

The Publishing Process

Types of Scholarly Writing

Primary vs. Secondary

Empirical vs. Theoretical vs. Review

Review Types

In order for a scholarly field to be reputable, it must have a way of self-policing what is published; otherwise, there would be no guarantees that published works accurately report on research studies that are reliable and were conducted ethically. Historically, the main way that scholarly fields engage in such self-policing is through review. There are many types of review that are used today. Some are more rigorous than others, and the type of review that work undergoes will depend on the publishing venue (e.g., scholarly journal vs. trade magazine vs. popular book). I will mention four here.

Double-Blind Peer Review

This is typically the gold standard for any scientific field. The "peer" aspect means that reviewers are drawn from peer experts in the discipline who are knowledgeable on the topic and can speak to the manuscript's merits and demerits. The "double blind" aspect means that the author does not know the identity of the reviewer, and the reviewer does not know the identity of the author. This anonymity allows the reviewer to analyze the manuscript on its own merits without reference to the author's credentials, prior work, or prestige, and it also allows reviewers to be fully honest and critical in their reviews without fear of the author discovering their identity.

Peer reviewers are generally chosen by an editor who draws from a pool of authors who have previously published in their journal. This also allows the reviewer to more fully understand the context of the publishing opportunity, because they will have published in the same journal themselves, and to operate in accordance with the journal's and professional community's scope and goals.

For these reasons, when a manuscript is submitted for peer review, it should be anonymized. This means that the names of the authors should be removed from the manuscript and that any self-identifying information in the manuscript, such as references to prior work, should be removed or edited in such a way as to mask the author's identity.

Single-Blind Review

This variant of review may also utilize peers but does so in a manner where the reviewer knows the

identity of the author. This is often done merely to simplify editorial processes or in response to the difficulty associated with fully blinding a paper. It may also be done because though reviewers should be experts in the discipline that they are reviewing for, they may not be experts in every aspect of the manuscript they are asked to review (e.g., the reviewer may be an expert in the topic but not the methods employed, or vice-versa). In these cases, reviewers can refer to the author's previous work to determine suitability of the study by asking questions like "Does the author show a history of rigor in this methodology that I am unfamiliar with?"

Though often viewed as less rigorous than its double-blind counterpart, single-blind reviews are somewhat common and fall under the umbrella of "peer review."

Editor Review

The third form of review relies upon one editor (or a small group of editors) to determine a manuscript's suitability for publication. This form of review is often employed with books, edited books, and some journal special issues. Editors often have a superior vision to reviewers regarding the scope and aims of a given project, such as how an article could fit within the context of a large encyclopedia, but they cannot be expected to be experts on everything. For that reason, this type of review is most common when maintaining an overall vision or uniformity of work is the primary goal and when authors are submitting reviews or summaries of previous peer-reviewed work (e.g., a book chapter that summarizes journal articles on a specific topic).

Pay to Publish

Though many scholars would scoff at my listing "pay to publish" as a review type, I add it here as a precaution to young scholars so that they can understand what it is and why people do it. In recent years, some publishers have recognized that scholars themselves can be a source of revenue (especially if a scholar needs to publish for tenure and promotion purposes), and they sometimes adopt predatory publishing practices that prey upon the stresses that scholars face.

Generally, you should never have to pay to have your paper reviewed or published. The reason is that reviewers donate their time to review as a pro bono citizenship activity, thus incurring no cost for the publisher, and the publisher generally charges for access to its articles, thereby covering its own editorial and publishing costs by charging readers. Thus, if a publisher attempts to charge you for reviewing or publishing your work, it probably means that they either are not legitimate or are not reputable.

The only exception to this may be in the case of open-access journals or open-licensing of content by publishers, which will be discussed next.

Copyright-Restricted vs. Open-Access

Generally, when you have a journal article or book chapter accepted for publication, you must sign over copyright ownership to the publisher. The publisher will then sell copies of your work or online access to it to cover their editing and publishing costs. This means that any subsequent copying, sharing, and distribution of that work is now legally controlled by the publisher, and typically you do not even have free reign to share your own work after that point (cf., the publisher's author archiving policies for clarification).

However, as a result of the internet, many authors have shifted to more open attitudes toward sharing their work and have attempted to find ways to make their work freely shareable, remixable, and useable via open licenses. Open licensing is a type of copyright that makes work freely available (both in terms of cost and use), and many open-access journals have been created in recent years that provide all of their articles freely to the public.

The benefits of open access are manifold but include (1) increased access equity (e.g., to scholars in poorer countries and the lay public) and (2) increased citation counts.

In addition to open-access journals, many traditional journals will now provide an open option to authors, which means that rather than charging readers to gain access to your work, they will charge you a flat fee (that is typically paid by governmental agencies or grant funds) to make your accepted work available to anyone. These fees vary greatly by journal but generally fall within a range of \$300 to \$3,500 USD.

Because of its similarities to pay-to-publish methods, some scholars do not view open-access journals as being as reputable as more traditional sources, but the key differences between open-access and pay-to-publish situations is that with open access (1) your work still undergoes rigorous review, (2) you only pay if your work is accepted, and (3) the publisher makes the work freely available through an open license. The benefits of going this route are both ethical (equitable knowledge access) and practical (greater citation likelihood), but these benefits should always be weighed in conjunction with the quality of the venue.

