Submitting the Manuscript for Formal Review: Efficient and Effective Strategies

11

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Contents

Abstract

One important skill for academic authors is determining when a manuscript is ready to be submitted for formal review. Both extremes–a hasty submission or, conversely, a manuscript that is perpetually unfinished—are barriers to progress as a scholar. Based on survey research with editors, lack of familiarity with a publication outlet—including its mission/goals, primary audience, and submission policies—account for many rejections. Given that the peer review cycle for journals often is 8–12 weeks, errors at the manuscript submission stage are an impediment to achieving publication goals. Learning how, when, and where to submit scholarly work is a career-long decision-making process because published authors pursue various writing tasks, work with different editors, and accept new challenges. Familiarity with the standards of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) offers guidance to authors about the submission process. Publishers offer detailed guidelines for authors, and these are another

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237

underused resource to facilitate successful publication. While some may object that the quality of their ideas is the only thing that does or should matter, poor presentation of ideas and formatting flaws can become a roadblock to the acceptance of a manuscript. Prolific authors have learned, not only how to produce manuscripts of publishable quality—as important as that is–but also how to efficiently and effectively navigate the manuscript submission process. This chapter describes a strategic approach to manuscript submission that will spare authors from many troublesome, time-consuming, and dispiriting outcomes with scholarly publication.

Keywords

Scholarly writing • Manuscript preparation • Submission procedures • Guidelines for authors • Publication outlets • Peer review

Three Narratives

Novice
A doctoral candidate successfully defends his dissertation in January and is now searching for a position as an assistant professor. After two faculty members in the Department decide to take advantage of a retirement incentive from the state university system, he is offered a one-year temporary instructor position and decides to accept. During that year, with extensive support from his dissertation chairperson, they co-author a research article that is accepted for publication. The next year, the doctoral program graduate is hired for a tenure-track position at another university. The article based on his dissertation has been posted online but not yet published in the print copy of the journal, so he contacts the editor to update his institutional affiliation. The editor responds that their contract specifies no changes can be made to the institutional affiliations after the final, typeset copy is posted online. The reason for this policy is that the work was completed while the faculty member was employed at the first institution, rather than the second.

In this situation, the author and the publisher see things differently. The new faculty member wants his work to "count" with his new employer while the publisher is adhering to the ethical standards of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). These guidelines state that a change in institutional affiliation is addressed by an acknowledgement. Did this manuscript submission policy surprise you?

Collaborators at Different Levels of Experience
Due to declines in enrollment, a university begins to reorganize its programs and courses so that only the most financially solvent ones survive. A newly hired assistant professor finds it very disturbing that her department is going to be dismantled. She has been productive as a scholar, making several national conference presentations,

co-editing an anthology with her former professor, and contributing one chapter to that book project. She also served on numerous committees, including the regional accreditation report writing team. The administration uses the situation to override tenure obligations, arguing that there is no suitable assignment for some of the faculty members now that their department and programs are being discontinued. In her case, she collaborated to publish a research article with senior members of a different, yet related, department. When the other department is allocated a faculty position, the job description is a good fit for her areas of expertise, they encourage her to transfer, and she manages to keep her job.

How did networking with more established authors support this author in identifying outlets and submitting manuscripts that were accepted for publication?

Prolific
A team of eight researchers from different countries undertake a major investigation together. They correspond online frequently throughout the project and, as time goes on, the contributions made by each team member differ from what was originally anticipated. When allocating credit to each team member, the lead researcher thinks that the list of names should be changed accordingly. After conferring with the team, he reorders their names and then submits the revised manuscript. This is immediately red flagged by the publisher. They send an email and attach a form that must be signed by every author before the manuscript can be accepted for publication. Initially, the principal investigator for the research is annoyed. He is a bit embarrassed that he was unaware of this manuscript submission policy, plus it is going to take some time to orchestrate obtaining the signatures. Yet after looking at it from the publisher's standpoint, he can appreciate how contentious the credit allocated to authors could become if everyone was not consulted first. He complies with the publisher's request without complaint.

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) standards state: "Any change in authors after initial submission and before publication must be approved by all authors. This applies to additions, deletions, a change of order to the authors' names, or a change to the attribution of contributions." Were you aware of this ethical standard?
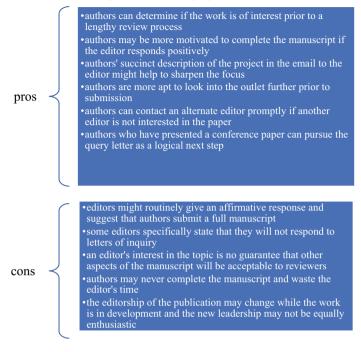
Activity: Writing a Pre-submission Inquiry
What if you could hasten the peer review process, yet continue to work with outlets that have a rigorous peer review system in place? That is the purpose of corresponding with an editor while a manuscript is still in development. Referred to as a query letter or pre-submission inquiry, the author sends an e-mail to the editor to gauge interest in a manuscript prior to submitting it officially (Murray, 2015). However, some editors flatly refuse to respond to these inquiries, so sending one would result in irritating the editor. Pros and cons of the strategy are highlighted in Table 11.1.

