

Publish, Don't Perish

Submitting Research Articles to Refereed Journals

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Seeing your work in print is one of the more rewarding outcomes of graduate study. However, getting your work published is often one of the most frustrating aspects of early academic life. The pressure to publish is typically particularly intense at this stage of a career; the rules that govern editorial decisions for any one journal frequently appear to be arbitrary; and different journals display an alarmingly disparate array of publishing practices. This guide is designed to help you to navigate this difficult terrain. It is primarily intended for graduate students, recent Ph.D.s, lecturers, and assistant professors in British history interested in publishing their first articles in refereed historical journals. Following these guidelines will not guarantee publication, but it should help to increase your likelihood of successfully placing graduate and dissertation research in a juried (that is, refereed) scholarly publication. To supplement these suggestions, you should discuss them with your dissertation advisor or senior colleagues and also spend time reading through recent issues of a range of journals relevant to your own research specialty.

Why (and Why Not) to Publish:

Given the current exigencies of the job market, the RAE, and the tenure process, the question of why to publish your research in a refereed journal may appear moot. But don't be fooled. Attempting to publish (and even publishing) your work early and often is not always to your advantage. Not all historical arguments lend themselves successfully to article form; not all graduate work is appropriate for publication; not all conference papers (particularly short, 20-minute papers) contain sufficient research to support an article; and not all work from your dissertation research should be published prior to publication of your dissertation-book. Think seriously—and take advice—about why you should or should not publish your research in article form before you attempt to do so. Keep your short-term goals—for example, obtaining a post-doc or initial teaching position—in perspective alongside longer-term goals, such as publishing your first book, garnering grants, obtaining tenure, and moving from a first to a second academic job. Bear in mind that in the long term the quality of your publications often counts at least as much as their quantity: the historians generally considered the “best” specialists in any field are not inevitably the most prolific historians in that field. Also remember that once you've published material, it is irretrievably in the public sphere. In this context, timing is of the essence.

When to Publish:

As a general rule, you should have a more compelling reason to publish an article than simply a desire to add two lines to your vita. Ask yourself precisely what new insights your research contributes to the existing secondary literature before you seek to publish it as an article. Good indications that your work may be suitable for publication as an article include:

- a responsible person suggests publication (responsible persons include dissertation advisors, senior colleagues, published scholars in your sub-field, conference commentators, editors, etc.)
- your work involves significant, substantial original research with primary materials
- your research complements work recently published in a scholarly journal or journals
- you have already presented your research on this topic at conferences and/or seminars
- you have revised your manuscript at least twice in light of comments from responsible persons (see above for list of potentially responsible persons)

Not each of these conditions will be met for every publishable manuscript, but if most of them don't apply to your manuscript, think seriously before attempting to publish at this early stage in your career.

What to Publish:

Generally graduate students and recent Ph.D.s have four sorts of work available for publication. The first consists of seminar papers, typically written (in the North American system) in the first two years of graduate study; a second, related category of research which may be suitable for publication derives from M.A. theses. In both of these two instances, the research is often distinct from the author's doctoral dissertation research, and in this case publication may help to expand your scholarly profile while making good use of your early research. However, much work generated in these contexts is, due to the constraints of time and limited access to primary sources, not sufficiently original or well-synthesized to merit publication in a major journal. M.A. theses in particular typically require substantial rewriting, recasting, and revision to be converted into article form—the typical M.A. thesis is too long for publication, and the typical M.A. thesis chapter is too limited in scope for publication as an article. Before you attempt to publish either of these two kinds of work as a journal article, compare your manuscript against the criteria listed under "When to Publish" above, and read around in the extant periodical literature as suggested in "Where to Publish" below. Journals with specialized readerships are often more appropriate choices for this kind of material than are publications with broader audiences.

The two remaining kinds of work typically available for your first articles are dissertation chapters and research material which, despite its intrinsic merits, in the final analysis does not 'fit' in your dissertation. Regarding the first of these two categories, you should be wary of publishing all of your best dissertation material in articles if you also expect to publish a book with an academic press. (Many presses are understandably unenthusiastic about publishing first books in which most of the material has already appeared as articles). If revising a dissertation chapter for publication as an article, bear the following points in mind:

- the typical dissertation chapter is significantly longer than the typical article
- the typical dissertation chapter is denser (i.e., more focused on the detailed presentation of original primary research) than the typical article—hence, in part, its greater length
- the footnoting in dissertation chapters is often more extensive (in particular, more bibliographical) than the footnoting in articles
- the typical dissertation chapter draws part of its analytical force from arguments or evidence made in previous chapters or in a freestanding introduction, and thus requires significant re-framing to 'work' as an article
- the historiographical focus of your article will not always be the same as the historiographical focus of the corresponding dissertation chapter, a circumstance which again may require re-framing of your argument and evidence for publication in article form

When publishing research that did not make its way into your dissertation, bear in mind the dreary fact of academic life that all researchers generate pounds of notes that fail to see the published light of day. Ask yourself whether the research is sufficiently significant to stand without your accompanying dissertation material, and if not whether additional research is needed to make it suitable for publication.

