page length). Lay the groundwork, but then cut to the chase. Don’t pad your references; not every statement needs to be sourced. Meanwhile, it’s probably OK to put some life into your writing.
- Simultaneous submissions are generally considered to be unethical. At the very least, they’re an unfair imposition on volunteer editorial board members.
- Speaking of ethics, don’t rip off your students or colleagues in your desperation to get published. Attribute credit to each according to his/her contributions.
- Timing may be more important than you think. Is the editor at the end of his tenure, “filling the final issue with whatever fits,” or new on the job, with perhaps unreasonably high

standards? If it's a peak period (right around your discipline's conferences, or at the end of a holiday/summer break), you'll be up against a lot more competition. Try a November or February submission.

- Be patient. You should hear back from an editor within a couple of weeks, to say your article has been received. But it can take from two to four months for closure. If you haven't heard back by then, don't hesitate to send a friendly e-mail inquiry.
- Don't have unreasonable expectations of volunteer reviewers. They shouldn't have to do your research for you, check all your citations, note the missing literature, or correct all your style errors. Those are your jobs.
- There's blind reviewing and then there's blind reviewing. Know what you're in for.
- You have the right to expect thorough and fair critiques of your work. If you don't receive them, get back to the editor and ask for them. It's amazing how many reviewers let their own egos or "smarts" interfere with a fair reviewing process, and how many editors don't carefully read the manuscripts but merely total up the reviewers' ratings. Don't put up with it. If you don't get satisfaction from the editor, consider going to the editorial governing board or journal sponsor.
- Don't expect an "Accept Unconditionally for Publication" letter very frequently. If you know the journal's acceptance or rejection rate, you shouldn't plan to beat the odds.
- Just because one journal rejects your article doesn't mean your work sucks. Send it somewhere else. (If you're lucky, the editor of the first journal will make some suggestions about where the article might better fit.)
- You should learn something from every piece of correspondence with the editor(s), including why your piece is being rejected or what precisely is needed in your revision.
- If you're asked to "Revise and Resubmit," do it. Rumor has it that 80% of manuscripts that actually follow the requests in an "R&R" end up being published. It's poor form, and an insult to yourself and your field, to blow off an "R&R" because it's too much work, or because the letter bruised your ego. An "R&R" request is a sign that the editor wants to work with you toward publication.
- If you don't agree with one or more of the reviewers' requests for revision, address the point specifically in the cover letter you send back with the revision (or consider heading off another disappointment by actually e-mailing the editor to ask how important a given suggestion was, particularly if it's peripheral to your major methodology/purpose). At any rate, when you resubmit, note in the cover letter how you addressed the various concerns.
- PS: When you send your revision, the cover letter might say something complimentary to the editor and reviewers for helping your scholarship. Heck, you might even do this after you've gotten a particularly helpful rejection letter. And it's certainly appropriate once your masterpiece has been accepted for publication. After all, being an editor or reviewer is lonely, tiring, and unpaid or minimally paid labor.
- When your masterpiece is in press, and you get page proofs, read them carefully. Make any last-minute changes asked of you. Do this as quickly (and cheerfully) as possible.
- Go ahead and sign the damned copyright release form, but remember that most journals are happy to have their stuff republished elsewhere.
- If you are really committed to a field of scholarship but have trouble getting your work published, seriously consider starting your own journal. That's where the real bucks are.