Guidelines for composing a letter of inquiry:

1. Look up the current editor's name rather than addressing the e-mail to "Dear editor."

Table 11.1 Pros and cons of a pre-submission inquiry

pros

- authors can determine if the work is of interest prior to a lengthy review process
- authors may be more motivated to complete the manuscript if the editor responds positively
- authors' succinct description of the project in the email to the editor might help to sharpen the focus
- authors are more apt to look into the outlet further prior to submission
- authors can contact an alternate editor promptly if another editor is not interested in the paper
- authors who have presented a conference paper can pursue the query letter as a logical next step

cons

- editors might routinely give an affirmative response and suggest that authors submit a full manuscript
- some editors specifically state that they will not respond to letters of inquiry
- an editor's interest in the topic is no guarantee that other aspects of the manuscript will be acceptable to reviewers
- authors may never complete the manuscript and waste the editor's time
- the editorship of the publication may change while the work is in development and the new leadership may not be equally enthusiastic

2. Provide a specific, informative title for the manuscript.
3. Write a compelling abstract.
4. Indicate that the manuscript is not currently under consideration elsewhere.
5. Look into the publication's purpose and scope. State why this would be of interest to the specific audience.
6. Provide a one-sentence summary of your qualifications that are specific to this topic.
7. Write a business letter that is professional in tone.
8. Avoid understating or overstating the work's possible contribution.

Example of a Query Letter:

Dear Dr. ___:

Our research team has a manuscript in preparation that appears to be a good fit for [insert name of the journal]. The title and abstract for the article are:

[insert title and abstract]

The work is not under consideration by another publisher at this time. Given the [insert explanation] of the readership of [insert journal name], the article would [describe benefits for audience].

Our international research team represents specialized expertise on the [topic/approach of the article] with contributions from [briefly describe].

We look forward to your reply and will submit the completed manuscript in a timely manner if it meets publication needs for the journal. Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

Respectfully,

Self-Assessment: Checklists for Manuscript Submission

Fortunately, many experienced academic authors have a sense of commitment to the next generation of scholars. They have published helpful tools that support others in pursuing publication. Here is an example of a checklist for assessing empirical research articles adapted from Wilson (2016).

General Criteria for Evaluating Research Articles

Do the title, abstract, and literature review conform to the format required by the publication (i.e., MLA, APA, Chicago)?

Is the writing style suitable for the outlet?

Does the paper fit the standards and scope of the particular journal?

Is the research question clear?

Was the approach to studying the phenomenon appropriate?

Are the study design, methods, and analysis appropriate to the question being studied?

Did the researcher(s) gain ethical approval prior to implementing the study and was the study ethical in its treatment of participants and handling of data?

Is the study innovative or original? Does it challenge existing paradigms or contribute to existing knowledge?

Does the work develop novel concepts?

Is the investigation likely to be of interest to the intended audience?

Could presentation of the results be improved, and do they answer the research question?

Is the study description sufficiently clear for other researchers to replicate?

Are the methods of statistical analysis suitable and do the findings matter?

Are the conclusions supported by the data? (Adapted from Wilson, 2016).

Additional Resources: Use the pre-submission checklist designed by Crack et al. (2023) to assess your work prior to sending it in.

Prominent professional organizations, such as the American Psychological Association's (2023) Journal Article Reporting Standards (JARS) offer checklists to assist authors in evaluating manuscripts prior to submission.

For checklists to evaluate practical articles, qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed-methods research, see Jalongo and Saracho (2016).

11.1 Introduction: What Manuscript Submission Implies

Over the years of teaching doctoral students, I would ask them what I do first after reading the title of a manuscript submitted to the journal. None of them guessed correctly. They assumed it would be to read the abstract or quickly scan

the entire work. The first thing I did in 25 years as an editor-in-chief was to look at manuscript length. If the author does not follow the most basic guideline of producing an article-length manuscript, then the editor is under no obligation to wade through page after page to determine if there is an article in there somewhere. Although writers may think that it is their ideas only that will be considered when a manuscript is submitted, the fact is that the manuscript can be disqualified from further consideration based on presentation of their work and manuscript format. A predictable editorial response to an overblown piece would be "revise before review" or "reject without review." In other words, authors need to conform to the submission guidelines of the outlet. If they decide to do otherwise, their work may be disqualified from further consideration.

