Getting started with publishing about learning and teaching practice

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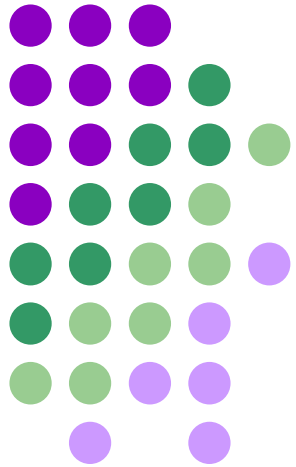
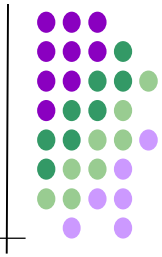


What's this session about?



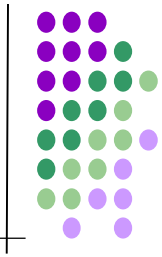
Researching (and writing about it) provides the heartbeat of any university, but there are all sorts of practical problems about how to make this happen when academics and others have multiple competing demands on our attention.

This highly pragmatic and light-hearted session will engage participants in thinking about rationales for writing about learning, teaching and assessment, how to take the first steps, what kinds of outlets are best suited for individual purposes and how to make it motivating and enjoyable. The session will be illustrated with anecdotes about doing things wrong in the first instance, but then achieving success in publication in diverse various formats. You should leave with some concrete plans about how to do it yourself.

Six things you can do to help yourself get published on learning and teaching

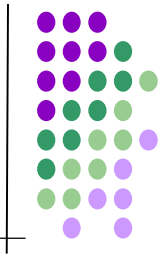
1. Think through your rationale for wanting to get published;
2. Decide which publication outlets are best for you;
3. Get feedback on your work;
4. Hone your writing style;
5. Move from a dissertation to publication
6. Persist in the face of setbacks.

Initial task



Why do you want to get published about learning and teaching? (50 words, 4 minutes)

1. Your rationale for publishing



- **Disseminating the outcomes of your research.**
- **Accumulating evidence for your professional portfolio/ HEA application.**
- **Making a contribution to your department's research profile.**
- **Making a contribution to the academic community.**
- **Improving your own national profile and standing in the academic or professional community.**
- **Making some money.**

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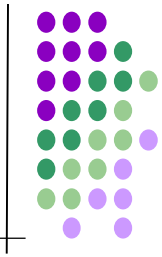
More motives for publishing



- **identifying yourself within a domain of research or scholarship and facilitating contact with other professionals working in the same area.**
- **because writing requires a very disciplined approach, it can help to facilitate your thinking and clarify your logic.**
- **Publications make you more credible to your students. They see you as a person who has something scholarly to offer.**
- **It can provide an immense amount of personal satisfaction.**

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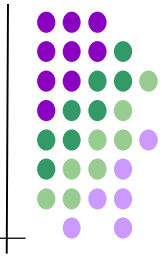
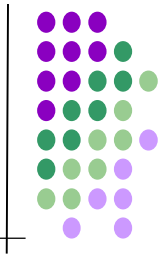
Other reasons



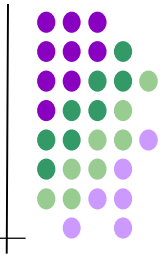
- opening doors, getting a background.
- to get a broader focus to your career and grow on your scholarship.
- to help you get a temporary contract renewed.
- to get free books for reviewing them.
- Making your case for a teaching excellence award

2. Outlets for publications: a hierarchy



- journals: international refereed
- lesser, UK un-refereed
- books scholarly monograph, co-written, edited, co-edited
- conference proceedings - refereed
- book reviews
- conference papers - depends on type
- project reports
- poster sessions
- magazines
- textbooks, newspapers
- Web articles of various kinds
- distance learning materials

Persisting in the face of setbacks

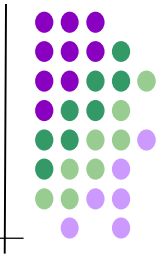


- **Make time to write: it's not selfish to prioritise this, it's essential for your career (and don't wait for the best time);**
- **If initial feedback is harsh, seek other views abut listen intently and consider it carefully;**
- **If your article gets rejected, it's not you but your work that has been unsuccessful;**
- **Don't overreact in your response to negative criticism.**

The ‘ten damn fool questions’ method of getting started...

- What am I doing?
- Why am I doing it?
- What has been done in the past?
- What were the effects?
- Why was this unsatisfactory?
- What have I tried that worked?
- What didn’t work so well?
- What have I learned from my success and failures?
- What can I deduce from what I have done?
- What do I plan to do next?

