Successful Strategies for Publishing in Peer-Reviewed Journals in the Social, Behavioral and Policy Sciences

Center for Excellence in Research Advancement Workshop

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The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences

The Journals of Gerontology: Series B is a bimonthly journal of The Gerontological Society of America, The Social Sciences section of the Journal publishes research on aging from the fields of anthropology, demography, economics, epidemiology, geography, health services, political science, public health, social history, social work, and sociology.

Five types of contributions are included in the section:

• Original Research Reports.
• Brief Reports.
• Review Articles.
• Theoretical or Methodological Articles.
• Commentary or Letters to the Editor.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Impact Factor*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal of the American Geriatrics Society</td>
<td>3.656</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry</td>
<td>3.353</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journals of Gerontology: Series A</td>
<td>3.083</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychology and Aging</td>
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<td>International Psychogeriatrics</td>
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<td>The Gerontologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal of Aging and Physical Activity</td>
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<td>Research on Aging</td>
<td>1.474</td>
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*2009 Journal Citation Reports Social Sciences Edition, Gerontology Category, Thomson Reuters
Successful articles should be:

- Theory-driven and rooted in a social science foundation
- Use rigorous and appropriate methodology
- Move knowledge in the field of gerontology forward
- Well written, no longer than 5000 words

More leniency given to:

- Junior scholars
- Scholars from developing countries
- Articles addressing under-studied topics
The Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences

• Process and manuscript journey
  • Submit article through Manuscript Central
  • Initial evaluation for quality, appropriateness, editorial correctness (60%→ review)
  • Send to three reviewers (may use reviewer recommended by author)
  • Decision: reject, minor revision, major revision, conditional accept (30%→ revision)
  • Revisions submitted and second(+) review (20%→ publication)
The Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences

- To optimize success (aside from scientific merit)
  - Keep to journal style and standards
  - Write clearly and concisely
  - Cite articles from JGSS in your references
  - Be a reviewer or mentored reviewer for JGSS!
Thinking of Submitting a Journal Article?

- Publication expectations for recent Ph.D.s has gone up dramatically.
- Not unusual to have new graduates with 3-5 peer-reviewed publications (not all first-authored).
- Graduate school is increasingly on the fast track and you should be too.
- Use empirical paper requirement (if your department has one) to produce a first-authored journal submission as early as your second year.
Thinking of Submitting a Journal Article

- Diversify your portfolio by working with your mentor (or other senior scholar) in a supporting role on a project or research grant where you serve as an apprentice scholar.
- Make sure that authorship order is negotiated early (even though this is difficult given status differential).
- Authorship may be renegotiated with change in the relative contributions of authors.
- First author status is deserving to the person who drives the main ideas of the research and prepares the first written draft. Others go on in order of contribution.
Publication Strategy

- What strategy is most beneficial to your career?
  - Publishing in the journals with the highest possible impact?
  - Generating the greatest numbers of publications?
  - Having a lead authored publication?
  - Publishing with your mentor?
- If you are interested in an academic career, all of these will help you.
- Diversified portfolio is best (particularly for junior faculty seeking tenure).
Publication Strategy

- Optimize your chances by serving as a reviewer-in-training or a mentored-reviewer.
- Depending on the journal, there is keen interest in having junior scholars review (because such training is a service to the field, and because it has become more and more difficult to find reviewers).
- Use this as opportunity to refine your critical faculties.
- One benefit is that you get to read the other reviews and the editor’s letter.
- This will sharpen you ability to avoid potential problems and issues in your own articles that tick off reviewers.
Choosing a Journal

- **Fit-based decision**: What journals are you citing? This could be a good indication that your research is in the right “camp”, establish scholarly continuity, and better insure that the reviewers will be familiar with the ideas and jargon of your article.

- **Audience-based**: Who reads the journal? Your discipline, multi-disciplinary audience (based on theme), professional organization with built-in audience that sponsors the journal.
Choosing a Journal

- **Status-based:**
  - Relying on the journal impact factor, the average number of citations received per paper in a given year among papers published in that journal during the two preceding years. For example, if a journal has an impact factor of 3 in 2008, then its papers published in 2006 and 2007 received 3 citations each on average in 2008.
  - The impact factor is highly discipline-dependent. The percentage of total citations occurring in the first two years after publication varies highly among disciplines going from 5-8 in the biological sciences and 1-3 in the social sciences.
  - Rejection rate indicating high volume of submissions is an indication of selectivity.
Choosing a Journal

- Methodological preferences of journal: quantitative vs. qualitative, mixed methods
- Theoretical orientation and emphasis. Does theory take a front seat or back-seat? Is the journal more theory-based or applied?
- Communicate with editors directly about your topic and approach; they are more than willing to provide feedback,
- Seek out editors at professional meetings and workshops
Quality Control