Some authors of an overly long manuscript assume that editors will read it and then advise them on how to condense it. This is not something that professional journal editors typically do. The problem with editing *for* an author by cutting down their manuscript is that the writer knows the work better than the editor. As a result, authors may not agree about the relative importance of various parts of the manuscript. Although there may be times when places to cut are obvious—such as a lengthy preamble to a manuscript that takes four pages to get to the point–the decisions about how to craft the manuscript rest with the author. Editors have a responsibility to their sponsoring organizations and to the readership. Their job is to manage the review process fairly and render a decision about what is publishable in the outlet. They are not an author's writing coach, although they may elect to briefly step into that role when a work is otherwise very promising.

The decision to submit a manuscript should not occur until that work has been carefully composed, thoroughly polished, and conforms to the guidelines. Everything here is the author's responsibility. Misconceptions persist about what manuscript submission implies. When you hit "send" you are, in effect, affirming that your manuscript is thoroughly prepared—as perfect as you can make it. Successful academic authors often talk about ways they have learned to prevent a premature manuscript submission such as "letting the manuscript get cold" or "sleeping on it" so that they can look at the article with a cool head and critical eye. Those uninitiated into the world of scientific communication sometimes expect high praise to be the outcome of editorial and peer review. Instead, manuscript submission *invites* critique. Expect that the multiple professional perspectives of the editor and peer reviewers will raise questions, take issue with particular statements, and suggest modifications to the manuscript. Searching for a time-saving shortcut generally has the opposite effect. If, for example, a manuscript is evaluated as needing major revisions rather than minor ones, the editor with an ample supply of accepted work awaiting publication may decide to reject it. That would mean the author has to begin the review process all over again with another outlet. When a reject decision is reached, it is highly unlikely that it will be reversed.

When authors lavish time on a manuscript, it shows. The writing flows. The proofreading is impeccable. Usually, they have asked others to read and respond to the manuscript informally before subjecting their work to anonymous peer review. Their adherence to the guidelines is unfailing. The course of their argument runs

smoothly without digressions or errors in logic. Doing this affords the best chance for producing a manuscript that will fare well in the review process. Fail to do it, and a desk rejection is the predictable outcome. Keep in mind the description of the "ideal research article" from journal editor Sillars (2004): it addresses core concerns, holds interest for the intended audience of scholars, is written in a style that is accessible to a diverse academic readership, has theoretical and social significance, and is an ambitious undertaking that includes rich/extensive data sets and careful/intensive analysis.

11.2 Submitting Journal Articles

Elsevier (2015) reports that their editors reject 30–50% of the manuscripts they receive. Sending a manuscript off to an outlet based on the journal's title alone is ill-advised and no doubt adds to these high rejection rates. So, the first rule of manuscript submission is to look beneath the surface. A good example from the field of education is early childhood. Usually, it is defined as the age span between birth and eight years of age; however, these journal editors often receive manuscripts focused outside this age range. They are promptly refused. In fact, surveys conducted with editors indicate that the number one reason for rejecting a manuscript without review is that the work is outside the journal's scope (Ali, 2010; Pierson, 2004). What does that mean, exactly? An excerpt from the description of the *American Journal of Sociology*, published by University of Chicago Press, describes their scope as follows:

> *AJS* presents pathbreaking work from all areas of sociology, with an emphasis on theory building and innovative methods. *AJS* strives to speak to the general sociology reader and is open to contributions from across the social sciences—sociology, political science, economics, history, anthropology, and statistics—that seriously engage the sociological literature to forge new ways of understanding the social.

Reading this statement immediately answers several important questions prospective contributors might have, such as, "What is the journal's primary purpose?" "Who is the audience and how technical/formal is the tone?" "Will they consider work from other disciplines?".

Mismatch with the outlet can take several forms, such as:

1. Work that is outside the stated aims, scope, mission, and purpose of the publication. For example, a publication that is for international audiences would reject manuscripts without this perspective. So, if an author writes about policy and politics that are shaping higher education in the United States only, it probably does not speak to an international readership.
2. Topics that are unlikely to be of interest to the intended readership. For example, in-depth linguistic analysis of speech patterns probably would be too

narrow, detailed, and specialized for readers who are teachers of English as a second language (TESOL).

3. In-house material. Professors sometimes try to turn their routine duties into research. For example, if they are assigned to write an accreditation report, observe several interns, or teach three sections of the same course, they present it as "research." The problem here is that the scope of this work is narrow, a conceptual framework is absent, and the activity is centered on the local context only. Another issue with this practice has to do with the ethical treatment of human subjects. If there is any hint that students felt pressured into participating, this violates the principles of informed consent (Tulyakul & Meepring, 2020).

4. Inappropriate format of the manuscript. If a journal does not publish editorials or book reviews, it is a waste of everyone's time to submit one. The Wiley journal *Clinical Case Reports*, for example, is exclusively interested in publishing cases from the medical field.

