# How to get published in academic journals

# Introduction

## Why publish your scholarly research?

# There are many reasons to write up your research and disseminate it to the scholarly community and the wider public:

# Document and share your findings to help build knowledge and move the field forward

# Gain recognition and raise your academic profile

# Boost your CV for job and grant applications

# Publications of peer reviewed research may be a requirement of your contract

# Scholarly communication can take various forms, including journal articles, monographs, edited volumes and conference proceedings. The output you choose will depend on the research you are reporting, the audience you want to reach and practices within your discipline.

# This resource will focus on journal publications, providing tips to get your articles accepted, and highlighting what to expect during the editorial process. It will cover:

# Choosing the right journal

# Article preparation

# The editorial process: submission, peer review and decision

# Choosing the right journal

# This section will explore different article types, how to start researching possible journals, and what considerations you need to make when choosing a journal.

## Considering article types

Before you start thinking about where to submit your article, you need to consider what you are planning to publish. What are you trying to say and how can you say it effectively? What kind of article would suit your findings the best? A research article is a fully developed presentation of your work and its findings. It should be a discrete piece of research, with an introduction, rationale, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion. Below are some article types you may wish to consider:

* Short communication: Or ’work-in-progress’ is a concise report presenting new findings, often in advance of publication in a full research article.
* Letter to the editor: Conversation between readers about content published in a journal.
* Perspective or debate: Topical and opinion-led articles.
* Literature reviews: Summary of published work on a particular topic.
* Book reviews: Critique of a recently published book.

## All are good experience for academic writing and publication. Many subjects also have well-known and respected blogs that can be used for more informal communication.

## Once you have decided on the type of article that best suits your piece of work, make sure that the journal you choose accepts that article type. Some journals only accept one type of article, others accept many. Check the journal’s guidelines and previously published articles. Few journals accept unsolicited reviews, they are generally commissioned, but you can put yourself forward as a potential reviewer.

## Shortlisting journals

How do you create a shortlist of journals to consider submitting to? Think about journals that:

* you read the most
* you cite in your own research
* your peers, supervisor or mentor have published in before and recommend
* are ranked highly in Web of Science’s Journal Citation Reports or the Scimago Journal Ranking

Take a look at your [subject guide](http://subjects.library.manchester.ac.uk/) on the Library website; this will give you a starting list of key journals in your subject area.

If you’re an undergraduate researcher, consider a student led journal to gain a better understanding of the publication process. A list can be found on the [British Conference of Undergraduate Research website](http://www.bcur.org/research/undergraduate-journals/).

## Evaluating a journal

### Reputation

The reputation of a journal is important. Articles published in well-respected journals are more likely to be read and cited. The journal’s reputation will also affect how your work is received. How can you identify a reputable journal?

* Associated with a known and respected publisher or society
* Included in the relevant abstracting and indexing databases for your subject area
* High Impact Factor (Web of Science) or Scimago (Scopus) ranking
* Respected editor, editorial board and published authors
* Has digital preservation strategies, for example [Portico](http://www.portico.org/) or [LOCKSS](https://www.lockss.org/)
* Robust peer review process
* Clear and transparent submission or Open Access fees if applied
* Member of ethical bodies, such as COPE ([Committee on Publication Ethics](http://publicationethics.org/))
* If Open Access, is it listed in the DOAJ ([Directory of Open Access Journals](https://doaj.org/))?

### Predatory journals

‘Predatory' Open Access journals are now part of the scholarly communication landscape. There are thousands of journals online and new journals are being launched all the time.

Stories of journal misconduct, malpractice and deception are increasing, such as journals charging high publication fees but not providing the expected editorial and production services of an academic journal.

You should always check the credibility of unfamiliar publishers and journals prior to submission. [Think.Check.Submit](http://thinkchecksubmit.org/) provides a useful checklist of questions to help researchers identify trusted journals.