Where to Publish:

Choosing the right journal is one of the most significant decisions you will make for your manuscript, both in the short and the long term. You can spare yourself considerable time and agony if you identify an appropriate journal for your manuscript in advance, rather than submitting to a journal that appears from its title alone to be appropriate. Journals that publish British history articles vary widely in their norms, practices, requirements, expectations, audiences, and content. To determine which journal is most appropriate for your own manuscript, you must invest time exploring the available possibilities. This process inevitably entails time spent reading journal articles to compare and contrast work in your sub-field in the various journals in which you are interested in publishing your own manuscript. Ideally, this process of systematic reading should begin well before you are ready to submit your manuscript. (Subscribing to a journal obviously increases the likelihood that you'll undertake this kind of systematic reading in advance).

The data below are meant to illustrate a very few of the quantitative parameters that distinguish articles published in a range of journals in which British historians routinely publish. The list of journals and the data presented are not intended to be comprehensive: I've simply drawn material from research articles in one recent issue of a few key journals to suggest, in a very preliminary fashion, some of their distinguishing characteristics. If you are interested in publishing in any of these journals, you should expand this kind of analysis to generate data for at least a full year of each relevant journal, as well as considering the qualitative characteristics discussed in the paragraphs below the table. You should also check the range and usual page length of articles in these journals, rather than relying only upon the word limits and footnote data given here.

<i>Journal</i>	<i>Word limit for articles</i>	<i># footnotes (range)</i>	<i># footnotes (ave.)</i>
<u>Albion</u>	10,000 words	59-118	94
<u>AHR</u>	8,000 (excludes fns.)	145-156	151
<u>Bus. Hist.</u>	8,000 (target length)	39-89	70
<u>Eco. Hist. Rev.</u>	8,000	53-96	72
<u>18th-C. St.</u>	7,500	34-85	56
<u>Eng. Hist. Rev.</u>	15,000	58-131	94
<u>Gender & Hist.</u>	9,000 (average)	56-123	77
<u>Hist. Jnl.</u>	10,000	60-126	95
<u>Hist. Res.</u>	8,500	26-118	75
<u>History</u>	8,000	69-103	94
<u>Hist. Wk. Jnl.</u>	8,000	58-83	72
<u>JBS</u>	12,500	122-149	138
<u>Jnl. Eco. Hist.</u>	35 d.s. pp. max.	31-70	57
<u>Jl&CH</u>	8,000 (target length)	100-128	111
<u>Jnl. Women's Hist.</u>	10,000	53-84	65
<u>Parl. Hist.</u>	10,000	30-102	73
<u>P & P</u>	-----	76-182	125
<u>Rad. Hist. Rev.</u>	45 d.s. pp. max.	14-84	58
<u>Reps.</u>	12,000	37-68	51
<u>20th-c. Br. Hist.</u>	5,000-10,000	69-151	110

As these statistics suggest, journals vary significantly in the typical length of their articles and in the extent of their footnoting. Some journals encourage submission of both shorter and longer articles (for example, Twentieth-Century British History), while others typically focus either on shorter articles (for example, Eighteenth-Century Studies) or on longer articles (for example, the AHR). Some journals usually expect quite high levels of historiographical framing and/or detailed documentation, an expectation which tends to lead to extensive footnoting (for example, Past & Present). Others specifically discourage extensive use of footnotes or endnotes and/or employ MLA (Modern Language Association) usage to reduce footnoting (for example, Victorian Studies). Understanding these differences increases your ability to choose an appropriate journal

for your manuscript. A manuscript of 10,000 words with 110 footnotes is, for example, less likely to be appropriate for History than for Albion, the Historical Journal, or JBS.