Manuscript submission strategy is a priority issue for academic authors (Barrerra-Barrera, 2022). Getting a "wrong number" at the point of submission is such a pervasive problem that university libraries, publishers, and various artificial intelligence and online tools have been developed to help authors match their manuscript to an outlet. Examples of these tools are in Table 11.2.

Given that each cycle of peer review can take months and that researchers are expected to submit their manuscripts to only journal at a time, sending it to the wrong outlet can derail authors' publication goals (Tennant et al., 2019). Those few moments supposedly saved when deciding where to submit the manuscript restart

Table 11.2 Online journal finder tools

Cabell's Online Directory
Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL)
Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)
EndNote Match
Elsevier Journal Finder
Journal Citation Reports
Journal/Author Name Estimator (JANE)
Nurse Author and Editor
Publish or Flourish Open Access (Flourish OA)
Scholarly Publishing Information Hub (SPI-Hub)
Springer Journal Selector
Think. Check. Submit
Ulrich's Periodicals Directory Web of Science Master List
Wiley Journal Finder

the clock on submission. If the next outlet attempted has a different referencing style or format, even more tedious detail work is demanded. Early efforts made to achieve a goodness-of-fit between a manuscript and the publisher are likely to pay off. A case study published in a nursing journal (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002), for example, described submitting an article to six different journals before achieving acceptance. The authors' first conclusion was that they needed to match their material to the outlet. Cummings and Rivara (2002), candidly remark "One of us wrote a paper that was rejected by eight journals but was finally published in a ninth" (p. 105). That is more persistence than most authors have, but surely a strategic approach to manuscript submission could have spared at least a few of those missteps. Careful consideration of suitable outlets is well worth the time invested.

Another reason to plan the submission process is that deciding what to submit where is not a "one and done" activity (Mortimer, 2001). Productive scholars will be making those decisions continually, so it is important to get it right (Knight & Steinbach, 2008). In fact, a careful selection strategy matters, even after one or more of an author's papers have been accepted by a particular outlet and the author submits there again. Successful publishers do not remain static. With changes in a professional field, publication practices, public policies, and leadership, even a very familiar publication can acquire a different tone and focus. A good example of this is the journal of the International Reading Association, *The Reading Teacher*. Back in the 80s and 90s, practical articles that would guide teachers of reading and reading specialists in their work with children tended to dominate the publication. Yet after schools were harshly criticized for failing to attain high levels of literacy and experts advocated more "evidence-based practice," the emphasis on research increased dramatically. An article that once would have been accepted would now be rejected by the editor and board if it did not reflect that shift in focus.

Yet another reason for implementing an effective journal selection strategy is that it may be a route to increasing the originality of the manuscript. This flaw is another leading cause of manuscript rejection cited by editors (Byrne, 2000; Menon et al., 2022). When authors elect to write for a different audience, material that might be quite familiar to those within their field can be news to those in a different profession. Some good examples are a professor in a deaf education department who wrote an article about the rights of deaf individuals for an audience of emergency medical personnel and a nurse who specialized in infection control writing about disease prevention in childcare settings. In both cases, the expertise and insights of the author had value, applicability, and originality for a readership from a different field.

Successfully published authors know how to get manuscripts accepted by the journals in their discipline and perhaps other disciplines as well. Some disciplines have comparatively few publications dedicated to them. As a result, academic authors may need to "cast a wider net" in terms of possibilities for publication. Furthermore, some areas of specialization are, by their very nature, multidisciplinary—for example, health and safety, curriculum and instruction, evaluation

models, information systems, or instructional technology. This is yet another reason to take a strategic approach to manuscript submission that is efficient and effective, as outlined in Table 11.3.

Submitting a manuscript is such an important step that many academic publishers have sites that walk authors through the process:

Elsevier Submit your paper - Elsevier

Sage Open **Manuscript Submission Guidelines**: SAGE Open: SAGE Journals

Springer Instructions for Authors: Manuscript Guidelines | Springer—International Publisher

Wiley Submitting Your Manuscript | Wiley

Cover Letters for Manuscripts

Some publishers require authors to write a cover letter while others do not. If it is a journal—particularly an online journal—it may not be necessary. If the publication is more "old school," composing a cover letter is advisable. A cover letter might be particularly important when submitting a book proposal because the manuscript is not complete at that point. Use the advice in Table 11.4 to compose a cover letter that will accompany your submission. In many respects, it is similar to the pre-submission inquiry or query letter of the activity for this Chapter.

11.3   Common Elements of Article, Chapter, and Book Submissions

Each type of writing project has some common elements that are required, which we discuss here. Even so, it is important to check each publisher's guidelines for authors. Table 11.5 lists the items that are frequently expected as part of the submission process.

