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Getting Published: Four Keys for Participating in the Scholarly Dialogue

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In a twist on the familiar dictum to "publish or perish," the renowned organizational communication scholar, Charles Redding, used to quip that "Professor So-and-So had demonstrated that it is possible to publish *and* perish." With his passing, Charles proved his own point . . . but the fact that his influence infuses the communication discipline to this day hints at a fundamental truth: *Scholarly publishing matters because it is the primary means of disseminating our ideas and data to the larger scholarly community*. Certainly teaching matters (and the best teaching is irreplaceable); impassioned debates over cold beers matter (and good beer, while replaceable, is hard to beat), but by publishing their work, theorists and researchers can contribute to the scholarly dialogue in a way that is unmatched by other modes of communication. If thinking about publishing in such terms seems to be a bit overblown, in a much more concrete way, one's publication record is accorded significant weight in both hiring and promotion-and-tenure decisions (and, indeed, may be the most important factor at Research I institutions). Even for those graduates who choose to leave the academy to pursue careers in profit or non-profit sectors, a record of scholarly publication can only enhance one's attractiveness to potential employers.

Scholarly publishing takes various forms (e.g., books, invited chapters in edited books, refereed articles and chapters, book reviews, encyclopedia entries), and many of the principles developed below apply equally to any of these sorts

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of manuscripts. That fact notwithstanding, the primary focus here is on getting published in refereed journals. It is certainly possible that a graduate student might develop a book-length manuscript for publication, or that he or she might be invited to contribute a chapter to an edited volume (although it is more likely that a student would be afforded the opportunity to co-author such a piece with a more senior scholar), but, far and away, the most common path to publication in the early stages of one's career is the one that leads to refereed articles.

OVERVIEW OF THE SUBMISSION–REVIEW–PUBLICATION PROCESS

A colleague once told this story of his first experience submitting a paper for publication: He put his manuscript in the mail and sat back waiting for a "thank you" letter and notification of the issue number in which his piece would appear. What he received instead was a pair of scathing reviews and a rejection letter!

During the author of this chapter's tenure as editor of *Human Communication Research* there were several occasions when people submitted manuscripts that the reviewers soundly rejected, but those papers actually had potential. If the authors had only had a better grasp of the way the submission–review process works, they might eventually have been accepted. Consider how likely you would be to walk away from a night of poker as a winner if you did not know the rules of the game: Hand after hand, you would just be randomly selecting which cards to keep and discard (and almost certainly taking a whuppin' in the process). In a similar way, the prospective author might throw manuscript after manuscript at the wall, hoping "something would stick." To suggest that the submission–review process is analogous to a "game" might connote an unfortunate, and unwarranted, note of cynicism, but there are "rules," and knowing them makes it a lot more likely that you're going to "win."

When submitting a manuscript for publication, whether it is an electronic or hardcopy submission, authors should review the target journal's submission guidelines and carefully adhere to those guidelines. Journals typically specify page limits, format requirements, number of copies to be sent, etc., and a failure to follow such guidelines, even if something seems arbitrary or capricious, is a surefire way to stack the deck against yourself. Along with your manuscript you should include a cover letter. Some journals' submission guidelines go so far as to specify the contents of the cover letter, but when that information is absent, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* provides a useful guide to the elements to be included in the letter. You should not submit a manuscript to multiple journals at the same time, and the editor should be advised when there are similar papers (e.g., based on the same data set but reporting different analyses) either published or under review.

Once the editor receives the manuscript, he or she should promptly acknowledge that fact. This is less an issue with today's electronic submission processes, but when submitting a manuscript via the mail, an editor should notify an author that the submission has been received within a week. The editor will

then make an initial determination of whether the manuscript is in proper form and addresses a topic suitable for the journal. Manuscripts that simply are not ready for review, or that are not in keeping with the mission and focus of the journal, typically will be rejected at this stage (although a helpful editor may offer feedback about re-working the paper for possible submission). For those manuscripts that pass this initial screening, the editor will identify two or three scholars with expertise in the area to serve as reviewers. Often these reviewers are members of the journal's editorial board, but a journal receives far more manuscripts than could be processed by that group. Therefore, many reviewers serve on an ad hoc basis—lending their time and expertise at the editor's request out of a commitment to the discipline and their interest in the topic.