Beyond these purely quantitative considerations, journals differ in a number of qualitative ways. First, they vary in the extent to which they are designed to appeal to broad or specialized audiences. To determine a journal's intended audience, read the editor's "Notes for Contributors," typically located inside either the front or the back cover of any given issue; check out the journal's Web-page if there is one; and read through each of the articles published in your sub-field in the journal in the past two or three years. The last of these activities will help you to distinguish between journals with similar titles but different 'spins'—for example, Social History and the Journal of Social History. By strategic reading in journals, you will become better attuned to their qualitative differences, and this knowledge will in turn increase your likelihood of submitting your manuscript to the most appropriate journal at the outset.

Second, different journals publish different kinds of articles. Some publish only research articles; others also publish research notes, debates, and historiographical interventions. Choose a journal in which your manuscript will not be an anomaly (either in quantitative or qualitative terms) and you will increase your likelihood of serious consideration and potentially of an acceptance.

Third, journals differ significantly in their manner of reviewing manuscripts. Many journals (indeed most history journals in the US) employ "blind" review procedures, keeping the identity of the author unknown to the referees throughout the review process. Other journals do identify the author to the referees. Some editors rely on members of their editorial boards to supply all or most of their evaluations of manuscripts or to provide a preliminary evaluation of whether the manuscript should be sent to external readers; others draw their referees from the field of British history as a whole. Some editors make acceptance or rejection decisions unilaterally once they have received reports from referees; other journals make editorial decisions collectively with their editorial boards. These procedural differences often translate into differences in the time that it normally takes to receive an editorial decision on your article. The stated policy of Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation, for example, is that "Obviously unacceptable essays will be returned within two weeks; essays being seriously considered will be kept for three months." History Workshop Journal, in contrast, cautions that "Since work is often widely circulated amongst editors, a final decision may take several months." Few journals, in fact, can consistently turn manuscripts around in less than three months, and 4-6 months is a much more usual waiting period—though six months is not, unfortunately, a maximum interval. If you have an important looming deadline by which you must publish your work (for tenure, for the RAE, etc.), it's a good idea to email editors of prospective journals in advance of submitting your manuscript to ask what their normal turn-around time is. Editors cannot guarantee that your work will be assessed within a given period (or that it will be accepted at the end of that period). But most can give you a useful estimate of the time it will normally take to make a decision.

How (and How Not) to Publish:

Once you've identified material that you want to develop into an article, one of the best strategies available is to present a working draft of the piece at a seminar, and/or to present a short version of your paper at a conference or conferences. If there are published scholars—your dissertation advisor, a senior colleague, an individual who has commented on a version of the manuscript at a conference—who are willing to read a draft of your article, do avail yourself of this option as well. Obtaining comments on your manuscript prior to submitting it is always a good idea. Whenever possible, present your work more than once and obtain comments from more than one reader before you submit your manuscript to a journal. It's tremendously difficult to keep your perspective when you focus intently on your manuscript in isolation for extended periods of time. Use conferences, seminars, and the exchange of work-in-progress strategically to improve the quality of your submission.

Revise your manuscript more than once before you submit it, taking cognizance of the comments you receive from readers and conference or seminar participants. Also revise in light of the norms of the journal to which you are submitting the manuscript (as detailed above in "Where to Publish"). Be particularly careful about the introductory section of your article—the editor's first impression of the piece will depend upon these crucial paragraphs. The substance, the significance, and the methodology of your argument should all be clearly evident to the reader by the end of the introduction—and must be borne out by the material that follows. (Reread the introductory sections of a few relevant published articles in the journal to which you are submitting to help you to frame your own introduction.) Avoid excessive claims of novelty, extravagant assertions about the global significance of your thesis or evidence, overly negative or dismissive comments about other scholars or scholarship, and beating dead horses. Focus more on the positive contributions that your article will make to the field than upon the appalling failings of the existing literature.

Once you believe that your manuscript is substantively ready for submission, you should ensure that it adheres to the editorial guidelines of the particular journal to which you are submitting it. (These guidelines can usually be found in the journal's "Notes to Contributors" section or its Web-page; alternatively, you may need to write to the editor or editorial assistant for a hard copy or email attachment of their style-sheet). If the journal uses blind review, you will need to remove your name from the title page and the header. In this instance, if you refer in the footnotes to your dissertation—and you should avoid repeated references of this sort—do not reveal yourself as the dissertation author. (I.e., if your name is Alex Harris, refer to your thesis in a footnote not by saying "See my Ph.D. dissertation, 'The Importance of Being Published'..." but rather "See Alex Harris, 'The Importance of Being Published'..."). If, as is usual, the journal asks for double-spaced text and endnotes, print your text out according to those specifications. (Editors often need to make provisional estimates of the length of the manuscript when it is first submitted—it is difficult to make these calculations from a manuscript with single-spaced footnotes). If you are a graduate student or recent Ph.D., enclose a c.v. or information on

who your dissertation advisor is as well as naming persons who have commented on a version of the paper at conferences. (Doing so will, for example, help the editor to avoid sending the manuscript to your advisor for review). Double-check that your manuscript is within the word limit suggested by the journal—be sure that you include your footnotes in your final calculation if the journal includes them in theirs (as most do).