As the table highlights, the main difference between journal articles/book chapters and scholarly books is that the former is submitted in their entirety while book contracts typically are awarded based on a proposal and sample chapters rather than the finished manuscript. Usually, publishers do not review an entire book-length manuscript prior to awarding a contract. Instead, authors develop a prospectus or proposal that conforms to the guidelines that the publisher requires. The first step is to conceptualize your concept for the book "in a nutshell." Think of this as a "commercial" that demonstrates the need for the book, supported with evidence. It is worth the time to compose this piece because it will be used in three important ways: (1) in a letter of inquiry to the publisher, (2) during brief discussions with an editor, and (3) in the marketing materials developed by the publisher after the book is completed.

Anthologies or edited books are multi-authored works. The editor may write a preface or introduction only, contribute chapters, or co-author several chapters. Many of the large publishing companies sponsor book series on various topics. This might be accomplished during a brief discussion with a representative of the publishing company at a conference or via a short email. If the book has potential, you should find an editor who is enthusiastic about the project.

Table 11.3 A manuscript submission strategy

Identify not only a topic but also a focus. General treatments of subject matter rarely succeed in scholarly publishing, unless the project is a reference book, such as an encyclopedia or research handbook. The topic must be sufficiently narrow to address it adequately in the format selected: article, chapter, or even a book. For example, choosing the topic of group dynamics for a journal article is far too broad; maybe group dynamics during class discussions of college freshmen is more manageable. Next, ask "Is the focus a good match for this particular publication or publishing company?" If it is a journal, does each issue consist of various topics, focus on a single topic (thematic) or a mixture of both? Does the focus of your manuscript fit already or does an upcoming thematic issue of the journal suggest a focus?

Choose an outlet for the right reasons. Do a "backwards search" by scanning the references of your manuscripts and those you have read (Searing, 2006), Are there articles or books that are outstanding examples of the type of material you want to publish? Have others published previously on your topic in these outlets? Another consideration is the outlet's stance: is it consistent with your philosophy and what you hope to publish?

Study the publishers' mission. Pay particular attention to the scope, defined as publishers' goals, priorities, and intended readership. Before submitting to an outlet, study what has been published there recently. Examine the tables of contents for several issues of the journal or the catalog of the book publisher. Is your work at a comparable level of sophistication? (Klinger et al., 2005). If nothing like your manuscript has appeared over the past five years, chances are this is not the best outlet for it

Think about the readership and their purposes. Does your audience consist mainly of scholars and researchers, professionals working in the field, or more general audiences (e.g., parents/ families)? Would college faculty members be likely to use the publication in their teaching? Are undergraduates and/or graduate students apt to be assigned to read the publication? Is the readership primarily regional, national, or international?

Follow the rules. Many publishers have detailed submission guidelines, such as MDPI MDPI Submission Process: Your Questions Answered - MDPI Blog Leading journals often use an online submissions system that is automated, such as Editorial Manager®. Get acquainted with it before attempting to upload files. If your abstract exceeds the word count, for example, the system will prevent you from moving on to the next step. Now you have an incomplete submission out there while you go back and condense. You might be required to separate any figures, tables, graphs, or other visual material into individual files rather than leave them inserted in the manuscript. Doing this hurriedly is a place where mistakes often creep in. If you walk through the system first, you can avoid some of these annoying disruptions

Match the broad category of manuscript to the publication. A common beginner's mistake is to write a paper that is a mixture of different article types and does not do justice to any of them. If it is a journal article, is it practical, review/theoretical, or research? If it is a research article or book, is it basic, applied, or clinical? Does the outlet publish other types of manuscripts, such as book and media reviews, editorials, or brief reports of research?

Assess the publisher's reputation. Some publications are print, others are online only, and still others are hybrids that produce a physical paper copy of the article or book as well as disseminate it online. Do you see this publisher cited frequently? What is the credibility and prestige of the publication? Does this publisher have a presence at professional conferences? What does the publisher's site say about their review process? What evidence do they provide of impact on the field? What are your perceptions of the publisher's reputation/quality, topical relevance, dissemination practices, career benefit for authors, and any costs associated with publishing?

Table 11.3 (continued)

Consult resources. Confer with colleagues. Use your professional networks to identify others who have experience with the publisher, even if they are outside your department or institution. What are their opinions about this publisher and editor? Do you have co-authors who can provide input into the selection process? There are many online sources that evaluate publishers, so refer to them as well. If you have never heard of or cited a journal or book publisher in your work, it may be a questionable enterprise

Make a list of possibilities. Determine which publishers are most likely to be interested in your manuscript. Consider your professional goals and how they mesh with the level of difficulty in successfully publishing in this outlet. What is likelihood of acceptance, potential impact of the manuscript (visibility), and timeline from submission to publication? Generate several possibilities. Decide which one to begin with

Sources Knight and Steinbach (2008), PLOS One (2023), Springer Open (2023), Kumar (2019), PLOS One (2023), Suiter and Sarli (2019)

