

## **Journal Publication: Rules of The Game**

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*Angels fly, because they take themselves lightly.*

*Inscription on a commercially available paper weight found in a gift shop in West Vancouver, B.C. 2002*

1. Publication is both a political and a personal game. We have to manage it both from the outside (the political) and the inside (the personal, psychological).
2. The first step is to write a good paper. A good paper usually does the following:
  - (1) Takes the reader to the leading edge of scholarship in the area (a good review of the literature)
  - (2) Engages with existing ideas and material in a critical manner (theoretically, substantively and methodologically)
  - (3) Offers something (data, analyses, idea) new or original
  - (4) Comes with good structure and organization, has clarity and coherence
3. The second step is match-making. This means researching the journal. Your manuscript has to match the interest, purpose, format, and style of the journal. It is important to assess the positions (political, ideological, epistemological, methodological) of the journal to see if there is a match. Spend some time going through the recent issues of a journal before you submit. A good manuscript that is a mismatch wastes your time, and the time of your colleagues (editors, reviewers, staff), and causes delay and frustration. Sometimes, a call to the editor of the target journal will give you a good sense of whether you should be submitting to them.
4. Get two or three journals that might be appropriate for your manuscript. Send it to the most desirable one, which is usually the more difficult one (e.g. the Canadian Social Work Review, which has high prestige and a low acceptance rate). You will decide what to do when you get the reviewers' reports. In some cases, you might want to just send it out to the next journal on your list upon reading a rejection letter. I have adopted the principle of never giving up until my manuscript is eventually published.
5. The publication process needs to be actively managed. Most journals involve the work by volunteers (editors and reviewers are often colleagues who are usually not paid to do a full time job). In order to get your manuscript out on time, you might send friendly emails inquiring the current status of your manuscript. It can help to get people "remember" to put your manuscript on to the next step of the review/publication process.

6. Publication is of personal significance. It affects your life politically (impact and influence), socially (visibility, image, prestige) personally (self-image, subjective well-being), and materially (tenure and promotion, salary). You need to develop a healthy attitude. The Golden Rule is “Keep telling yourself that you are worthwhile, regardless of what the reviewers might say or imply.” Rejection is just one of those standard inconveniences. The fact that no inter-reviewer reliability index is ever reported by major journals should be used to support rational thinking conducive to your own mental health and continued vitality.
7. Revision can be more energy-consuming than writing the first draft. You might experience angst, frustration, feelings of resentment, or that you are not understood and respected. The process can be quite dis-empowering. Please remember reviewers are colleagues who are asked to be critical of your work. If you are asked to do revision and resubmit, you have a better than 50% chance of getting accepted by that journal eventually. A good way to look at reviewers’ reports is that you have the best available colleagues brought together for you by the journal to help you improve your manuscript. I estimate that a typical report with three reviewers’ comment can easily cost CAD \$1,500 to \$2,000, not inclusive of administration/staff/postage costs and GST. Take full advantage of this free service.
8. If you need to take time away to nourish your pain, or to get over your narcissistic injury upon receipt of a negative review. I recommend a maximum time-out of one week. Get back to it as soon as possible. Be nice to yourself during that period. Do something to make yourself happy.
9. When you do your revision, it is good practice to provide a summary of your revisions with the revised manuscript. It is actually required now by many journals. It gives reviewers a clear statement of your revision, and it can also be used as a space for indicating why you do not think certain recommended revisions are appropriate. You might also use to it indicate the additional work (e.g. expanded literature review, new data, additional examples/illustrations) you have put in.
10. Have someone to talk to about your publication. Whoever can make you feel better is an appropriate candidate (Personal note: Please exercise discretion and caution when talking to teenage children).

Disclaimer:

The above rules have not been tested through RCT (randomized controlled trials) and their practical validity is not established. The author is not responsible for any damage, injury, side-effects, or any negative outcome – real or imagined, resulting from the application of these rules.