The editor usually asks reviewers to provide their evaluations within a specified span (one month or six weeks are typical, but these periods do vary). Very often, reviewers do not meet their due dates, but it is incumbent upon the editor to follow-up with tardy reviewers to ensure that a manuscript does not languish at the bottom of someone's "to do" stack. The review process normally takes two to three months, but there are many horror stories of authors who have waited far longer to receive word of their paper's status. An author who has not received a response after three months should feel free to contact the editor to inquire about the manuscript. (And you call tell him or her that you read here that that's what you should do!)

Reviewers will provide the editor with three types of feedback: (1) comments to the author(s), (2) confidential comments to the editor, and (3) a publication recommendation. It is important to keep in mind that the editor often sees a more candid evaluation than that provided to the author. Specific publication recommendations made to the editor vary somewhat from journal to journal, but they usually reflect categorical judgments along the following lines: "accept," "accept pending revisions," "revise and resubmit," and "reject."

The editor will then carefully review the manuscript, weigh the reviewers' comments and recommendations, and make a publication decision. He or she will write a decision letter to the authors and provide them with the reviewers' "comments to the author(s)." It is quite rare that a paper submitted to one of our field's top-rung journals would receive an outright acceptance on first submission. For our best journals, even "accept pending revisions" judgments are rather unlikely. Statistically speaking, of all manuscripts submitted, most receive "revise and resubmit" or "reject" decisions.

In the decision letter, the editor will summarize the comments of the reviewers and, for papers that receive "accept pending revisions" and "revise and resubmit" verdicts, outline the points that need to be addressed in a revision. The editor may also ask to be informed about whether the author will undertake a revision and set a date for resubmission.

When submitting a revision the author should include a cover letter in which he or she details the way in which each of the reviewers' and editor's comments have been addressed. The editor will typically return the revised manuscript and cover letter to the original reviewers. It is possible that, upon revision, problems that were not apparent in the first version will emerge, and the paper will be

rejected. It is also common for reviewers to feel that their earlier criticisms have not been adequately addressed, and for them to ask for yet another revision. In some cases a paper may go through multiple rounds of revision before it is accepted for publication.

Once a manuscript is accepted, it enters the production phase of the publication process, and this may extend over some months. At some point the author will receive a set of page proofs which is the typeset version of the manuscript. Very often the page proofs will contain typesetting errors, and it is essential that the author go over them very carefully to detect any such mistakes. The author should use the standard proofreader's marks given in the *APA Publication Manual* to indicate any corrections or changes. Changes to the content of the paper at this stage are strongly discouraged because they may necessitate resetting the entire article. Also at this stage, the author will receive a copyright agreement which assigns the copyright for the article to the journal's publisher or the association that owns the journal. Finally, the day arrives when the issue with your article lands in your mailbox. It is a gratifying experience, one to be savored, but not for too long: If you're doing it right, you've got a revise-and-resubmit sitting on your desk that needs to be turned around, and you're also collecting data for another study.

A HIERARCHY OF CONCERNS: THE QUESTION, PROJECT, MANUSCRIPT, AND JOURNAL

The modal number of refereed publications by Ph.D.s in the communication discipline is one! Fewer than half of the people who earn their doctoral degree in communication will ever publish more than a single refereed article (Hickson, Bodon, & Turner, 2004). The submission–review–publication process might seem somewhat daunting, and that probably contributes to this publication statistic, but there are specific steps that one can take to enhance the chances of success. As an approach for exploring ways to nudge the odds in one's favor, it is instructive to think about the research and publication enterprise in terms of a four-tiered hierarchy of concerns.

Level 1: The Research Question—Significance of the Problem

At the most fundamental level of the hierarchy is the nature of the research question the author is seeking to address. The questions that drive a research project vary in their significance or importance, and as one would expect, when reviewers judge that the question pursued in a manuscript is trivial, they are unlikely to recommend that it be accepted (see American Psychological Association [APA], 2001, p. 6; Ryan, 1982). As Darryl Bem (1995, p. 172) so succinctly put it, papers are very often rejected because, "Nobody will give a damn."