### Other factors

Other factors are also important when choosing a journal:

Speed of peer review and publication. Publication can take months, even in the top journals but you may need to publish your article quickly, ready for your CV. Check the journal website or ask the editor for details. The journal may have the option to publish an article online first, before it is assigned to an issue.

Author service. Are the editor and publisher helpful and good to work with? Talk to your peers about their experience.

Open Access policy. Is it compliant with the requirements of your funder, institution and HEFCE ([Higher Education funding council for England](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/))?

# Article preparation

This section will explore the process of planning and preparing your article for submission.

## Journal aims and scope

Journals will only publish research which aligns with their aims and scope. You will need to frame and position your article with your target journal in mind. If your article does not fit the journal’s scope and format, don’t expect the editor to make an exception for you.

* Sign up for newsletters and updates for information and potential calls to publish in special issues.
* Look at published papers. Get a feel for what is accepted.
* Does the journal require articles to follow a particular structure? Check the author guidelines.
* Be aware of maximum and minimum accepted word lengths and follow the journal’s style guidelines. These are not optional and disregarding them will make a bad impression.

## The structure of an article

The title and abstract will be the first things that the editor, peer reviewer and future reader will see. Expect to spend time perfecting them; they are not mere afterthoughts. Use them to make an impact.

They are also essential for indexing and online discoverability. You want your article to be read and cited so think about the key words that a researcher would search for when they are looking for relevant publications and make sure that yours will be one of them.

### Title:

Readers must see instantly if the article is relevant to them. Grab their attention, be concise and clear. Think about recent articles that you have read. Which titles did you find informative and effective?

### Abstract:

Indicate why your research is important. Introduce your research simply and give a brief overview of your findings. Do not talk about what your article ‘will do’ - report what it reveals. Stay within the journal’s prescribed worth length for an abstract.

## Components

The components of a research article may vary slightly by discipline but they generally include:

* **Introduction:** A description of the research undertaken. The context and what is already known about the topic. Your hypothesis and an overview of your results.
* **Methodology:** How did you go about answering the question?
* **Results:** What did you find?
* **Discussion:** What do the results mean? Remember to acknowledge any limitations.
* **Conclusion:** What has your research achieved? Summarise the main findings and implications for the field, suggest future areas of research.

These elements may form discrete sections within your article or may be weaved into a more narrative structure, but there should always be a logical and transparent flow. Headings and subheadings are especially helpful for complex research articles.

### Figures and graphs

Photographs, figures, maps and graphs are important ways to convey information and can enhance the arguments in your article. They should be: essential, not just decorative; referred to in the text and actively interpreted; and more than a duplication of information in the text.

* Provide high resolution digital files so they appear clear when printed.
* Keep them simple, avoiding extraneous detail.
* Check the journal’s guidelines on use of colour and acceptable file types.
* Do you have permission to use any you didn’t create yourself?

## Best practice when writing your article

* Think about the audience. Keep it interesting and show your enthusiasm. Use the active, not passive, voice.
* Write in concise paragraphs, not long blocks of text. Use clear language; avoid jargon and long words or phrases, but stay formal.
* Do not leave yourself open to misrepresentation. Be clear about the argument you are making and the limitations to your study.
* Be logical in the progression of your argument. Use headings and subheadings, or in-text phrases, to help the reader orientate themselves.
* If you are basing your article on a piece of coursework, remember that the research will need to be original. Ask your tutor or supervisor for advice if you think your work meets this requirement.

## Ethics

As you write and format your article, make sure that you are writing ethically and not committing any misconduct.

### Plagiarism

This is the theft of someone’s ideas and passing them off as your own. It ranges from copying word-for-word or paraphrasing another’s work without citing them, to translating an article into English, putting your own name on it as author and submitting it to a journal.

Plagiarism is fraud, and something that is treated extremely seriously by academic and research institutions.

To learn more about plagiarism take a look at the My Learning Essentials resource [Avoiding plagiarism through good academic practice](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/avoiding-plagiarism/#/).