Table 11.4 Composing a cover letter

Check into the preferred format. The publisher or style manual may specify what to include in your cover letter. Some templates for writing a cover letter can be found at Author Services Supporting Taylor and Francis (2023) How to write a cover letter for journal submission | Author Services (taylorandfrancis.com) and the American Psychological Association (2023) Cover letters (apa.org)

Make it specific. Address the editor by name (rather than Dear Editor) and refer to the journal and publisher by name. This suggests that you have at least taken a moment to familiarize yourself with the organization or company

Describe the manuscript's relevance for the readership. State the title of the work. Remember that the editor is not necessarily an expert on your topic, so avoid excessive use of jargon or acronyms. Rather than doing a quick cut and paste of the abstract, briefly explain why the material would be of interest to the audience and what benefit they might derive from reading it

Address ethical considerations. Verify that the work has not been published previously and is not under consideration by another publisher. Also confirm that you have no competing interests to disclose, such as major funding from another source

Provide contact information for authors. Highlight, in just a sentence, the specific qualifications that supported this project. Include various ways of contacting the author(s)

Check and double check all details. Any proofreading errors in this letter will immediately tarnish your reputation with the editor. Run spell check, grammar check, and proofread multiple times. Consider asking someone else to read this important piece of correspondence

When an author submits a book proposal, it had better include some facts and figures that support the viability of the project. One of my editors described their decision-making process as a meeting where everyone has book proposals to present. All of them want the company to be solvent, so they need to convince their colleagues that the project they are advocating has earnings potential. Before the meeting, she would go through a book proposal with a highlighter, noting the arguments that could be used and ways to address reservations raised by colleagues. When preparing a book (or grant) proposal, remember that the first group of decision-makers in the process frequently are not experts in your field.

Table 11.5 What typically is submitted to the publisher: articles and books

Journal articles	Anthology/edited book	Research book or college textbook
Cover letter and/or cover page with all authors' contact information	Cover letter and cover page with editor's (s') contact information	Cover letter and cover page with authors' contact information
Title, abstract (usually 250 to 500 words), and 4 to 6 keywords for indexing purposes	A brief description of the project suitable for sharing with others who may not be specialists in the field (e.g., other editors)	A brief description of the project suitable for sharing with others who may not be specialists in the field (e.g., other editors)
Manuscript prepared for peer review–no author's name should appear anywhere on the manuscript except the cover page; any references to the author's previous work may have to be cited as "Author" until after the work is accepted	Book proposal that conforms to the publisher's required format	Book proposal that conforms to the publisher's required format
Entire manuscript. Every table, figure, chart, or graph needs a title and a number; photographs need captions	A rationale for the project that speaks to the need for the book and its contributions to the field	A rationale for the project that speaks to the need for the book and its contributions to the field
Signed permission forms for any copyrighted material, photographs, or work samples from participants	An analysis of competing works that demonstrates how the proposed book represents a stride forward or different approach	An analysis of competing works that demonstrates how the proposed book represents a stride forward or different approach
For research articles, evidence of ethical treatment of participants, both human and animal (e.g., institutional review board approval)	Description of the book's primary and secondary audiences	Description of the book's primary and secondary audiences
Visual material that meets publisher's standards (e.g., high resolution/high quality) and tables prepared in the correct referencing style (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago)	A "wish list" of authors who have tentatively agreed to contribute	Detailed table of contents
Signed forms that permit the publisher to share the work with peer reviewers (e.g., consent to publish or copyright transfer)	Signed forms that permit the publisher to share the work with peer reviewers (e.g., consent to publish or copyright transfer)	Signed forms that permit the publisher to share the work with peer reviewers (e.g., consent to publish or copyright transfer)
Verification that the article is not under consideration by any other publication	Brief chapter abstracts accompanied by the authors' names, titles, and institutional affiliations and a brief biography for each contributor	For textbooks, sample elements of chapters (e.g., discussion questions) and ancillaries (e.g., online quiz for each chapter, PowerPoint slides) and a description of how some features (e.g., in class activities) were field tested with students

(continued)

Table 11.5 (continued)

Journal articles	Anthology/edited book	Research book or college textbook
Evidence that the researcher has complied with the principles of informed consent when working with human participants in a study	Evidence that the editor is qualified to undertake the project (an abbreviated curriculum vita)	Evidence that the author is qualified to undertake the project (an abbreviated curriculum vita)
For research articles, there is sufficient detail for other investigators to replicate the study	Project details such as the estimated length of the manuscript and the anticipated completion date	Project details such as the estimated length of the manuscript and the anticipated completion date
Manuscript prepared in the required format—typically, there is a word limit, a statement about footnotes, and the entire manuscript is 12-point print, double spaced	One or more sample chapters, with references that use the style guide designated by the publisher; if the editor is prolific, this requirement may be waived	One or more sample chapters, with references that use the style guide designated by the publisher
List of references correctly formatted in the style sheet (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago) used by the publisher	List of references correctly formatted in the style sheet (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago) used by the publisher	List of references correctly formatted in the style sheet (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago) used by the publisher