What sorts of features, then, distinguish "significant" from "trivial" research problems? It may not be possible to give a definitive and exhaustive answer,

but considerations of "coherence," "pragmatics," "heuristics," and "aesthetics" certainly matter.

Coherence Considerations. At root, "coherence considerations" concern how a study fits with and extends established understanding. According to Sam Becker (1984, pp. 2–3), "The most important questions . . . are ones whose answers will serve to refine, amplify, or . . . confirm some part of what we currently take as knowledge in our field" (see also Chesebro, 1993, p. 378). But satisfying coherence considerations does not just involve locating the project within the matrix of what is assumed, believed, and known. What is most important is the potential for pursuit of that question to reshape or extend that matrix. For example, does a question lead us to re-think what is currently accepted or to see relationships between what had previously been treated as disparate phenomena? In contrast, the framing of problems may address coherence considerations only minimally, in the sense that they incorporate established assumptions, terminology, and methods but do not really have the potential to reshape what we know. Reviewers recognize trivial extensions of research paradigms (e.g., "the effect of green ties versus blue ties on credibility")—what the *APA Publication Manual* (2001, p. 5) refers to as "exhaustion of a problem," and research questions that "beg the obvious" (see Pacanowsky, 1976, for a delightful parody).

Heuristic Considerations. Heurism refers to the capacity to stimulate even more research. The most compelling research projects are those that suggest new avenues of inquiry and application—those that open up new possibilities. You have almost certainly read articles that were exciting because you could see ways of running with the ideas and findings. Just like you, reviewers are sensitive to the heuristic implications of a project, and those that do not seem to lead anywhere tend not to fare as well in the review process.

Pragmatic Considerations. Communication is a practical discipline—one concerned with understanding how people can function more effectively in their roles as message producers and processors. The most highly regarded research questions, then, tend to be those that have practical implications for people's lives. (In fact, the National Communication Association now publishes an online magazine, *CommCurrents*, which focuses on making the scholarly research published in our journals accessible and useful for the lay public.)

Aesthetic Considerations. There are layers of beauty, elegance, and order that characterize virtually all communication processes, but they often go undetected or underappreciated. A truly compelling research question reveals some element of this aesthetic world. In the way that a significant question is framed, it can yield an "ah ha" moment of insight and realization; we find these problems "fascinating," "engrossing," and we delight in their contemplation.

Level 2: The Research Project—Quality of Execution

Posing a significant research question is a key first step along the path to publication, but obviously, coming up with a great idea or problem does not ensure a great research project in pursuit of that problem. Because reviewers are usually (but unfortunately not always!) scholars actively involved in conducting and publishing research in the same subject area, the author should expect that

they will have had first-hand experience in dealing with the conceptual and methodological issues pertinent to the research problem. As a result, it is both important and strategic to be particularly sensitive to whether and how those issues have been addressed. Whereas at the first level of the "getting published" hierarchy manuscripts get booted because they do not pass the "So What/Who Cares?" test, at this level they are jettisoned because "You Didn't Cite X, and You Didn't Do Y."

It is at this level that one's graduate training and research experience really comes to the fore. Via training and experience a scholar learns to anticipate likely criticisms concerning the execution of a project, and thereby avoids or addresses them at the outset. This is a tremendous advantage—you can short-circuit lots of objections when you are on top of the substantive and methodological issues pertinent your project. Even then, though, reviewers will almost certainly . . . no, make that *certainly* . . . seize upon actual or perceived shortcomings in the project, and these will constitute the "teeth" of their reviews and, very often, the major considerations informing their publication recommendations.

Concerns with quality of execution crop up at every phase of a scholarly project. In surveying the literature, it is important to know what has already been done and how what you're doing differs from and extends that literature. In collecting data, it is essential to avoid textbook errors in study design, sampling, and measurement. In the analysis phase, you've got to apply appropriate analytic techniques (e.g., do not violate statistical assumptions); and, when you're doing something new, make a clear and compelling case for your approach. In drawing conclusions from the data and analyses, be cautious about making claims that extend beyond your findings: Do not lose sight of what population actually was sampled, what actually was measured, and what actually was found.