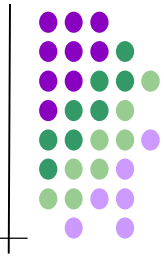
3. Getting feedback on your work



Never submit work for publication without:

- **reading it aloud to yourself;**
- **Getting feedback from at least two people, one an expert colleague, the other a 'talented amateur';**
- **Seek out and make good use of an experienced mentor;**
- **Constructively use feedback you get once you have submitted work for publication.**

4. Honing your writing style;



- If you want to publish in a journal or a book series, become very familiar with their existing outputs;
- Read thoroughly the last couple of issues of a journal you want to submit to, for example, or scrutinize other books in the series;
- Look at:
  - Technical issues like length, format, layout, number of diagrams/ tables expected;
  - Stylistic issues like active or passive verbs, typical sentence structure, tone, register, vocabulary;
  - Read and read and read to get the look and feel right.

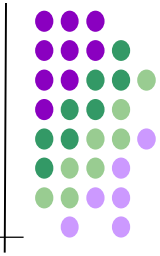
Good advice to help you maximise your chances of publication:

- Write clearly, logically and sequentially.
- Study and follow the author guidelines.
- Have the manuscript critiqued by peers and others before submission.
- Think what readers might want to know, rather than what you want to say.
- Pay great attention to detail about presentation/appearance/format.
- Ensure your Research method is relevant, appropriate and accurate.

Ten most common reasons for immediately rejecting a manuscript (after Noble)

- Author guidelines not followed.
- Not thorough.
- Bad writing: clarity and style.
- Subject of no interest to readers.
- Poor statistics, tables, figures.
- Old subject / manuscript.
- Unprofessional appearance.
- Title of manuscript.
- Too simple - ‘reporting’.
- Written at the wrong level.

Most common problems editors experience with manuscripts received...

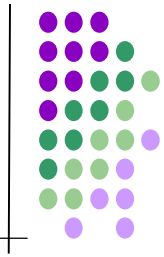


- slight, trivial or low-quality work/research.
- inappropriate subject for journal.
- poor quality of writing.
- failure to follow author guidelines.
- presentation/appearance/format.

Referees and reviewers look for the following in manuscripts:

- Clarity, coherence, well-written.
- Thoroughness.
- Research method.
- Appropriateness to the journal.
- A unique contribution.
- Advancement of knowledge.
- Importance of subject
- Generalisability and validity of results.
- Timeliness.

When writing an abstract



- Write this at the very end of the article production process;
- Summarise briefly what you set out to achieve, your research methods and your key findings;
- Look at abstracts within the target journal so you can emulate their style, scope and length. Some journals have a prescribed format for abstracts which you must follow using their on-line form
- Scientific journals normally use short sentences but social science journals use longer more complex ones;
- Seek peer review from a more experienced colleague as abstracts really matter.

How do you evaluate the status and impact of journals?

The impact factor (IF) of an academic journal is a measure reflecting the average number of citations to recent articles published in the journal. It is frequently used as a proxy for the relative importance of a journal within its field, with journals with higher impact factors deemed to be more important than those with lower ones. The impact factor was devised by Eugene Garfield, the founder of the Institute for Scientific Information. Impact factors are calculated yearly starting from 1975 for those journals that are indexed in the *Journal Citation Reports*. Impact factors cannot be used to compare journals across disciplines. A journal can adopt editorial policies to increase its impact factor. For example, journals may publish a larger percentage of review articles which generally are cited more than research reports http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_factor, see also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journal_Citation_Reports

A useful tool to help you calculate ratings at http://www.scimagojr.com/index.php

If you type in the name of a journal in the box JOURNAL SEARCH it will give a graphical and numerical indication of its influence over the last few years (rising or falling). (It also identifies its country of publication)

If you click on JOURNAL RANKING they can select by Social Science and then Education and then by region (worldwide or in the UK or in the USA, etc) and it will show the journals with the highest impact factors in rank order. You will notice that it also includes journals for primary and secondary education but you can select out the HE ones.

Thanks to Ray Land at Durham University for this tip

5. From dissertation to publication

	Do:	Do not:
1	Review your thesis looking for publication potential as fast as possible after the assessment so the ideas remain current and you don't have extra work to do updating references and so on.	Give up hope if you've done nothing for years: it's possible to revive elements of an old thesis and still find things worth saying.
2	Look for discrete / freestanding elements of your thesis that might well be readily turned into a quick publication, for example, re-versioning the literature review as an article for a journal that says in its guidelines that it publishes literature reviews.	Post off your whole thesis to a publisher with a note saying 'my supervisor / examiner said this is publishable as a book, so please will you publish it?'
3	Look for the really original ideas within your work, and see if you can write an opinion piece for a journal conveying your key thoughts.	Expect the text to simply be capable of being 'boiler-plated' into a journal article; you are likely to need to revise style, tone and register to make it fit the author guidelines for a journal.