Grant proposals submitted to The National Institutes of Health, for example, allow a three-sentence abstract while those submitted to the American Heart Association require a 250-word abstract written at a 10th grade level. Excessive jargon, impenetrable prose, and efforts to impress with your specialized knowledge are counterproductive. As one of the acquisitions editors I admire most put it, "I wish that professors would realize that, when they are proposing a book, we assume they know something about their subject. We will check up on that later, during peer review, with experts in the field. What we need at the first stage with the publishing company is evidence that there is a need for this book and a good fit with our publishing program." If a book proposal does not get through that first screening process, it amounts to a desk rejection by a journal editor and will not go out for peer review.

As a book proposal is drafted, it is helpful to study the criteria that reviewers will use to evaluate it. Usually, the evaluation questions are posted on the book publisher's website. Book reviews sometimes are not completely anonymous because publishers want to sign authors with a solid reputation in the field. Their work is likely to be recognized by experts on the same topic. Instead, the reviews might be "single-blind," meaning that the reviewer knows the author's identity, but the author does not know the reviewers' identities. When there is no doubt that a prolific book author is qualified to write a book, the publisher might even ask the author to list 5–7 noted authorities in the field who do not have a personal relationship with the writer to objectively assess the work. The review of book proposals usually consists of two stages. First, the prospectus is assessed for

potential as a book and reviews assist the publisher in deciding to award a contract. Some publishers will require sample chapters; however, for prolific authors who have published with them previously a detailed table of contents or an abstract for chapters may be acceptable. Next, after the entire book is written, peer reviewers assist the publisher in deciding whether to move forward with its publication and what level of revision is recommended. Table 11.6 includes some of the questions used to guide reviewers of new book projects.

Across the disciplines, scholarly writing is the major mechanism for advancing thinking in various fields (Oermann, 2023; Wickman & Fitzgerald, 2019). The ways that academics inform one another through the scientific literature is the currency that supports further development within each field of study. Among the various writing genres, those that create and disseminate new knowledge are

Table 11.6 Sample evaluation criteria for evaluating books

1	Prior to reviewing this proposal, were you aware of the contributions of this author in the field and, if so, how?
2	In your professional opinion, is the author qualified to undertake this project?
3	What is your overall appraisal of the quality of this book proposal or manuscript?
4	Would this book be likely to make an original and significant contribution to the field?
5	How would you assess the clarity, accuracy, helpfulness, and accessibility of the book?
6	What is unique about this project? Please identify the main strengths of the work
7	Are all necessary topics included? If not, what would you suggest adding to the manuscript?
8	How would you describe the market/readership for this book? Who is the primary audience for this book? Are there secondary audiences you would identify?
9	Is the book logically organized? Do you have any recommendations for improving the structure of the book?
10	What was your opinion of the sample chapter(s)? If you are reviewing the entire book-length manuscript, please note any strengths or weaknesses, chapter by chapter
11	How much editing of the academic writing style and format would be necessary before the work would be of publishable quality?
12	Are you familiar with other competing works in the field and, if so, how do they compare with this book?
13	What revisions would you recommend prior to publication?
14	If it is a textbook, would you consider adopting it for a course that you teach?
15	If you are reviewing the proposal only at this stage, would you be willing to serve as a reviewer of the entire manuscript after it is finalized?
16	For each decision below, provide further explanation: [ ] highly recommend [ ] recommend with revisions as noted [ ] decline to publish

Sources Peter Lang, Springer Nature, Purdue University Press

Table 11.7 Attributes of scholarly writing and roles for academic authors

Attribute	Roles for academic authors
Research-based	Authors ground their arguments in literature review and empirical evidence rather than anecdotal impressions and unsubstantiated personal opinions
Thesis-driven and deductively organized	Authors begin with a focus and "take" on the issue and proceed to analyze it in a systematic fashion
Thoughtful, well-reasoned and detailed	Authors assemble substantive, specialized, and in-depth support for the thesis
Reflective, self-critical	Scholarly writers relate their work to past investigations, clarify the nature of the contributions made, engage in self-criticism, and avoid overstating their claims
Formal tone and style	Authors adopt the academic writing style of the outlet and avoid sexist language, colloquialisms, and casual types of speech. Professional jargon is used judiciously
Respectful of copyright and intellectual property	Scholar/authors adhere to the ethical guidelines that govern publication by requesting permission to use others' work, citing the sources consulted, and referencing them appropriately

Adapted from Moxley (2021)

pre-eminent. Academic writing is "privileged" based on the six characteristics identified by Moxley (2021) in Table 11.7.