Again, reviewers are especially tuned in to considerations such as these. Few things stick out like not knowing what you don't know and not knowing what you're doing. At the same time, it is important to distinguish between "fatal" and "nonfatal" problems in carrying out a project. Essentially, nonfatal problems are those that can be addressed via a revision: A review of literature can be bolstered to fill in gaps, data can be re-analyzed using more appropriate techniques, and discussions can be re-written so that they more accurately reflect the findings, limitations, and conclusions of the project. Unfortunately, fatal errors are another matter, and they are not easily exorcised. Problems in the design of a study such as a confound in the manipulation of the independent variable, lack of reliability and validity in operationalization of the dependent variable, bias in sampling, and so on, typically cannot be overcome.

Level 3: The Manuscript—Quality of Presentation

An interesting problem, pursued via a well conceived and well executed study, still does not ensure a positive outcome in the review process. A third tier of concerns, then, involves the quality of exposition and manuscript preparation. As Alexander and Potter (2001) observe, many manuscripts are rejected not because the research is bad, but because the writing is not very good.

Quality of presentation encompasses a number of distinct concerns, more than can be developed here, but several are particularly important to mention. The

first of these involves the basic mechanics of writing: grammar, punctuation, spelling, and so on. Inadequacies in these areas (and similar problems like typographical errors, an incomplete reference list, references in the wrong format and other failures to adhere to the journal's format guidelines, incorrect quotations, etc.) are more problematic than authors sometimes suppose. It might seem that these are minor details, to be corrected somewhere (by someone) along the path to publication, and that such little things should not obscure the overarching significance of one's ideas and data, nor should taking the time to get the manuscript in proper order be allowed to delay the process of bringing one's work to an unenlightened community of scholars.

In point of fact, however, problems in the basic mechanics of writing and manuscript preparation can really stack the deck against an author in the review process. The standard reviewer's comment goes something like this: If the author was this cavalier about manuscript preparation (something we *can* see), then what confidence can we have about the care with which the data were collected, handled, analyzed, and reported (something we *can't* see)?

The second aspect of presentation quality of particular note involves the need to develop a "reader-centered" model of scholarly writing. The ultimate purpose of scholarly writing is to communicate one's ideas and findings to others, and to accomplish this end, the author needs to write with the reader in mind. In orienting to the task of developing the manuscript, the author should ask: (a) what his or her reader likely knows, believes, and is willing to assume at the outset, and (b) what he or she wishes the reader to know, believe, or assume at the end of the paper. With these two endpoints in mind, the task becomes one of moving the reader from the starting point to the conclusion, along the most direct possible path. As the narrative unfolds, each successive step should seem reasonable (sound, systematic, perhaps even necessary). Now, this in no way is meant to suggest that the author should think about what he or she is doing as leading the reader to some surprise ending—as Potter (2001) says, the author does not want to make the mistake of "writing a mystery." The reader should know where you're going; you simply want to make sure that the path to getting there is one he or she is able and willing to follow.

Adopting a reader-centered orientation, and actually carrying through in implementing that perspective, results in several readily discernable features in scholarly writing. Foremost among these are clarity, conciseness, and anticipation.

Clarity. Readers cannot follow along with you if they cannot follow you. Not too long ago, this chapter's author encountered the following sentence in a paper: "With respect to the interaction styles' influence on changing epistemological styles, the key difference between these styles is the establishment of a trusting relationship between the instructor and the students with one style, and not the other." Sentences such as this do not make the final cut when one is writing with the reader in mind. And concerns with clarity extend beyond the level of sentence construction. The reader-centered writer strives for clarity to the point of transparency at every turn: developing the rationale; stating the research question; describing the method and results; and discussing conclusions, limitations, and implications.