Online vs. Print Format

Venues

Journals

You are never paid or offered royalties for journal articles.

Audiences

Review Time

Tiers

Books

Edited

Single Authored

Book Chapters and Encyclopedia Articles

White Papers

Blogs

Rejections

You've spent months carefully researching a topic, writing up your results, and poring over each word of your manuscript. You submit it to a prestigious journal. You wait patiently for six months. Then, you get a curt email from the editor like this:

"Based on the feedback provided by our reviewers, we have decided not to publish your manuscript."

Failure. Rejection. We all face it, we all feel it, and it hurts.

But was the manuscript really not good enough? Did the editor really select the right reviewers? Did they understand what you were trying to accomplish? Were they actually qualified to provide an expert review of your work? Or did they just not like your prose or disagree with your ideas?

Who can say? There might be a hundred reasons why a manuscript is rejected, but rest assured that it happens to all of us.

Many journals have acceptance rates as low as 8%, which means that for every manuscript that is accepted, 12 or more are rejected. And sometimes even the best papers are rejected merely because they aren't a good fit for the journal or they are too innovative for some reviewers or are merely different from what a reviewer wants.

Here are a few things to know about rejections and how to develop a healthy research agenda despite them:

First, don't take rejection personally or too hard. It's not the end of the world. Even experienced scholars face rejection regularly. Personally, I average between two and three rejections per article that I get published, which means that I get a LOT of rejection letters. When people look at my CV, they sometimes make astonished comments like "How on earth did you publish 7 articles last year?!" But what they don't see are the 20+ rejection letters that I had to read to get those articles and the self-doubt that can be coupled with each one.

But you just have to roll with the punches. No one likes to get a rejection letter, and you can be a little bummed about it. Take a break, eat a snack, and complain to your best friend ... for exactly one day. Then, on the next day, you should be resubmitting your manuscript elsewhere. Don't take time to feel sorry for yourself or to entertain self-doubt. You've already taken your work 90% of the way, so don't let a brief rejection hurdle lead you to scrap all the progress you've made. Take a moment for yourself, and then push forward.

Second, aim high in where you submit. Sometimes people are so afraid of rejection that they don't take risks, but your manuscript can just as easily be rejected by a great journal for silly reasons as it can by a mediocre journal, so why not aim for the better one? Sometimes we become so close to our work that we begin to question its value, but oftentimes fresh eyes can see genius in what has become mundane to our own. In short, you really can't predict exactly how an editor and reviewers are going to react to your manuscript until you submit, so you might as well get it underway.

An additional reason to aim high is that often you will receive better feedback from more prestigious

journals. Many prestigious journals only allow tenured, highly-productive scholars to review for them, whereas less prestigious journals often rely upon early career faculty and graduate students for reviews. Similarly, leaders in the field, like those famous names you cite in your paper, become increasingly selective of which journals they review for as their careers progress. This means that you typically have a better chance of getting true experts as reviewers the higher you aim. This means that the feedback you get will often be higher quality if you first aim for a top journal, and then, even if it's rejected, you can use that feedback to improve the paper to make it more likely to be accepted elsewhere.

And third, learn from your mistakes. It's true that sometimes reviewer feedback is nonsense, but even the most antagonistic, unreasonable reviewer can help you improve your work. Maybe the reviewer didn't understand or value your methods; so, maybe you should provide some more explanation for why your methods were valid and meaningful. Maybe the reviewer disagreed with some of the basic assumptions you were making; so, maybe you should provide better evidence for those assumptions. Though you shouldn't let reviewer feedback on a rejection cripple you from moving quickly on resubmitting your work elsewhere, you should at least attempt to be charitable to your reviewers and recognize that there might be some validity to their points of view. So, quickly try to learn from them and move on.

Revisions

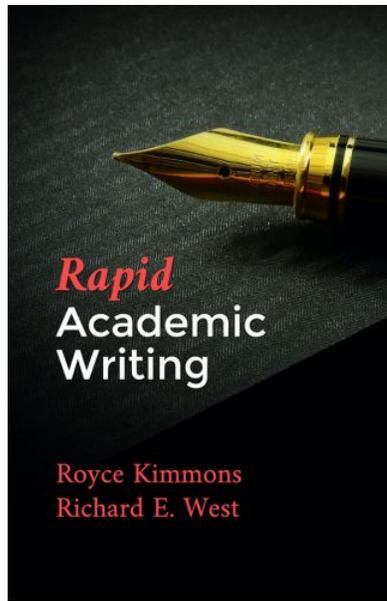
You've finally got feedback on your manuscript, and the editor says that the reviewers would like to see a revision. Hooray! Rejoice!

This does not mean that the paper is accepted or that it will necessarily be accepted even if you do everything the reviewers say. But it does mean that the editor and reviewers are at least willing to work with you to try to make the paper work in that venue. So, that's a good sign!

knowing what to change, what to defend, and what to ignore

sometimes you have to eject

Acceptances



Kimmons, R. & West, R. E. (2018). *Rapid Academic Writing*. EdTech Books.
<https://edtechbooks.org/rapidwriting>



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