- Hardest sections to write: introduction/background and discussion. The intro is key and establishes the roadmap for what’s to come...spend more time on this!
- Is your abstract a concise outline of the article?
- Does your review of the literature support your research questions, the grounds for your study and hypotheses?
- Does the method section offer adequate information for the reader to know how you did your study?
- Are your analyses appropriate to your research question? Are they targeted at the research questions, do they make the most of your data?
- Were your analyses conducted correctly? Double-check.
Quality Control

- Does your discussion section explain whether your hypotheses were supported?
- Does your discussion section refer back to the relevant literature and explain how your study enhances it?
- Does your discussion list shortcomings of the research?
- No research is perfect, but is it clear that the positives outweigh the negatives?
- Does your discussion provide a conclusion and statement of where research should go based on your findings?
Quality Control

• Is the document formatted according to journal standards, particularly the references?
• Are you using tenses consistently and correctly for your journal?
• Check manual for appropriate formatting (e.g., APA).
• Are tables and figures self-explanatory, well labeled, simple as possible but detailed as necessary.
Submitting

- Recommend reviewers: why not? This makes the reviewer selection easier for the editor and there is a highly likelihood one of your suggestions will be chosen.

- The submission & review process
  - Submit through Manucript Central or other electronic portal)
  - Don’t forget the pro-forma cover letter
  - Wait.....
  - But get in touch with the editor or managing editor after three months—unforeseen things happen.
Peer Review

- Scholarly peer review (also known as refereeing) is the process of subjecting an author's scholarly work, research, or ideas to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the same field, before a paper describing this work is published in a journal.
- Peer review requires a community of experts in a given (and often narrowly defined) field, who are qualified and able to perform impartial review.
- Many editors obtain reviewers from organized lists of scholars with coded specialties and from the reference list of the paper. Often a specialist and generalist are selected. Sometimes two and sometimes three are chosen depending on the journal.
Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as ‘quite an improvement.’
What May Happen after Submission

- Immediate reject
- Sent to reviewers
  - Reviewers respond: Editor rejects
  - Editor invites revision (R&R)
    - Revise and resubmit (R1) and wait for reviews
    - Reviews returned and editor makes decision
      - Accept or conditional accept
      - Another revision is required
        - Submit an R2: may or may not go back to reviewers
- Process may take 6-12 months depending on journal
- Publication will be 12-18 months from your original submission depending on the journal.
When You Get an Instant Rejection with No Peer Review

- Reasons for an instant rejection:
  - Poor fit to the journal’s content or “culture”
  - It is not clear how or whether your research advances the field
  - Weak writing that does not follow journal format
  - Very low acceptance rate of journal: it’s not you, it’s them
REJECTION After Peer Review! It Happens to Everybody

- You wrote an article, submitted it to a peer review journal, and waited. And waited. And waited. You finally receive that long-awaited letter – and it’s a rejection! What next? Should you tank that article?

- No. Take a deep breath. Put the review aside for a few days or as long as you need to let the sting of rejection fade. Then pull out the review and read it all the way through.
Rejected after Peer Review!

- Read the editor’s letter carefully. This will be a judicious summary that prioritizes the main problems and add the editor’s own take on the article.
- There might be a clue in the editor’s letter as to how “hard” the rejection in fact was (the door might be left open to resubmit with a radically revised manuscript.)
- However, most times it is best to move on.
Rejected after Peer Review!

- Common problems leading to rejection:
  - Article does too much (overly complex) or not enough (too simple)
  - Does not communicate why the issue is important, what gap is being filled, how it contributes to the literature
  - Mismatch between what the study purports to do and what it actually does
  - No or ambiguous research questions or hypotheses
  - Discussion is simply a recapitulation and does not provide expansive interpretation of results
Revise and Resubmit!

- Take a deep breath—the reviews may be harsh but you have your foot in the door.
- You probably haven’t read your article in some time, so you have a fresh perspective on it.
- Make a list for yourself of the major and minor changes you intend to make.
- Revisions are difficult when you can’t add length to the manuscript, so efficiency is key.
Writing the Letter for Resubmission

- Once your article is ready to resubmit, compose your letter to the editor.
- Go through the main points made by reviewers and for each, explain how you addressed them and on what page(s) it can be found.
- If there are some suggestions you don’t agree with, explain why. Do not simply ignore the suggestion.
- Proof read your revised article several times. Put it aside for a day or two and reread it with a critical eye. Ask a colleague or professor to read it.
Writing the Letter for Resubmission

- At the end of your letter, thank the editor for the opportunity to resubmit your article and thank the reviewers, noting that their comments were very helpful and improved the manuscript substantially (even if you really don’t think so!).
Moving On After a Rejection

- Choosing a new journal
  - Going down the impact hierarchy is typical but not always the best alternative
  - You don’t want to lose more time so topical match is more important and quick turnaround times are a virtue
  - Revise the article based on the previous journal’s review but mostly change those things the reviewers’ agreed were wanting. There may be idiosyncratic suggestions that will not come up again. Focus on the so-called “fatal flaws”.
  - Keep trying. Remember, (almost) all articles have a home....somewhere.