Conciseness. A key element of the reader-centered model is not simply to move the reader from point A to point B, but to do so by the most direct possible path. As a result, reader-centered manuscripts do not, for example, have long, tedious literature reviews; instead, they cut to the point by focusing on and framing previous findings and issues in ways that bear directly on the current project. More generally, they do not deviate from the strait-and-narrow narrative path by chasing after tangential points. If you've immersed yourself in a literature and project you are, quite naturally, going to be brimming with ideas, nuances, and minutiae, but that does not mean that you should try to incorporate all that; stick to the path and point of *this* manuscript. As Bem (1995) recommends, the writer who has included tangential material probably needs to do (at least) two additional drafts of the paper—the first where all those tangential ideas are moved to footnotes, and the second where those footnotes are deleted.

Anticipation. In constructing a manuscript's narrative path, the writer needs to be able to anticipate the steps that the reader may be unable or reluctant to make. Are there assumptions that need to be made explicit and defended, terms that need to be defined, theories to be explicated, methods to be described and supported? By being on top of the literature, knowing what informed readers are likely to grant and what is controversial or problematic, the writer is in a position to meet potential objections. Now, this is not to suggest that a writer should set for him- or herself the task of converting the reader to the other side of an ideological divide; rather, the more modest (and do-able) aim should be to make a reasonable case for the course he or she has taken.

Level 4: The Journal—Where to Submit the Manuscript

One of the secrets of scholarly publishing is that journal editors face just two fundamental problems: They have too few submissions, and they have too many submissions. That is, they always need high quality work to fill their issues, but they do not need manuscripts that, for whatever reason, have little or no chance of being accepted. Deciding where to submit a manuscript has very real consequences for whether it is likely to be published. In many cases, submitting your work to the "wrong" place, even if it is sound and well-written, can make it highly unlikely that the paper will fare well in the review process.

Doubtless, the most important recommendation for selecting where to submit your work is to be familiar with the journal. At one level, being familiar with a journal means being familiar with its focus and content; you cannot necessarily judge a journal by its title. You need to know what topics and methods are reflected in the articles published over the last few years, what the journal's editorial mission statement says, who the journal's current editor is, and whether he or she has published an "editor's statement" since taking the reins. The need to be familiar with a journal's focus and content suggests a very basic litmus test: If your paper doesn't include a single reference to an article published in a particular journal, you may want to think twice (or three times) about sending it there (assuming, of course, that the journal has been around for a while).

The best way to become familiar with a journal is, of course, to have immersed oneself in its contents in the course of reviewing the literature and designing and conducting one's own project. In some cases, however, it may be desirable to cast a wider net by researching the *Iowa Guide* (available online: http://iowaguide.uiowa.edu/). This resource provides useful summaries of many communication journals' focus, editorial policies, etc.

Being familiar with a journal also involves recognizing that journals differ in their prestige and impact, and that, to some degree, reviewers' evaluation standards and expectations (as well as their experience and expertise), may covary with these factors. A very rough ranking of journals in the communication discipline probably goes something like this: (1) general readership, or "flagship" journals (e.g., *Communication Monographs*, *Communication Theory*, *Human Communication Research*); (2) journals devoted to publishing in specialized areas (e.g., *Communication Education*, *Management Communication Quarterly*); (3) journals published under the auspices of regional associations (e.g., *Communication Studies*, *Communication Quarterly*, *Western Journal of Communication*); and (4) journals specializing in shorter research reports (e.g., *Communication Reports*, *Communication Research Reports*).

Alternatively, there are other, more objective ways of assessing journal quality. One common metric (and one often invoked by tenure and promotion committees) is acceptance rates (on the premise that the best journals are the most selective). By itself this is an imperfect measure, though, because authors often "self-select" out of more prestigious outlets so that lesser journals end up with low acceptance rates because they receive large numbers of low-quality submissions. Another index of journal quality is the Thompson Scientific *ISI World of Knowledge* ratings of journal impact (available online through institutional subscription), which are based on the number of citations in subsequent publications that a journal receives (the idea being that the best journals will publish articles that are cited often). While useful, the ISI rankings have various limitations, among them the fact that many communication journals are simply not included when it comes to counting subsequent citations.