From dissertation to publication

	Do:	Do not:
4	Try to get several articles out of your thesis (particularly doctoral ones).	So thinly 'salami slice' your data that you are sending off a number of rather thin articles; one or two chunky one are likely to be better received.
5	Ask your supervisor for her/his thoughts on what elements of the thesis are the ones that are likely to most lend themselves to publication.	Don't over-rely on other's opinions, you've worked on this topic for ages so trust your own judgments.
6	Think through the range of publication options: a book, journal articles, articles for less formal publications like trade journals, newspaper / magazine articles. Think through what your key aims are in relation to publication and work out a plan of what is likely to give you most value in terms of output.	Be afraid to look at ways of using your thesis data set in diverse ways for different audiences ranging from formal to informal: you can say the same thing more than once to different people. Look for different kinds of journal to publish your ideas.

From dissertation to publication

	Do:	Do not:
7	Consider the different kinds of articles you could write: overviews, opinion pieces, literature reviews, scientific accounts etc., and select the approaches that fir your work best.	Ignore the author guidelines given by the journal: make sure your articles don't get rejected straight off because they don't fit the requirements of the journal. Many fall at the first fence for this reason!
8	Consider using your thesis as a basis for co-authoring, perhaps even with one of your examiners or peers.	Allow yourself to be exploited by someone familiar with your thesis who wants to use if for a publication with themselves as lead author. Watch out for people who want to exploit your ideas!
9	Build on the hard work you have put into the literature review and consider updating your literature review regularly so you can use it as a source for future publications.	Stop reading around the topic as soon as you've handed in the thesis as you will need to keep up with current ideas.

From dissertation to publication

	Do:	Do not:
10	Have a look at the elements you wrote and then later cut out of your thesis: there may be good work there that didn't fit the thesis but can contribute to a publication.	Ever throw any writing away: keep all rejected text for potential later use.
11	Re-read your thesis after the examination and think through what your current ideas are now, and how you've moved on from your thinking at the time of submission, and use these further insights as a basis for future publication.	Feel that you have to re-state identically in your publication what you said in your thesis: you are likely to have moved on in some areas after you wrote up and you can smooth over some areas that you now no longer like from your original thesis. It's worth celebrating the fact that ideas have moved on since you first examined the topic.

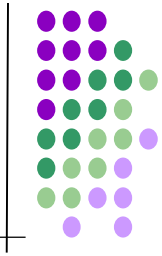
From dissertation to publication

	Do:	Do not:
12	If there were good ideas discussed in your viva, use these to frame your thinking for future publications, and even maybe contact your examiner after the event to follow up on questions or suggestions made.	Cast a veil of darkness over your examination and push it from your mind, since the occasion may well have made you pause for thought about your own work.
13	Consider submitting to publications in different parts of the world: what may be rather old hat in your country could be a very novel idea elsewhere (and vice versa).	Forget to make sure that your writing is culturally relevant to the nation in which you plan to publish: look out specially for ideas, bodies and organisations mentioned in your thesis that are specific to your nation and unknown elsewhere.

From dissertation to publication

	Do:	Do not:
14	Show drafts of your publications to readers other than your supervisor and examiner: it can be helpful to get different opinions from those without any kind of vested interest in your work.	Spend so long getting opinions from others that you don't actually get round to sending your work off for review by the journals themselves.
15	Try to retain your own interest in the work: if you are bored of it, others are likely to be too! (But remember new readers are likely to be really interested by what you have to say).	Overwork your original text: if you find you are having to revise significant elements of your original writing it may be more economical of your time simply to start anew altogether.

6. Persisting in the face of setbacks



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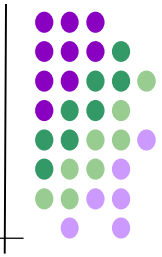
You can do it!

- The greatest barriers to having a successful track record of publications are often self-generated;
- Don’t be afraid or embarrassed to seek out help: practically all successful academic writers have needed an initial leg up!
- Look for co-publication opportunities with experienced writers;
- Always ask with any data set ‘How can I use this in more than one way to maximise impact?’

Your personal plan of action



- **This week: Set yourself some small and realistic tasks to achieve which could include, for example, finishing something you've already started, doing a literature search, brainstorming a new piece of writing, thinking through some ideas, discussing something with either of us or with a colleague, getting peer feedback, seeking help with references or layout, talking to a potential co-author or whatever will advance your writing activities.**
- **This month: If you were to allocate four hours a week, what could you do in this time? And what about two hours? And what about one?**
- **This summer: How many days can you commit to writing? Is it possible to draft and complete ready to send off a whole publication?**
- **By the end of this year: What realistically could you achieve if you set your mind to it?**

In each case, when do you expect to complete the task? Who can help you achieve these goals? What might stop you doing it? What steps can you take to stop you being sabotages (or sabotaging yourself!) and how will you know you have been successful?

Useful references

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