11.4   Conclusion: Suitable Placements for Manuscripts

After retiring from the university, I volunteered at the local animal shelter for five years. I assembled a great volunteer crew, including professional photographers, and kept social media up-to-the-minute on which animals were adopted and the new ones that had come in to rescue. One heart-breaking outcome was "returned to shelter"—a dog or cat brought back by the adopters when the animal did not fit into the family. These "bounce backs" disturbed the adopters, demoralized the staff, and stressed out the animals. The key to prevention was successful matchmaking—for example, an active home for a high energy dog or a quiet home for a timid cat. This analogy works well with submitting manuscripts because authors are, in effect, finding a suitable placement for their work. When that goodness-of-fit criterion is not met, manuscripts bounce back, authors are frustrated, and editorial staff members waste precious time. Conversely, matching manuscripts to suitable outlets offers reciprocal benefits. The author's work is accepted for publication,

the information is disseminated to the right readership, and the outlet's reputation for quality is reinforced/enhanced.

If unsuitable manuscripts clog the system, it does damage—to the authors who are rejected, to the volunteer reviewers who resign when they are overburdened, and to the editors, who are drowning in correspondence with authors and reviewers. Efficient and effective submission practices span the various fields of study and the professions. In their investigation into manuscript submission that included 18 different disciplines, Knight and Steinbach (2008) concluded:

> While initially we expected to find distinctions among the various disciplines, ultimately we were struck, not by differences, but by commonalities. We found that differences, when they exist, tend to exist among the journals within a discipline, not between disciplines. Thus, we conclude that the ties that unite academics seeking to publish are strong. (pp. 76–77)

It is the academic author's responsibility to broaden their understandings, not only about their fields and specializations within them but also the ties, norms, and values that bind scientific communication together.

Issue: Simultaneous Submissions

Less experienced scholars are sometimes unaware that it is a violation of research ethics to submit their research to two or more journals at the same time. This practice, called simultaneous submission, is a violation of research ethics and the policies of reputable scholarly journals. Why is it unacceptable to attempt to fast track a manuscript by sending it to several publishers at the same time? There are several reasons.

1. *Nonprofit status of publishers.* The publications programs of nonprofit learned societies are the predominant way that scholars publish their work. To illustrate, a research team found that the peer reviewed publications of learned societies accounted for about 70% of the scholarly journal articles, conference articles, book chapters, and monographs published by scholars in Finland (Late et al., 2020). Approximately 38% of the publications were open access. Commercial publishers produced only 2.6% of the journals and book series and 1.4% of the journal articles published by higher education faculty members (Late et al., 2020). Learned societies typically have few resources and major mechanisms for earning money. Customary ways of generating income, including membership fees, conferences, and consultation were disrupted during the pandemic. Perhaps more than ever before, these nonprofits cannot afford to review manuscripts that are already in review elsewhere.

2. *Peer review process.* Faculty who agree to conduct peer reviews of manuscripts do so as a service and seldom receive any compensation beyond a free subscription to the journal, a copy of the book, or perhaps a meeting at a conference with refreshments. It is unfair to exploit the reviewers' precious volunteer time.

3. *Contract violation.* Publishers routinely ask authors to verify that a work is under consideration by them alone. Authors may be required to agree and sign a document to confirm this. So, it is a violation of contract to have the manuscript in review by more than one publisher. Scholarly outlets typically require authors to give the publisher control and ownership of the work while it is under review, so writers are not within their rights to send that work around to several other publishers.

4. *Embarrassing outcomes.* If the manuscript is exceptional and it is accepted by both outlets, what then? The same work cannot be published in two places due to copyright issues. When a manuscript has not yet been published, the editor's plagiarism detection software cannot check for similarity with published sources. Reputable editors would consider the publication of the same manuscript in two outlets to be a mortifying mistake. Suppose that the decision from more than one outlet is to revise and resubmit. If that happens, the author(s) will have to withdraw their manuscript from one of the publishers. Again, this is inconsiderate of the editors' and reviewers' time.

5. *Exceptions.* There is a difference between for-profit commercial publishers and scholarly publishers. A book written as a commercial textbook, or a book written for the layperson/public may not have the same policies about simultaneous submissions. Be certain to check into this prior to presenting your concept for a book to more than one company.

Applications of Technology

Tech Tool: Understand how many leading journals manage submissions with Editorial Manager: A Tutorial for Authors Editorial Manager: A tutorial for authors | Editage Insights.

Springer Nature Resource: Author Tutorial on How to Submit to a Journal How to submit a journal article manuscript | Authors | Springer Nature.

Online Video: How to Get Published in an Academic Journal from Sage involves a panel of editors discussing ways to improve chances for success. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrGixQ7v4rY

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