

Publishing and the Peer Review Process

Mechanics and Stages of Peer Review Process

1. Completed Manuscript (this means that you have worked the paper over multiple times, given it to your faculty adviser and knowledgeable others to provide constructive comments. You already have taken into account what these folks have said and you have revised accordingly. If you have not done all of this, you probably are not ready to send your manuscript out.)
2. Decision about what journal to send to; the diverse criteria you want to consider.
3. Submission (includes cover letter, multiple copies, processing fee – sometimes waived for sole authored student papers – and a self-addressed post-card so the journal can acknowledge receipt of your paper).
4. You wait – Journal editor and reviewers work (see examples of blinded forms sent to reviewers)
5. 2-8 months later, you get your initial response. Statistically speaking, this is likely to be “reject.” But it could be one of multiple levels of “revise and resubmit” or even “conditional accept” or “accept.” You get a letter from the editor(s) and multiple reviews. Remember that the author does not know WHAT disposition the reviewers recommend to the editor. The author gets only the reviewer comments. If you get a “revise and resubmit,” editors vary in how much guidance they give. Some give none at all, leaving it entirely to the author to sort out inconsistencies/contradictions in advice from reviewers...
6. If you get the opportunity to revise for a “revise and resubmit,” you take this process incredibly seriously. You do an enormous amount of work to revise. This does not mean that you always have to do everything every single reviewer says. But if you don't, you need to explain clearly and respectfully why you have not. In general, you want to get an “R and R” turned around within six months to a year. But you don't want to do it in a week or before the reviews and their implications have had time to sink in. According to a recent editor of *AJS*, “the biggest mistake people with ‘R and Rs’ make is to turn things around too quickly.”
7. Resubmission, including a letter or list that explains how you dealt with each of the reviewer criticisms, comments and requests

8. You wait another few months, then you get another letter from the editor and copies of the reviews of your revised manuscript. Ordinarily your revised manuscript goes out to at least one original reviewer. Many journals also, however, send to at least one NEW reviewer.
9. If your article has been accepted, you still may wish to make some minor revisions consistent with the reviews. If your acceptance was made conditional on making some minor revisions, then you MUST do these. You send a final version of your article on paper and on disk to the journal for copy-editing.
10. Journal sends you a letter telling you when your article will be published. Journal sends you copy-edited version for you to proof. When you return copy-edited version with your corrections, your article is typeset. You then get the page proofs to go over. (Some journals skip copy-editing and go right to page proofs – thereby combining the two steps.)
11. Once you send corrected page proofs in, you are done. Journal comes out with your article in it. You, your family and friends celebrate. But not for long...there are all those OTHER review processes you are involved in, getting ready for, etc.
12. If your paper gets rejected (either before or after a “revise and resubmit,”) don’t despair. Make use of the reviews sensibly in revising the paper to send to another journal. Be aware that top general and specialty journals have an overall rejection rate of about 85-90%. *Footnotes* routinely publishes the rejection/acceptance rates for official ASA journals, general and specialty. *AJS* routinely reports its rejection/acceptance rates and its processing figures to consulting editors. At *AJS* currently, about 80% of manuscripts are rejected at the initial review. About 20% are given revise and resubmits. About 50% of the revise and resubmits subsequently are accepted. So this is an overall rejection rate of 90% (acceptance rate of 10%). *ASR* figures are strikingly similar.

Some Additional Comments on Publishing Empirical Research in Journals

- Assume it will take you 1 to 2 years to formulate the research question, reviewing prior research, developing theory and hypotheses, collecting relevant data and analyzing it.
- Decide on a journal (bold indicates the best choice when seeking tenure in most US research institutions)
 - Will it be for a **generalist** (e.g., *ASR*, *AJS*, *Social Forces*) or a specialty (e.g., *Work and Occupations*, *Sociology of Education*, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *Law and Society*, *Criminology*) audience?
 - Will it be for a **sociology** or related discipline's audience?
 - **U.S.** or International audience?
 - *You need to be realistic* because the review process takes time, the top general journals reject approximately 90% of submitted papers, and rejections can be devastating to one's ego (so develop a thick skin where criticism is concerned!). One reason for submitting to one of the best journals is that the reviews tend to be better (though not necessarily more positive), and you can learn how to improve the paper for the next submission.
 - Don't be afraid to ask for advice on selecting a journal. Some journals may have biases that you are unaware of. Look for faculty who have published in the journal you intend to target.
- Write the paper with the journal in mind. Again, different journals are known for having different types of articles. You need to write your paper to fit the journal. At first, mimic the style of articles found in the journal you'd like to target. After you become accomplished you can be more varied in this regard.
- After you complete what you consider to be a polished draft of the paper [this will actually take numerous drafts in itself], circulate the paper for reactions and comments and/or present the paper to colleagues in the Department Workshop, or other inhouse venues. Expect this to take 2 to 4 months.
- Make changes based on comments and reactions – expect this to take 1 to 3 months – and perhaps rethink the journal you'll submit to.
- Submit – Usually you need to submit 3 to 6 copies of the paper, with a *thoughtful* cover letter. Most journals require a submission fee. In general, follow the submission requirements published in the journals (typically once a year, and can be found on the inside front matter). Reviews can take 2-8 months (see above).
- Keep several projects going all the time so to minimize the time between publications. You can't afford to have 2-3 year gaps inbetween publications and expect to receive tenure in most research institutions.