Proof-read and spell-check your manuscript scrupulously before you submit it. Sending a manuscript to an editor larded with spelling, grammatical, or substantive errors is tantamount to sending him or her an invitation to reject your manuscript. If humanly possible, wait a month after your final revisions before you actually submit the manuscript—you will inevitably pick up a few infelicities or errors on a final re-reading after that interval.

Once you've submitted your article, you'll need to prepare yourself for an anxious wait, and for the possibility that your article will not be accepted. Because editorial procedures vary, your options at this point will depend somewhat upon the journal to which you have submitted your manuscript, but generally there are five possible outcomes.

- Your article may be rejected by the editor without being sent out for review. Usually, this outcome indicates either that you have submitted to an inappropriate journal or that your manuscript is not yet qualitatively ready for consideration
- Occasionally an editor will send a manuscript back to you with a request for minor revisions and resubmission, at which point it will be sent out to referees
- Your article may be sent out for review and receive one or more negative readers' reports and a rejection from the editor, who suggests that the manuscript should not be resubmitted to his or her journal
- You may receive a "revise and resubmit." In this instance, the referees and/or editor advise against publication of the article in its present form, but suggest (or encourage) revision and resubmission for their reconsideration. Articles resubmitted after a "revise and resubmit" are typically sent back to one or more of the original referees for reconsideration.
- Your article may be accepted for publication. Usually, acceptance is contingent upon some further, relatively modest revision but does not require resubmission to the referees (i.e., the final decision is made by the editor).

Don't let rejection of a manuscript or receipt of a "revise and resubmit" demoralize you, but also avoid dismissing your rejection as necessarily unfair, incomprehensible, or stupid. It is quite common for referees to disagree in their assessments of the same article, and/or for the editor to disagree with some of the referees' suggestions. This circumstance is understandably frustrating for authors—it's no picnic for editors either. Editors and referees do make misjudgments, but so do authors. It is important in this context to remember both that most manuscripts can be improved by further revision and that a significant proportion of published articles were

initially either rejected by a previous journal or revised and resubmitted for the journal in which they ultimately appear. It is in your long-term interests not only to publish your research but also to publish it in the best possible form. Personally, rejection is a bummer, but professionally it is an integral component of maintaining the quality of your own work and of publications in your field more generally. If your manuscript is rejected without the option of revising and resubmitting, do not attempt to engage in acrimonious correspondence with the editor or editorial assistant. But also don't simply give up. Cut your losses. Wait at least a few weeks to cool down (or to get your confidence back), reread the referees' reports and the editor's letter, obtain a second opinion from a senior colleague, and then decide whether you should submit a revised version to another journal.

If you do receive encouragement to revise and resubmit, give very serious consideration to so doing (rather than submitting to a different journal). You are not guaranteed an acceptance when you revise and resubmit, but as a general rule if you have been encouraged to resubmit your manuscript and have done so in accordance with the reports, it is at least as likely to be accepted upon reconsideration by the original journal as it is to be accepted by a different journal. (It also is often more efficient in terms of time to revise and resubmit than to send your manuscript to a new journal and start the review process again from the beginning). If you revise and resubmit, it's a good idea to include a cover letter to the editor in which you detail what revisions you have made in light of the previous reports, and where those revisions are to be found in the new manuscript. Bear in mind that no stigma whatsoever attaches to acceptance after a revise and resubmit—a very significant proportion of all published articles have gone through this process prior to acceptance.

In sum:

Just about anybody who publishes articles also suffers rejection at some point(s) in his or her career. This generalization applies to some of the most eminent historians of British history just as it applies to most graduate students and recent Ph.D.s. Writing good articles is an acquired skill. By thinking strategically, taking advice, participating actively in conferences and seminars, and reading articles systematically from the outset, you can significantly speed this learning process while improving the quality of your work. Doing so will substantially reduce the inherent frustration of the early stages of your publishing career.