There is a third sense of what it means to be "familiar" with a journal, and this can sometimes be elusive. Journal editors face a daunting job of processing a large number of manuscripts in a timely fashion, and communication has been very fortunate over the years in drawing from its ranks to enlist the services of a long list of distinguished, diligent, and fair editors. Nevertheless, there have been occasions when editors have gotten far behind in processing manuscripts and issues have not been published as scheduled. When things do go seriously awry, that fact is often widely known, and conferring with mentors and peers may help to head off launching a manuscript on a one-way flight into a "black hole."

GETTING PUBLISHED: THE FOUR KEYS

Time to pay off on the promissory note given in this chapter's title—beyond the basics we have covered so far, just what are the "four keys" to take with you?

Set a High Personal Standard

There just aren't many shortcuts along the path to scholarly publication (and good reviewers can usually tell where corners have been cut). At every phase of a project, from initial formulation of the research question to editing page proofs, nothing will serve you better in the long run than setting out to do things "right."

Take the Plunge

It is very unlikely that an editor is going to contact a graduate student and ask to publish his or her work; you've got to be willing to send your stuff out and deal with the feedback you receive. There are many reasons for the fact that the modal number of publications in the field is one, but prominent among them is that bright, capable scholars are sometimes reluctant to subject themselves to critique—you've gotta be tougher than that.

Be Persistent

The odds are pretty high that a quality manuscript submitted to a selective journal will receive a "revise-and-resubmit" decision. Revise-and-resubmits are a good thing—it means that you're still in the game and that the editor must have seen some promise in the project. Don't give up on a revise-and-resubmit manuscript, and don't let it languish. But in striving to "be persistent," don't be foolish. Not all "revise-and-resubmits" are created equal. Is the editor encouraging in his or her summary of what needs to be done? Have the reviewers or editor set a nearly impossible bar? Are the flaws "fatal" and just have not been labeled as such? There are times when it's best to move on.

When revising your manuscript, read the reviewers' comments carefully, and put them away. A couple of days later, lay aside your emotion, and read them again, even more carefully. Recognize that responding to a "revise-and-resubmit" involves preparing two documents: the revised manuscript and the cover letter detailing how you've responded to the reviewers' comments. Of the two, the cover letter is often the most important.

In those cases where a manuscript is rejected, the same advice applies. Read the reviews carefully and draw upon them to strengthen the paper. Don't just turn around and send the manuscript to another journal. Other reviewers are likely to seize upon the same points, and there is a certain chance that you will get one or more of the same reviewers (and they do not take kindly to being ignored).

Enjoy the Process

It is easy to focus on the ultimate objective of the submission–review–publication process (i.e., actually getting the paper into print), and there is certainly great satisfaction in that accomplishment. That said, it is also important to enjoy the process of getting there. Orienting only to way-stations along the path of scholarship (e.g., "when I get this published," "when I get a job," "when I get tenure") leads almost inevitably to burnout. If, however, you take pleasure in designing and executing the project, in crafting the manuscript, and even in learning from the reviews, you'll always will be an active contributor to the scholarly dialogue. Savor it all.

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10

Finding Your First Job: The Job Search and Interviewing Process

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By the time students begin their first job search, it is usually too late to significantly improve the qualifications they bring to the job market. Students must take best advantage of their time in graduate school to develop the experience and credentials they will need to get the type of job they are seeking. Still, the job that a graduate student eventually acquires is by no means determined solely by what the person has done in graduate school. The difference in job-seeking success between two applicants who seem to have similar credentials from graduate school can be striking. Some of the difference in success can be attributed to the intangibles a person brings to the job—interpersonal skills, charisma, vision, and likeability—and to factors no one can control, such as the candidate's fit with job openings in that particular hiring cycle. Yet the manner in which a person conducts the job search also plays an important role in determining the outcome of that search. Some candidates take best advantage of their qualifications, while others fail to realize that potential. This chapter is written to help graduates be as successful as possible in their job search and interviews, whether they are seeking a position in academe, business, or other professions.

THE JOB SEARCH PROCESS

Although the application and interviewing process can vary among different companies and universities, there is a standard pattern followed by most employ-