### Copyright

If you want to reproduce material in your article that you did not create yourself, you will need to get permission from the copyright owner, even if you are properly citing the owner.

Copyrighted material could be a line figure, photograph or a long quotation of text. Supply evidence that you have received permission when submitting your article and state the owner of the material in the citation or caption. Further information can be found on the [Copyright Guidance subject guide](http://subjects.library.manchester.ac.uk/copyright/research).

### Author contribution

List as a co-author anyone who has made a substantial intellectual contribution to the work. Minor contributions should be recognised in the acknowledgements.

Use the [International Committee of Medical Journal editors criteria for authorship](http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html) if in doubt.

### Conflict of interest

Disclose any potential conflicts of interest when you submit your article. These could be:

* financial relationships (such as employment or sponsorships)
* personal relationships
* intellectual beliefs that might bias or be seen to bias the analysis or interpretation of your work.

### Duplicate publication

Your submitted article should not already be published elsewhere or currently under consideration by another publication.

A lot of effort goes into the evaluation of an article, much of it for free, so you should respect the editor’s and reviewers’ time.

Within the article, cite your previous work if you are building on published research.

# Submission & Peer review

This section will explore the concept of aims, scope and audience of your chosen journal. It will also explain submission and peer review processes.

## Submission

Once you have finished writing your article, checked the spelling, grammar and formatting and have had it read by colleagues, it is time to submit to your chosen journal.

Follow the submission instructions on the journal’s website. Some journals accept submissions by email; others will require you to submit through an online system. If you are given the opportunity of providing a cover letter, take it!

Alongside the abstract, this is the first thing the editor will see. This is your chance to impress the editor and convince him or her why they should consider your article for their journal:

* Why is the topic important and the research significant?
* What are the key results?
* Why have you submitted to that journal?
* Why should the journal’s audience want to read it?

## Editorial check

1. Article submitted
2. Editorial office checks for suitability

When first submitted, the editor, an assistant editor or administrator, will do an initial check of the article. They will look at:

* Its presentation. Is it complete, correctly formatted and following the journal’s style?
* Does it fit within the scope of the journal? Will it be of interest to their audience?
* Is it significant research? This is how your cover letter, title, and abstract can help you.
1. After editorial check
	1. Article rejected

If the editor does not think the article is appropriate for their journal, because it is not within the journal’s scope or if they are not convinced by its impact, they will reject it immediately.

* 1. Article sent back to the author for revision and resubmission

The article may fit within the journal’s scope and the editor agrees that it is significant research, but it may be sent back to the author if the presentation is poor and needs re-formatting.

We will explore other reasons for rejection later in this resource.

* 1. Peer review

## Peer review: What is it?

Peer review is a system for evaluating the quality, relevance and validity of research. It should provide constructive criticism for authors to help them improve their work and it should help editors assess an article’s suitability for publication.

The editor has the challenge of selecting the highest quality articles for their journal. They cannot be an expert in every area published by their journal, and they need external reviewers’ comments to combine with their own expertise and knowledge.

## Types of peer review

There are four basic systems of peer review. The identities of reviewers may, or may not, be revealed to the authors. Likewise, the identities of the authors may be concealed from the reviewers. If the identities are kept hidden this is called ‘blinding’.

* Double blind: Neither the authors nor the reviewers know each other’s identity (common in Humanities and some Social Sciences).
* Single blind: The reviewer knows the identity of the author, but the author does not know the identity of the reviewer (common in the Sciences and some Social Sciences).
* Open: Both identities are made known to each other.
* Public: Both identities are made known to each other and the reviews are published alongside the article. Readers may also be able to comment on the submitted or published article.

## How are peer reviewers chosen?

Typically an editor will seek 2-3 peer review reports. They will choose them from:

* Reviewer database: previous authors or reviewers, members of the editorial board or bibliographic searches.
* Suggestions from the author, other reviewers or the editorial board.
* The editor’s own network and knowledge of the field.

## What do they look for?

Peer reviewers will consider the article’s originality, presentation, relevance and significance. They should write a report that is constructive and supportive but don’t be discouraged if a review is negative and unhelpful.

For more information on peer review, what reviewers look for and how they should write their reports see the [Peer review resource](https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mre/peer-review/).

# Editorial decisions

This section will explore the types of editorial decisions that can be made and what to do if your article is rejected.

## Types of outcome

Once the editor has received the peer review reports back they will use them and their own judgement to make a publication decision. The decisions you may receive are:

* **Accept with no changes:** This is relatively uncommon (most articles need some corrections).
* **Accept with changes:** The article needs some changes, but if they are made satisfactorily then the article is suitable for publication. Some journals may break this down to minor changes (light revisions) or major changes (structural changes, such as additional experiments, expanded data analysis or literature review or rewriting large sections of text).
* **Reject but invite resubmission after substantial changes:** The article needs substantial changes, but the research is of significant interest. If revised the editor will consider it again as a new submission.
* **Reject no resubmission:** The article is unsuitable for publication in the journal - usually because of problems with the research, it does not fit with the journal’s remit or it does not add to the body of knowledge.

## Surviving rejection

If your article is rejected, don’t give up! Articles can be rejected for several reasons and it doesn’t mean that the work is not worth publishing.

You are also not alone. A survey of academics, from early career to established researchers in the sciences, social sciences and humanities, showed that rejection is a common outcome. They were asked:

* Did you have to revise your last article before it was accepted? *91% said yes*
* Did peer review improve its quality? *91% said yes*
* How many journals rejected your last article before it was accepted? *78% had articles rejected by at least one journal*

[Sense about Science, Peer Review Survey 2009](http://www.senseaboutscience.org/pages/peer-review-survey-2009.html)

## Reasons for rejection

There are many reasons why an article may be rejected and most can be addressed with some revision. Some journals also have a very high submission and rejection rate, so even a very good article could be rejected. Common reasons include:

* **Wrong journal:** the content does not fit with journal’s scope
* **Poor presentation:** writing style, grammar, punctuation, use of English, badly formatted and not proofread
* **Does not say anything of significance:** or contributes anything new to the subject
* **Technical or scientific issues:** inconclusive results or conclusions are not supported by the data, absence of rigour
* **Not properly contextualised:** too narrow and not relevant to an international audience
* **Weak theoretical framework:** article does not reference relevant literature
* **Ethical issues**
* **Misunderstood:** Peer reviewers have misunderstood the article

## How to respond to rejection

If your article is rejected, don’t take it personally. Accept the decision and use the editor’s and reviewer’s comments to improve the article and submit to another journal.

Should you appeal?

Usually not. The editor and the reviewers know the journal and their criticisms are likely valid. However if you think the editor or reviewers have not recognised the importance of the research or there were factual errors in the reports that led to its rejection, you can ask for it be considered by a different editor or sent to another peer reviewer.

## Acceptance

**Congratulations!**

You have successfully written and submitted your article and it will be published in the journal, but your job is not over yet. You will need to consider the Open Access requirements of the University and your funder.

From 1st April 2016, authors must ensure that the accepted articles of all journals are deposited in an institutional repository or an acceptable subject repository within three months of the acceptance date.

Use the [Open Access Gateway](http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/services-and-support/staff/research/services/open-access-at-manchester/gateway/) to deposit your article and for more information.

# Summary

Publishing journal articles is an important part of academic research. When choosing the right journal for your article, remember to consider a journal’s reputation, its aims and scope and the target audience.

When you are ready to submit your article, it should also be well prepared to give it the best possible chance of impressing the editor and the reviewers.

Don’t lose heart though if your article is rejected after peer review. Consider the reviewers’ feedback, revise your article and try again.